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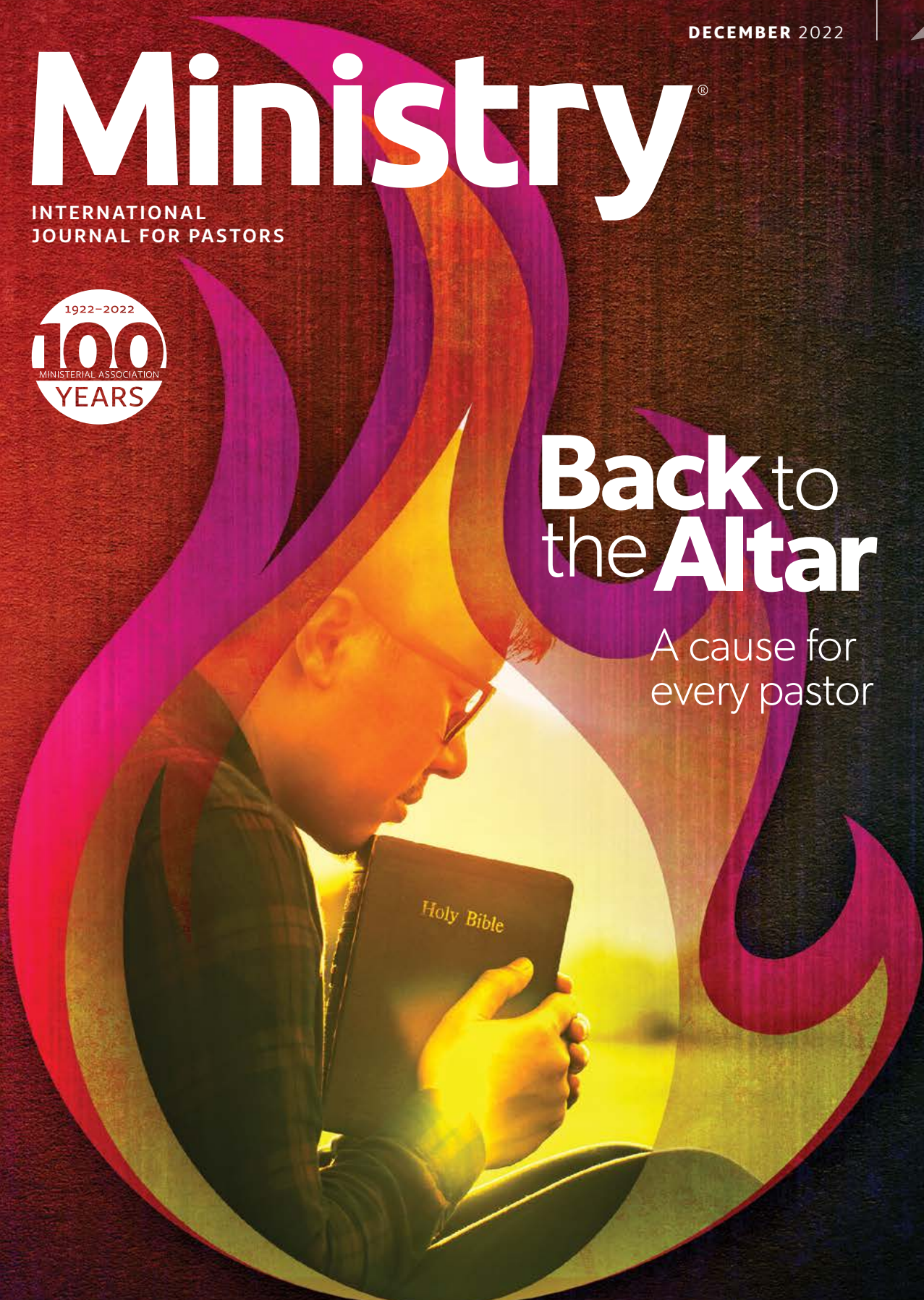
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INTERNATIONAL
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Back to the Altar

A cause for
every pastor



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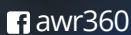
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For members only?

Your church may not have a sign that reads “For Members Only” but if we are not actively, persistently, and intentionally inviting people to come in, it is like having an invisible sign that prevents people from visiting our churches. I will never forget Gloria’s testimony. “For more than eighteen years, we lived almost in front of this church but were never invited to come in.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. It was my first year as a pastor of this beautiful church in West New York. “We must visit every home around the church,” I had said, “beginning with the closest neighbors.” So, we had divided the church into groups of two and gone into the neighborhood. One of our young couples began Bible studies with an older couple living just one block from our church. After studying the Bible and attending an evangelistic meeting we conducted, they accepted the Lord Jesus. Gloria and her husband were baptized.

I thank God that it was after her baptism when Gloria shared her testimony with the whole church. “For eighteen years my husband and I walked in front of this church and wondered what they were doing there. I used to observe from a distance the weddings, baby showers, funerals, and other religious services with curiosity. Sometimes I was tempted to go in, but I thought this was a private church for members only.” It was both an indictment and a wake-up call—as if she were saying, “Thank you for inviting us. And, what took you so long?”

The mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is, “Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev. 14:6-12).” To accomplish this mission, the church launched the I Will Go initiative. I Will Go is a personal call to get involved. It involves every



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SCAN FOR AUDIO



church member, pastor, administrator, and leader at all levels of the church in the mission of saving souls for Jesus. This is a call for total member involvement.

In the last part of Jesus' commandment, He says, "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20, NIV). The key phrase is "everything I have commanded you." Does this "everything" include the commandment to go, make disciples and baptize them in verse 19? It certainly does. The disciples of Jesus were to go, make disciples, and baptize. They understood this commandment clearly. But they also understood that the disciples they made were to be taught everything Jesus commanded, including the commandment to make disciples.

Paul later wrote, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2, NKJV). Therefore, being disciples of Jesus means accepting Him as

a personal Savior and Lord, taking up your cross, and following Him. This "following" means baptism, living as a disciple in a congregation, and obeying Jesus' command to evangelize.

Like Gloria, many await an invitation to come into the church and, more importantly, to become full disciples of Jesus. People are willing to listen if we are eager to talk. You and I, and every member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, have been called to be Christ's ambassadors and to say, "I will go to be His witness." Will we wait eighteen years to offer an invitation to our neighbors to prepare for His second coming? I hope not.

For 100 years, the Ministerial Association has faithfully and forcefully preached that Jesus is coming soon. We need to practically provide opportunities for people to connect with Jesus continually so we can prayerfully demonstrate that we are not a private club—"for members only." ❏

Dwain N. Esmond, PhD (cand.), serves as associate director and editor of the Ellen G. White Estate and evangelist for the global Back to the Altar worship initiative. His doctoral research in leadership focuses on innovation in missional organizations.



SCAN FOR AUDIO

Back to the Altar

A cause for every pastor

According to research by the Christian publisher Lifeway, the average American home contains more than three Bibles. Fifty-two percent of Americans think the Bible is an excellent source of moral teaching, 35 percent say it is life-changing, and 36 percent believe it to be true. That said, Lifeway reported that “more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible,” and less “than a quarter of those who have ever read a Bible have a systematic plan for reading the Christian scriptures each day.”¹ Why don’t more Americans read it? The excuses ranged from “I don’t prioritize it” (27 percent) to “I have read enough of it” (13 percent).

These data would, no doubt, vary by country should similar studies be undertaken, but one thing is sure: Bible reading is a fairly good predictor of devotional life. The 2018 Global Church Member Survey of Seventh-day Adventists reported that only 48 percent of Adventists read their Bibles daily. The study also found that while 65 percent have daily prayer, only 36 percent of Adventist members study the Sabbath School lesson daily. Those results may be best explained by two other critical findings from the survey: only 52 percent of Adventists engage in personal devotions, and only 37 percent of Adventist families have morning or evening worship.²

Whether or not we choose to accept it, the data suggests that a large percentage of

Seventh-day Adventist members lack a consistent personal devotional experience with God. The broken worship altar in the Adventist Church represents the single greatest threat to Seventh-day Adventist life and purpose, and every pastor should be alarmed. People who lack a consistent devotional walk with God cannot know Him, love Him, or effectively share Him with others. Godless living is a tree filled with the poisonous fruits of selfishness, pride, idolatry, and countless other harbingers of spiritual death.

We know the signs

As pastors, we see it every time a call for evangelism is met with yawns, an outreach initiative fizzles due to lack of involvement, or an invitation to koinonia falls prey to a more stimulating digital endeavor. We know when members have been with God and when they have not. We also know when we have been at our altars and when we have not. There is a marked lack of peace, power, and purpose in our ministry as we try to manufacture what God wants to manifest in and through us.

The restoration of personal and family worship among Seventh-day Adventists is the most pressing need of our time, but doing so will require much prayer and effort from pastors. Today, we face the challenge of technologies that,



while providing some efficiencies, increasingly occupy our time while altering our minds. Digital addictions have left many of us anxious, irritable, lonely, stressed, depressed, sleepless, and unhappy with life. Ironically, personal and family worship practices calm our minds, decrease loneliness, reduce stress, increase peace, fulfill our emotional needs, and teach us contentment.

How important is this endeavor? Ellen White gives us a clue: “God should be the highest object of our thoughts. Meditating upon him [God], and pleading with him, elevates the soul and quickens the affections. A neglect of meditation and prayer will surely result in a declension in religious interests.”³ Are we not witnessing signs of that neglect in God’s church?

Jesus had an altar

Time spent with God was Jesus’ secret to wise decision-making and life-transforming power. In Luke 16:12, 13, before choosing the 12 disciples, Jesus spent all night at the altar of prayer with His Father. Ellen White writes, “His spirit was often sorrowful as he felt the powers of the darkness of this world, and he left the busy city and the noisy throng, to seek a retired place to make his intercessions.” She later adds, “His example is left for his followers.”⁴

Jesus knew that His followers would need a thriving altar to endure life on Earth. He prayed “that [we] may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3, NKJV). His disciples’ knowing God and knowing Him were the twin desires of His heart, which was not lost on the disciples or those who later followed Him. The redeemed apostle Paul so craved this knowledge that he wrote, “What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:7, 8, NKJV). This is the core competency of the Christian life—knowing and possessing God!

A cause every pastor should embrace

Pastoral ministry today has been impacted by many changes in our world. Many of us were dragged, kicking and screaming, into the digital age as the COVID-19 pandemic closed our houses of worship. We developed new ways of reaching hearts and touching lives, but this has not been easy!⁵ Several studies have found that while

religious participation tends to benefit health and wellness, this is not always true for religious professionals. Stress and burnout among clergy members have led to severe mental distress, anxiety, and depression.⁶ Because of this, I hesitate to add anything else to our already full plate of responsibilities, but we must add one more thing: rebuilding the worship altar among Adventist individuals and families.

This year the Seventh-day Adventist Church launched the Back to the Altar initiative, a movement to encourage daily personal and family worship in the life of every Seventh-day Adventist. By 2027, we hope to see at least 70 percent of Adventist members engaged in daily morning and evening worship.

As pastors, we set the “spiritual diet” of the church. What we emphasize gets priority, and what we fail to emphasize dies. Here are the most critical things that pastors can do to help members rebuild their broken worship altars:

1. *Start with your own worship altar.* Amid your many responsibilities, are you leading your family to the worship altar, or have you outsourced that responsibility to someone else in the family? Ellen White comments, “Nothing can excuse the minister for neglecting the inner circle for the larger circle outside. The spiritual welfare of his family comes first.”⁷ We must lead by example.
2. *Share your walk with God often.* One of the best ways to strengthen members’ devotional altars is to share what God is doing with you at yours. Communion with God is so effectual that “men will take knowledge of us, as of the first disciples, that we have been with Jesus. This will impart to the worker a power that nothing else can give.”⁸ Show members the joy that you find in worshiping God, and they will crave their own experience with God!
3. *Encourage healthy digital mental hygiene.* This may seem like an odd inclusion on this list, but it is crucial to rebuilding our altars. Studies show that digital media occupies ever-increasing amounts of our time, and constant digital connection leaves us emotionally spent, anxious, stressed, and burdened.⁹ A critical part of rebuilding our altars is making space for God. Private piety is the stage for personal revival and reformation. It is also the fuel for outreach with real-world impact—the Isaiah 58 call to do righteousness and justice in the world. Pastors must teach—or bring in resource

persons who can teach—healthy digital culture for individuals and families to safeguard the spiritual lives and witness of members.

4. *Pray, pray, pray.* Pray for the personal spiritual lives of your members.

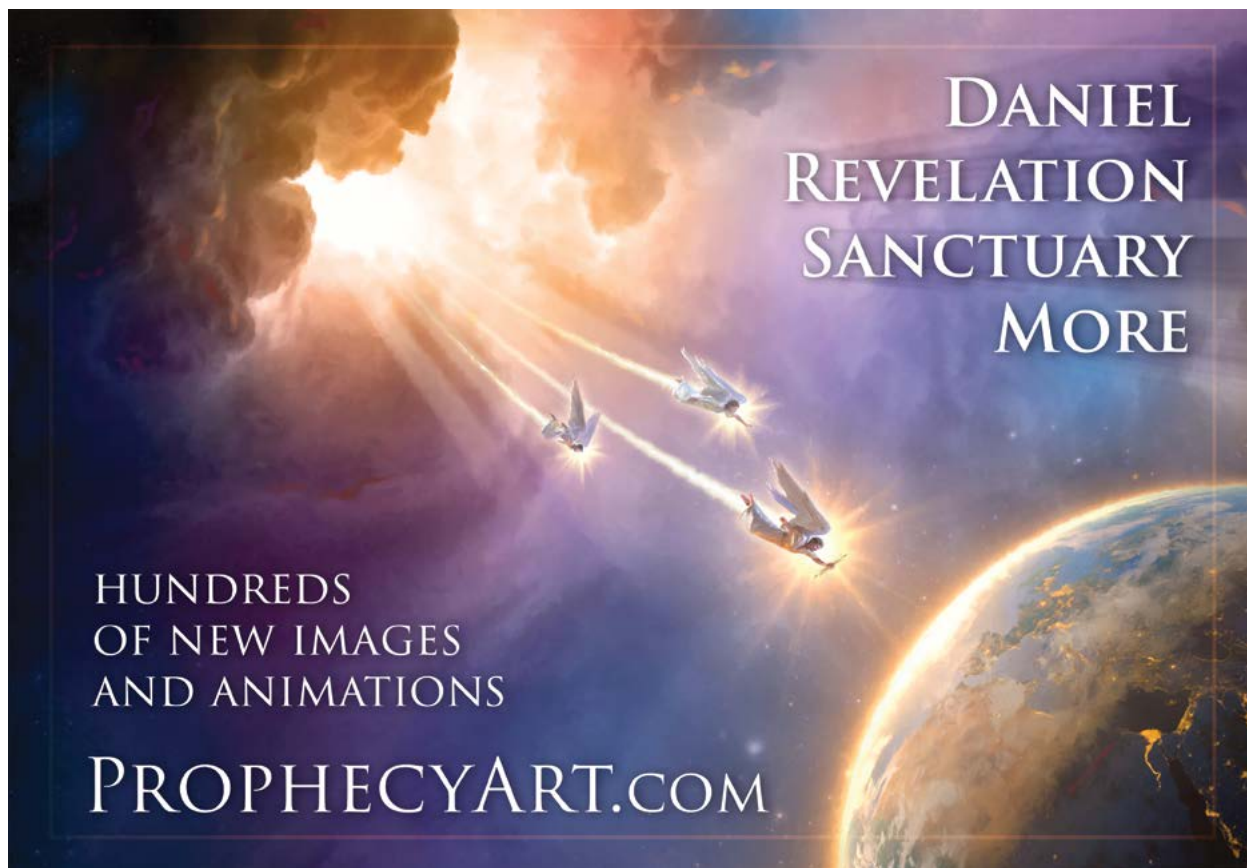
A church tasked with proclaiming the worship-centered messages of Revelation 14's first, second, and third angels cannot do so while

its members are not worshiping. We cannot do publicly what we are not doing privately. Ask God to rebuild the worship altars in your home and church, and He will.

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



- 1 Bob Smietana, "Lifeway Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don't Actually Read It," *Lifeway*, April 25, 2017, <https://research.lifeway.com/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.
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- 6 Andrew Miles and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, "Overcoming the Challenges of Pastoral Work? Peer Support Groups and Mental Distress Among United Methodist Church Clergy," *Sociology of Religion* 74, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 199–226, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srs055>; a pre-peer-reviewed copy may be seen at <https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/chi/Overcoming%20the%20Challenges%20of%20Pastoral%20Work%20preprint%20-%20web%20version.pdf>.
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- 9 "The Social Dilemma: Social Media and Your Mental Health," *McLean Hospital*, January 21, 2022, <https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/it-or-not-social-medias-affecting-your-mental-health>.





Mongolia Mission president SukHee Han, right, and a local Mongolian pastor, L. MunkhOrgil, raising a newly baptized believer out of the water as General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson watches on Sabbath, August 27, 2022, at a youth camp on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Photo: Henry Stober

Tears of joy as missionary hails Mongolian milestone

Tears filled Joanne Kim's eyes as she watched the first three Mongolians get baptized and join the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mongolia in 1993.

Her eyes again filled with tears as she watched 155 Mongolians get baptized on August 27, 2022, which was the thirtieth anniversary of the first church that she helped plant in Mongolia.

"As one of the pioneer missionaries who helped plant the Adventist Church in Mongolia, I remember the first baptism and many of the following ones, and I'm always tearful and joyful when we hold a baptism," said Kim, an American who attended the baptismal ceremony at a youth

camp on the outskirts of Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar.

The baptisms capped evangelistic meetings at 21 sites across the remote country, from August 20 to 27, as General Conference president Ted N. C. Wilson, Kim, and hundreds of other church members celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the first Adventist church plant in September 1992 with a whirlwind of activities, including visits with Mongolia's deputy prime minister and the US ambassador to Mongolia.

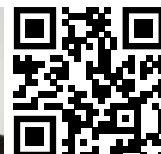
The anniversary celebrations also offered a welcome boost in morale for a church that has struggled amid COVID-19 restrictions and a decline in crucial financial support from abroad, church leaders said.

Wilson, making the second visit by a General Conference president to Mongolia since Robert S. Folkenberg conducted the first three baptisms in October 1993, expressed joy at seeing God's power firsthand in Mongolia.

"What a privilege it has been to get acquainted with our people and God's work in Mongolia and to see the increase from no members in 1992 to about 3,200 members and several institutions by 2022," said Wilson, who led one of the 21 evangelistic meetings with his wife, Nancy.

"Despite the 10/40 Window setting with a very small minority of Christians in the country,

Andrew McChesney is editor of the Mission quarterlies at Adventist Mission, headquartered at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



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God is blessing the strong work of Seventh-day Adventists to grow and proclaim the three angels' messages," he said by email.

Tough beginnings

Adventists first brought the gospel to Mongolia in the 1920s, but there was no Adventist presence in the country in the post-Communist days of the early 1990s when Kim joined fellow American missionaries Cathie (Jolly) Hartman and her husband, Brad, who had arrived earlier.

"Life was much harder back in the early 1990s," said Kim, now Education director of the Adventist Church's Mongolia Mission.

Amid financial and other difficulties, the efforts by Kim, the Jollys, and others bore fruit with the planting of the first church and the three baptisms in 1993. Kim said that the early church, although small in size, was large in love for God and self-sacrifice. She and her husband, Jon, a dentist, hope that the 2022 anniversary celebrations help to rekindle a similar spirit in the post-COVID era.

"I pray for that spirit of unity and self-sacrifice to be renewed in today's much larger church organization," she said in an interview. "Jon and I

want to bring back the spirit of the early church from the 1990s."

She and her husband have received approval from the Mongolia Mission to plant a new church.

Boost in morale

The anniversary celebrations have bolstered morale, according to Mongolia Mission president Han Suk Hee.

With the 155 baptisms, the Mongolian church is on target to baptize 300 people in 2022—a sharp increase from the average of 30 baptisms per year during the COVID-19 pandemic, he said. Fifty-nine people were baptized when the first COVID restrictions were lifted in March 2022.

"Although worship services were held online, on YouTube, and through Zoom meetings, it was difficult for pastors and church members to meet during the pandemic," Han said in reply to written questions. "When COVID restrictions were gradually eased in March of this year, church doors reopened, but church members who had not met face-to-face for almost three years desperately needed an opportunity to gather and fellowship together."

Photo: Henry Stober

General Conference president Ted N.C. Wilson, left, sharing a passage from the Bible with U.S. Ambassador to Mongolia Michael S. Klecheski, right, during a meeting about religious liberty and freedom of conscience in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on August 22, 2022.



The presence of the General Conference president provided just the boost that church members needed, said Yo Han Kim, president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, whose territory includes Mongolia and who is a former president of the Mongolia Mission.

“Elder Ted Wilson’s visit gave the Mongolia Mission and the Northern Asia-Pacific Division great comfort, encouragement, and strength,” he said by email. “After being unable to gather in church to worship for such a long time, the members and leaders were having a very difficult time. The General Conference president participated directly in the evangelistic meetings, and the Mongolia Mission gained vitality through them.”

Further boosting morale, church leaders broke ground on a new school of theology, funded by a much appreciated 400 million won (US\$300,000) donation from the Korean Union Conference, the Adventist Church’s Sijo Press, and Korean church members, Han said. The school will be located on the sprawling campus of the Gateway project, which also will include Gateway International Academy, a wellness center, a vocational school, an agriculture center, and a resort and recreational center whose income will help support the educational endeavors on the campus.

High-profile meetings

The Gateway project was central in talks between Wilson and Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister Amarsaikhan Sainbuyan at the parliamentary building in Ulaanbaatar on August 25.

“Deputy Prime Minister Amarsaikhan Sainbuyan was so gracious and has a deep concern for the health needs of the people of Mongolia,” Wilson said. “It was our privilege to share the Gateway project with him and receive his support.”

Joanne Kim, who is the coordinator of the Gateway project, attended the meeting and described the encounter as a significant step in the church’s relations with authorities.

“I feel that God used Elder Wilson’s visit to initiate contacts that would have otherwise been difficult to make,” she said. “The meeting with the deputy prime minister came about in a miraculous way, and he was so receptive. We’re praying that our follow-up with this powerful leader will continue to strengthen our relationship.”

In another high-profile visit, Wilson met Michael S. Klecheski, the US ambassador to Mongolia, to discuss, among other things, religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

“Freedom of worship is vital for a healthy democracy,” Klecheski tweeted after the August 22 meeting. “I enjoyed talking with President of the General Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church Ted Wilson and regional and local Adventist leaders about important issues for faith communities in Mongolia.”

TMI and the future

Mongolia’s evangelistic meetings, while organized to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary, are part of Total Member Involvement (TMI) evangelism, a world church initiative in which every church member shares Jesus with someone else. Mongolian church members reached out to friends and neighbors for Bible studies before the meetings. TMI evangelism started with evangelistic meetings led by Wilson in the metropolitan New York City area in 2013 and has spread across the globe to result in tens of thousands of baptisms in the Philippines, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Rwanda, Romania, Japan, and many other countries. TMI evangelism in Rwanda culminated in a record 110,000 baptisms in 2016.

“Christianity is not well established in Mongolia but is growing, praise be to God!” Wilson said. “These meetings are a fine example of Total Member Involvement where everyone is involved in helping the public and personal evangelism activities to grow.”

Among the other church leaders who attended the anniversary celebrations were Williams Costa, General Conference Communication director, and his wife, Sonete; Elbert Kuhn, General Conference associate secretary for volunteer programs, and his wife, Cleidi, who served as missionaries in Mongolia for nine years; and Henry Stober, an Adventist videographer living in Sweden who chronicled the events. Also present were the executive officers of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division and a delegation from the Korean Union Conference, led by union president Soon Gi Kang.

Hiroshi Yamaji, executive secretary of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, said he was encouraged by the many children and young people whom he saw at the meetings.

“They are the church now, and they will be the leaders of the Mongolia Mission in the near future,” he said by email. “I saw great possibilities and hope in Mongolia.” 🙏

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



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Rest and righteousness: Grace a lot or grace alone?

For a long time, I have observed church members constantly looking at their watches in order to know the exact time of sunset, when the Sabbath would be over, while making joyless, never-ending lists of what they could or could not do on this holy day. Instead of a feast of remembrance and celebration of our redemption, many were trying to make Sabbath a ladder to climb to reach heaven.¹ Have we really understood the Sabbath as the sign of righteousness by grace through faith and the rest our souls experience in Christ's accomplished work on our behalf?

Regarding the weekly Sabbath rest, which was to point us to the complete rest in the reality that our Creator is also our Redeemer, I have found that many were worshiping the Sabbath while rejecting the complete gospel of the Lord of the Sabbath. Deciding to research the topic of true rest in Christ, I discovered that while God has been speaking to humanity since the very beginning, we can only understand the full meaning of each story, doctrine, and commandment when we study it *in the light of the Cross*.

Developmental understanding of Scripture

In His mercy, God has explained the plan of redemption throughout the Bible in a developmental manner. Redemptive history contains multiple fulfillments of events and prophecies because God has been revealing the plan of salvation in a progressive and developmental way throughout the history of Israel and the world. The author of Hebrews starts his book by highlighting the developmental dimension of God's revelation, now fully manifested through Christ (Heb. 1:1–3).

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus offered His disciples a fascinating class in theology, reminding them that they needed to start from the beginning. In the midst of their post-Crucifixion despair, He helped them to see that all the Scriptures sought to convey one core reality. "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' *Then beginning with Moses*

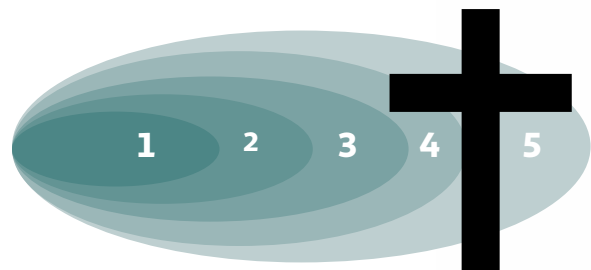
and with all the prophets He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:25–27, NASB; emphasis added).

The Cross is the great hermeneutical key to unlocking Scripture. The Greek verb translated "explained" (v. 27) is *diermèneuó*, which contains the root word for the term *hermeneutics*—the science of interpreting biblical texts. Jesus joined His disciples to explain that all of their doctrines of the Law and the Prophets pointed to one reality: Himself crucified!

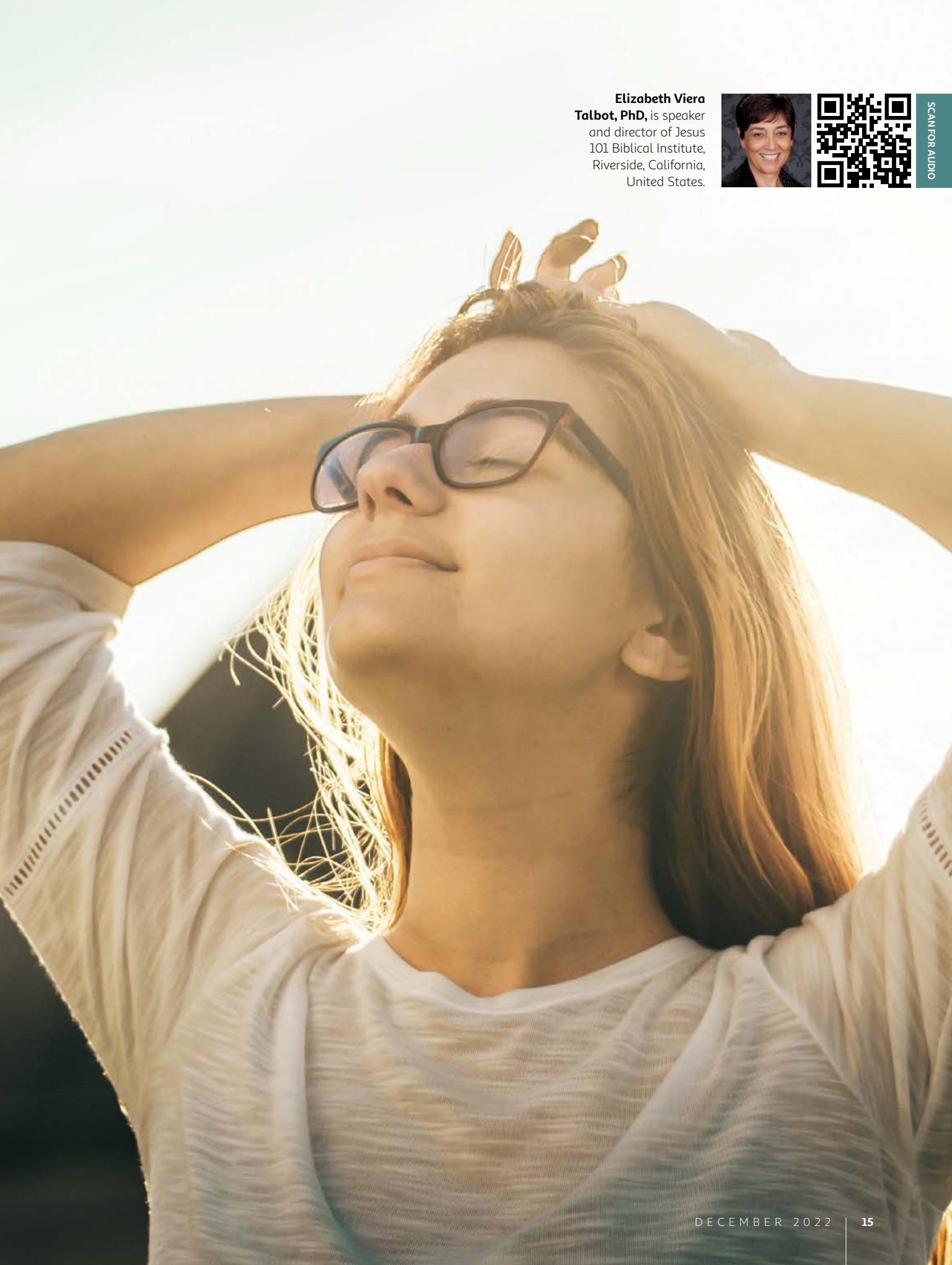
His goal was to open the minds of His disciples, then and now (cf. vv. 44, 45). His words reminded them that everything in Scripture pointed to His work on our behalf. Everything they ever read and believed, beginning with Genesis—every service in the sanctuary, every Day of Atonement, *and every Sabbath celebration*—sought to direct humanity to Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection.

Progressive understanding of the Sabbath

God lovingly taught His people to rest in Him. He did it gradually and developmentally as they grew in their knowledge of Him. God rested in His completion of the creation of humankind. As time went by, God kept adding more and more meaning to the Sabbath rest until we finally understood its full significance at the cross. One way to understand this principle is to visualize the whole Bible as a developmental graphic that finds its fulfillment and maximum expansion at the cross.



Here I present just five developmental expansions of the understanding of God's rest (though



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there are many more), leading to the full understanding of our rest in the salvific work of Jesus on our behalf.

1. *Completion of Creation.* The first circle on the left of the diagram represents God's resting on the seventh day, celebrating the completion of Creation (Gen. 2:2). Now that His children had come to life, the creation process was finished and complete. God's children are designated by gender, not by kinds or species like the animals. He created a male *'adam* and a female *'adam*. The Creator bestowed each gender with amazing and unique characteristics for a complete representation of the image of God. Then God ceased His work and blessed and sanctified the seventh day—the day that would forever point to the completeness and wholeness of divine Creation. We start to get a glimpse of the Creation-Redemption theme running from Genesis to Revelation when we analyze one word in Genesis 2:2: “completed.” The term used in the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) is the same Greek root word that Jesus cried out at the cross: “‘It is finished’” (John 19:30). It is completed; it has been fully accomplished.
2. *Provision.* The first time the Bible actually calls the seventh day a *Shabbat* rest, offering an expanded understanding of the Sabbath as a day of rest, is in the narrative about manna. “Then he [Moses] said to them, ‘This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath [*sabbata anapausis*, LXX] to the LORD. . . .’
 “. . . See, the Lord has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested [*esabbatisen*] on the seventh day” (Exod. 16:23, 29, 30, NASB). This provides a subsequent development after the first use of the verb *to rest* (Gen. 2:2), describing God's rest after the work of creation. The people of God had been oppressed for hundreds of years. Now they needed to trust the God of heaven and Earth to provide for their every need, including their daily bread. God was their Provider! In our diagram, this development is represented by the second circle. It is an expanded understanding of the Sabbath rest. God would miraculously preserve the heavenly bread every week so that they could rest in His ability to provide for them.
3. *Identification with the Creator.* Hundreds of years of slavery would have taken a toll on Israel's self-worth, on remembering who and whose they were, just as when someone has been abused, violated, or traumatized in any way. Humankind is created in the image of the Sovereign Creator. Aside from remembering that Yahweh is their Provider, they also needed to be reminded to rest, knowing that they are children of the Creator. So, the third circle in our diagram relates to their identity in relation to the Creator. They hold the highest place in the created order. God considered that so important that He brought to their attention a weekly feast of remembrance as part of the Ten Commandments so that they would not forget who they were and to whom they belonged (Exod. 20:8–11). How important it was to be reminded that they were to rest just like God rested. They were His! The Creator and His creatures rested together. The injunction to rest, just like God did, declared that they were His. “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are” (1 John 3:1, NASB).
4. *Liberation-Redemption.* Israel needed yet another insight in their understanding of why they should hold a weekly feast of rest. Moses repeats the Ten Commandments to them with the reason for the weekly rest expanded. “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day” (Deut. 5:15, NASB). Having been redeemed from slavery, they were now free. The Lord adds freedom and redemption to the ever-expanding understanding of the Sabbath rest. Everything, including the weekly rest, ultimately relates to the Creator-Redeemer, who is victorious on our behalf. That is why we rest, and that is why this developmental exploration can be fulfilled only at the cross. God made sure we know: “If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36, MEV).
5. *Completion-Redemption.* The Old Testament contains multiple expansions of the meaning of rest, pointing to the ultimate reality accomplished by Jesus on our behalf. Hebrews 4, introduced with titles such as “The Believer's Rest” (NASB), states, “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also

rested from his works, as God did from His” (Heb. 4:9, 10, NASB). As God rested in creation, we rest in the redemption accomplished by Jesus on our behalf. That is the ultimate meaning found at the cross. Only there do we discover His true rest.

In the deliberate juxtaposition found in Matthew 11:25–12:14, Jesus first offers His own rest and then proclaims Himself the Lord of the Sabbath in the next narrative. In fact, Matthew’s Gospel uses the term *sabbath* 11 times. Eight of these usages appear in the two consecutive passages that follow Jesus’ double promise of rest (Matt. 11:28, 29).² God has made a promise covering our past, present, and future: “You will find rest for your souls” (v. 29).³ The Sabbath rest was designed to be a weekly reminder that Jesus, as Creator-Redeemer, offers His complete rest to the weary soul.

Redemptive history reveals the plan of salvation in a progressive and developmental way. Most believers have applied this understanding to a few themes in the Bible, such as the Passover, but not to all doctrines and commandments. Ellen White eloquently explains this developmental principle: “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary. I present before you the great, grand monument of mercy and regeneration, salvation and redemption,—the Son of God uplifted on the cross. This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers.”⁴

Grace alone

It saddens and puzzles me when we explain doctrines such as the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, and end-time prophecies without understanding them in the light of the Cross. I have watched countless people become weary of rule after rule, commandment after commandment, chart after chart, and prophecy after prophecy without understanding them in relationship to Christ. They hear something like, “Yes, of course, we are saved by Jesus, but . . .,” and then we add many other requirements. As Max Lucado insightfully observes when discussing Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:

“No more striving after God’s approval. ‘You can rest now,’ he told them.

“And they did. For about fourteen pages, which in my Bible is the distance between the sermon of Peter in Acts 2 and the meeting of the church in Acts 15. In the first, grace was preached. In the second, grace was questioned. It wasn’t that the people didn’t believe in grace at all. They did. They believed in grace a lot. They just didn’t believe in grace alone. They wanted to add to the work of Christ.

“Grace-a-lots believe in grace, a lot. Jesus almost finished the work of salvation, they argue. In the rowboat named *Heaven Bound*, Jesus paddles most of the time. But every so often he needs our help. So we give it.”⁵

Righteousness by faith means to be declared right with God, not by our works but by grace through faith in the One who did *all the work*. “The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ.”⁶

The redemption that Jesus achieved at the cross on our behalf ought always to be our core message. He will come back for us, ushering in a new and eternal era of complete rest. And even then, this weekly feast of remembrance (Isa. 66:23) will forever commemorate that our Creator did not leave us on our own when we failed but became our Redeemer and offered us salvation, by His grace alone.



- 1 The author presented these concepts at the Commemoration of 100 Years of the Ministerial Association, San Diego, California, United States, September 27–29, 2022. For an expansion of this material, see Elizabeth Viera Talbot, *I Will Give You Rest: The Eternal Gospel for the Weary Soul* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2015); www.Jesus101.tv.
- 2 For an academic rendition of Matthew 11:25–12:14, see Talbot’s PhD dissertation: “Rest and Sabbath in Matthew’s Gospel: An Investigation of Matthew 11:25–12:14 in the Context of the Gospel’s Theology and Setting,” (University of Gloucestershire, 2013), https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/2362/1/TALBOT%20Elizabeth%20PhD%20Thesis%20final_Redacted%20for%20signature%20only.pdf.
- 3 See Elizabeth Talbot, “Rest, Eschatology and Sabbath in Matthew 11:28–30: An Investigation of Jesus’ Offer of Rest in the Light of the Septuagint’s Use of *Anapausis*,” in “*What Does the Scripture Say?*” *Studies in the Function of Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2012), 57–69.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 315.
- 5 Max Lucado, *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 45.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), 92.

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DONATION



PULPITS OF HOPE:

Fulfilling
God's
mission

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Pulpits of Hope is a simple, flexible, and effective initiative that every preacher may adopt in his or her church. It is part of a comprehensive evangelism plan based on the five universal keys of successful soul winning and evangelism reflected in the book of Acts.

The five keys to successful evangelism

Key 1: Revival. Churches grow when members experience genuine spiritual revival in their lives. Emphasize these three things to begin your church's spiritual revival:

- › study of the Bible (Acts 2:16)
- › intercessory prayer (Acts 1:4, 14)
- › witnessing (Acts 1:8)

Key 2: Training and equipping. Churches grow when every member is trained and prepared to serve (Acts 2:42, 43).

Key 3: Community outreach. Churches will grow from a planned process of outreach that meets peoples' physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual needs (Acts 2:44, 45).

Key 4: Harvest. Churches grow when preaching the Word of God through evangelistic proclamation (Acts 2:40, 41).

Key 5: Follow-up and nurturing. Churches grow when they nurture members and new converts and train them to testify (Acts 2:46, 47).

Pulpits of Hope

We can transform our churches into centers of evangelization through the Pulpits of Hope plan, or simply put, Sabbath morning evangelism.

Public evangelism is expensive. And while it has an important role in the church, sometimes we overlook the fact that thousands of visitors pass through the doors of our churches every Sabbath, many times unnoticed. Many leave without having been invited to accept Jesus and His teachings. That is why the evangelistic sermon is important, and it is always appropriate to make an appeal or call. Every pastor and elder called to preach may follow and use this



flexible, low-cost preaching plan, which is giving amazing results in churches that use it.

To support this concept, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference has developed a Christ-centered evangelistic series of sermons in PowerPoint and Keynote, with professionally illustrated prophetic and doctrinal topics.¹ This plan, among other things, offers the following advantages:

- Accustoms the ears of members to evangelistic preaching on Sabbath morning.
- Exposes both members and visitors to the whole biblical message, including distinctive Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.
- Helps believers to establish their faith on a solid biblical foundation, thus reducing apostasy.
- Helps each pastor prepare and submit a preaching plan to the local church or district quarterly, semiannually, or annually.
- Covers the entire biblical message within one calendar year.
- Lets members and visitors know ahead of time the topics that will be presented, which will encourage them to bring friends and family to worship services on Sabbath.
- Develops and promotes a culture of evangelism and develops more pastors and lay evangelists.
- Is a highly flexible plan, adaptable to churches of any size. It does not interfere with the plans of the higher organizations of the church and can begin on any Sabbath of the year and continue for as long as needed.
- Can be used in a single church or simultaneously in districts with multiple churches because the pastor can assign the same sermon to all the elders.
- Is the most economical and effective method of evangelism.
- Helps many to decide for Jesus and the truths of the Bible. The direct result will be increased attendance every Sabbath and more baptisms throughout the year.

The Bible must regain primacy in every pastor's life. The Word of God must be the source for sermons. It is the message that comes from the heart of God to the heart of every person. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes it has been specifically called to proclaim the eternal gospel (Rev. 14:6-12) and that all truth should be presented within the context of the gospel.

"Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16, NKJV). The pastoral task and evangelism are inseparable. The expansion of the church through personal and public evangelism, the preparation of people for baptism, planting new congregations, and developing new disciples should be the primary emphasis of each minister.

Evangelistic churches are growing churches. The New Testament church prioritized evangelism. It shared the Word of God in confidence, anticipating the blessing of the Spirit (Acts 4:31; 5:42; 8:4).

The Great Commission is to preach the Word and make disciples. It is not a suggestion; it is Jesus' command, and it is vital for the church's health, life, and growth.

We must view evangelism as a process leading to discipleship, not just an event that adds to membership. While increasing membership is a by-product of evangelism, the Great Commission envisions each believer becoming a mature, disciple-producing minister. The task of evangelism does not cease until new believers are nurtured, trained, deployed, and winning souls themselves. Disciple making must be regarded as an integral part of the evangelistic process, not just an appendage or follow-up after the main evangelistic event. Winning members without discipling them is ultimately self-defeating.

A revealing study

Thom Rainer, pastor and prolific researcher, carried out an extensive 10-year study of the fastest-growing churches in the United States to learn how they are reaching out to postmodern people and why their members were motivated to stay in the church.² The results speak volumes about how we need to relate to postmodern people and what will keep them coming back to church. Listed below are factors that attract and influence members in some of the fastest-growing congregations:

- Pastor/preaching: 90 percent
- Doctrines: 88 percent
- Friendliness of members: 49 percent
- Someone from church witnessed to me: 41 percent
- Family member attends: 38 percent
- Sensed God's presence; atmosphere of church: 37 percent
- Relationships with others than family members: 25 percent
- Sunday School class: 25 percent
- Children's/youth ministry: 25 percent
- Other groups/ministries: 12 percent

- › Worship style/music: 11 percent
- › Location: 7 percent

Harvest

As we near the end of time, God is preparing a great harvest of people around the world. Thousands of pastors and laymen are cooperating with God in His final work. Now is the time to focus our vision on what Christ is doing in the world. The Lord promises His Holy Spirit right now if only we seek, ask, and believe.

As we testify to people in our spheres of influence—in church, at home, at work, at school, or in our daily activities—God will bless our efforts. As we plan to reach our neighborhoods, towns, villages, and major metropolitan areas, He will make our work successful. As we sow seeds, God will give us a harvest.

Every child of God is a beam of light. We are engaged in the most exciting and lasting work in the world: soul winning. As leaders and church members, we have an awesome responsibility that comes with a stunning promise, summarized on the last page of the book *Evangelism*: “Our watchword is to be, Onward, ever onward! Angels of heaven will go before us to prepare the way. Our burden for the regions beyond can never be laid down till the whole earth is lightened with the glory of the Lord.”³

The stories in the book of Acts will occur again, even more gloriously, with the coming of the latter rain. The disciples did not have all the means available to us today, but one thing made the difference for them in the first century, and it will do the same for us today: to be baptized and possessed by the Holy Spirit. Very soon, the world will be illuminated by God’s glory. Will you let it shine through your life and work?



- 1 See <https://gcevangalism.net/>
- 2 Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 21.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), 707.
- 4 Ellen G. White, “Aggressive Work to Be Done,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 2, 1906, 8.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn, 1948), 6:11.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), 193.
- 7 White, *Testimonies*, 6:54.
- 8 White, *Evangelism*, 699.

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Inspired quotations

The inspired writings of Ellen G. White, especially *The Acts of the Apostles*, *Evangelism*, *Gospel Workers*, *Christian Service*, and *The Great Controversy*, should be must reads for every pastor to help keep the vision alive while accomplishing the mission of the church.

“Evangelistic work, opening the Scriptures to others, warning men and women of what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God’s servants.”⁴

“The Lord designs that the presentation of this message shall be the highest, greatest work carried on in the world at this time.”⁵

“Take your Bible, and open before them [the people] its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart.”⁶

“Never should a sermon be preached, or Bible instruction in any line be given, without pointing the hearers to the ‘Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ John 1:29. Every true doctrine makes Christ the center, every precept receives force from His words.”⁷

“I saw jets of light shining from cities and villages, and from the high places and the low places of the earth. God’s Word was obeyed, and as a result there were memorials for Him in every city and village. His truth was proclaimed throughout the world. . . .

“Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families, and opening before them the Word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence.”⁸

ONE SUBJECT

will swallow up all others

As we commemorate the founding of the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1922, here is an extremely productive ministerial question: What is the one thing Adventist ministers can do that will massively increase their effectiveness? Master the subject of righteousness by faith and incorporate it into all messages and practices of the life of the local church.

Righteousness by faith is, by definition, a relational dynamic. Paul explains that God saves us by relating to us according to our potential in Christ, not according to our current moral condition: “God,” Paul says, “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Rom. 4:17).¹

Paul’s historical context here is the story of Abraham, who “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (v. 3). The theological point the apostle draws is that God terms us righteous, even though we are really not. He relates to us as if we have never done anything wrong, although He knows we have done plenty wrong. Paul conveys the same idea earlier in the passage by saying, “God imputes righteousness apart from works” and does “not impute sin” (v. 6). To *impute* means to “ascribe,” to “assign,” to “attribute” a value or a state of being. In the apostle’s usage, God attributes a state of righteousness to unrighteous people. He responds to us as if we are righteous, not to justify our unrighteousness but to make us righteous. He treats us as if we are better than we actually are.

And that is precisely what we see on display in Christ.

When the angels sang to the shepherds of Bethlehem, they proclaimed the gospel in embryonic form: “‘Glory to God in the highest, and on

earth peace, goodwill toward men!’” (Luke 2:14). The glorious benediction of peace and goodwill is universal in its scope: “on earth” and “toward men,” meaning all human beings.

When the gospel baby grew up into a man, He proclaimed and demonstrated God’s egalitarian love for all human beings, whatever their social caste, ethnicity, or moral condition. “For God so loved *the world*,” He said, “that *whosoever* believes in Him [the Son] should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into *the world* to condemn *the world*, but that *the world* through Him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17; emphases added). Living out the practical reality of His teachings, He touched the untouchables, socialized with the outcasts of the religious system, embraced people across political and racial divides, and eagerly associated with the morally fallen and condemned. And then, having lavished His love freely upon the world, He laid down His life at Calvary as an atoning sacrifice for the entire human race.

Although Jesus never used the theological term *righteousness by faith*, He was, in fact, its embodiment. Relating to people according to their potential, not according to their actual moral condition, He poured love and acceptance and unmerited favor upon all. In other words, Jesus related to people as if they were righteous, even though they were not, which brings us back to Paul’s theological framing of the truth we see on display in Christ. Whereas Jesus was righteousness by faith personified, Paul was the main theological practitioner of righteousness by faith.

After having informed us in Romans 4 that God calls us righteous, even though we are sinners, Paul explains in chapter 5 that Christ is

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the Second Adam, the new representative head of the human race, so His righteousness redeems the first Adam's failure and gives humanity a new starting point: "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (vv. 18, 19).

Then, in chapter 6, following through with the implications of the Christ event, the apostle admonishes us to see ourselves the way God does and live accordingly: "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 10, 11).

To "reckon" means to regard or count a thing to be true and proceed accordingly. Jesus lived the righteous life that Adam failed to achieve, He died the covenantal death of self-sacrificing love, and then He rose from the dead as the new genesis of a new humanity. So then, Paul reasons, we should "reckon ourselves" to be what God, in Christ, says we are: dead to sin and alive to God.

After having negated the law as a means of salvation, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul coined the specific theological term *righteousness by faith* as a simple and profound framing of the gospel: "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:5, 6).

Here Paul explains that righteousness comes only "by faith." I cannot attain righteousness by pursuing it as an end in itself, as a moral goal to be achieved by trying hard enough, or as something I can do by myself. Faith alone is the means by which righteousness is attained. That is the first thing Paul wants us to get clear in our heads. But then he goes one vital step further. While we attain righteousness only by faith, faith only "worketh by love" (v. 6, KJV).

The word here translated "worketh" is *energeo* in the Greek, from which we get *energy* as the English equivalent. Paul is saying that God's love, as revealed in Christ, is the energy source that awakens faith to action in us. Righteousness is the *what*, while faith energized by love is the *how*. There is an axiomatic relationship between righteousness, faith, and love:

- Righteousness is the moral standard of relational integrity from which humanity has fallen and to which we are redeemed in Christ.
- Faith is the psychological action by which righteousness becomes experiential.
- The love of Christ is the energizing catalyst that arouses faith to its proper sphere of exercise—namely, to latch on to the objective gift of the righteousness of Christ as the only means capable of generating the subjective reality of righteousness in our lives.

It becomes evident, therefore, that God's love must be our focus, for therein lies the power that sets the whole experience in motion. Employing the language of Galatians 5, Ellen White offered a simple yet brilliant definition of righteousness by faith: "It is the active principle of love imparted by the Holy Spirit."²

Whereas Paul speaks in Romans of imputed righteousness and in Galatians of righteousness by faith, to the Corinthians, he articulates the same idea in terms of God occupying an already reconciled relational posture toward sinners:

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:14–21).

Paul's gospel reasoning here is tight and cohesive: "The love of Christ" operates as a moving force inside us as we "judge"—in the sense of discerning and believing—that He "died for all." Because He died for all human beings, His death constituted the death of all human beings in a representative, substitutionary sense. Then Paul

explains that the love of Christ radically impacts us in two ways:

First, it breaks the power of selfishness in our hearts so that we stop living for ourselves and begin living for Him.

Second, it changes the way we see and relate to people. Believing that His death was for all, we no longer regard anyone “according to the flesh,” or according to their natural carnal state. Rather, we see and relate to people in the light of God’s love for them, as revealed in the magnitude of the sacrifice that He made on their behalf. We regard people according to their potential in Christ, according to what they can be through Him, and not according to what they are apart from Him. Thus, we relate to people as if they are what they are not because Christ has related to people (ourselves included) as if they are what they are not. That is to say, looping back to the language in Romans, God relates to us as if we were innocent and righteous, even though we are not.

Paul then recapitulates his point with slightly different language. God “has reconciled” humanity to Himself in Christ by “not imputing their trespasses to them” (v. 19)—or, as the New International Version says, “not counting people’s sins against them.” What Paul frames as imputed righteousness in Romans, he here frames as God occupying a reconciled posture toward all. “Now then,” the apostle reasons, because God, in Himself, is already reconciled to all human beings through Christ, all human beings are called upon to “be reconciled to God” from their side of the relational equation. Then he states the practical outcome God desires: Jesus became “sin for us” so “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Said another way, the objective, historical, and achieved fact of God’s love for all human beings seeks to generate a subjective, experiential, and transformative righteousness in the lives of all who believe in and receive the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf.

Paul has thus built a bridge of understanding between the relational dynamic of righteousness by faith as it operates (1) from God toward humanity and (2) in the realm of our relational dynamics toward one another. The way I understand how God views me will determine how I see myself, and that will determine how I see others.

When we, as Seventh-day Adventist ministers, individually and collectively, get in sync with the moving of the Holy Spirit, righteousness by faith will not be one topic in a list of many, nor will it be an occasional subject in our preaching. No, it

MASTER THIS ONE SUBJECT AND INCORPORATE IT INTO ALL YOUR PREACHING AND RELATIONAL DYNAMICS, AND YOUR MINISTRY WILL SKYROCKET TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL OF RELEVANCE AND POWER.

will be the truth that defines and pervades our total work as ministers of the gospel. Envisioning the final and climactic work of the church, which will illuminate the whole world with the glory of God as a global phenomenon, Ellen White said: “One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other,—Christ our righteousness.”³

We do not have many things to preach, my ministerial brothers and sisters, but rather one thing in many forms. Properly understood and communicated, the doctrinal system of Adventism is a gospel monolith. Each doctrine interlocks with the others to form a single righteousness-by-faith structure. Righteousness by faith does not just involve our individual relationship with God. It affects how we regard and treat others. In fact, it must shape and guide everything we, as God’s people, do.

Master this one subject and incorporate it into all your preaching and relational dynamics, and your ministry will skyrocket to a whole new level of relevance and power. Magnifying God’s love and negating all human merit, the glorious message of righteousness by faith is the one truth that will, when we allow God to have His way with us, swallow up every other.



- 1 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this article are from the New King James Version.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1928), 468.
- 3 Ellen G. White, “Be Zealous and Repent,” *Review and Herald Extra*, December 23, 1890, 2.

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



Veterans of the Cross: South Pacific Division initiative focuses on retired ministers

COORANBONG, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Acknowledging retired pastors for their years of dedication to ministry, the South Pacific Division (SPD) Ministerial Association held its first Veterans of the Cross conference on September 26–29, 2022. Retired ministers and their spouses from across Australia gathered for the event at Avondale University, where they participated in a variety of activities.

Organized by a volunteer committee of ministry veterans, the event featured daily morning worship and a series of presentations about God’s grace by SPD Ministerial Association secretary **Darius Jankiewicz**. The program also included several simultaneous workshops on relevant topics for retirees, such as how to face retirement from a medical perspective, how to relate positively with grandchildren, and a beginner’s guide to social media.

In the afternoon, the 130 participants could choose from an array of recreational activities, including guided bush walks, table games, health checks, and Cooranbong tours.

The initiative was initially born after Jankiewicz heard his father’s perspective on retirement. “My dad is a retired pastor. He told me that after serving the church for almost fifty years, retirement felt like dropping off the face of the earth. [After hearing that] I’ve been dreaming of doing something for retired pastors, and since I returned to Australia in 2019, I have started working on it.



SPD Ministerial Association secretary Darius Jankiewicz presents “The Story of God’s Grace.”

Around eighteen months ago, we got the committee, and the result is here.”

Graham Thompson, a retired pastor from Western Australia, also acknowledged the importance of the initiative. “Ministers, when they walk out, it seems like they’ve been on the front line, and all of a sudden, they’re on their own; they’ve got to find their own way again, and it’s very difficult to settle down and to get on with a different life. So, this type of event is actually essential for us. It’s really appreciated.”

According to SPD president **Glenn Townend**, the initiative is a way of acknowledging retired pastors past and current contributions. “In my perception, pastors never retire. Their contribution to the work of the church and God’s mission in the community just continues. Sometimes retirees contribute their best life’s work in retirement, and so this is a great initiative to just honor them and thank them for their service and to say that we continue valuing their contributions since their retirement.” [Juliana Muniz, *Adventist Record*]

Adventists committed to reaching large tribe in Papua New Guinea

PAPUA, NEW GUINEA

Volunteers in Action (VIA), an independent ministry supported by the South

Queensland Conference in Australia, has sponsored two volunteers from the Kiunga Seventh-day Adventist Church in Papua New Guinea to reach the large, divided Yogom tribe, which is based along the border of Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Volunteers **Johnson Dialope** and **Siro Waida**, who have been sponsored for three years with the specific mission of reaching the tribe, have already

started to take the gospel to the people of Dome village this year.

To support the work of the two volunteers, a large group from the Kiunga church recently organized a mission trip to the village, which is located within walking distance of the West Papuan villages. The mission started in the center of the area, with plans to expand to the north and south.

"We heard of that need from a report at their district camp meeting last September," said **Jim Wagi**, Western Highlands Mission VIA coordinator. "We then sent the request to the VIA administration in Australia for sponsorship. Their positive response made it possible to kick-start the mission to this tribe."

Jacklyn Nomi, a participant in the mission trip, brought clothes to donate for babies and children, meeting the needs of many families in the area. "Mothers with naked children queued

up for Jacklyn's favor. Her kind deed touched the hearts and easily created friendship within a short space of time," Wagi said.

According to Wagi, the response from both sides of the border was very positive, but "there is still much more to do." [Jim Wagi]



Johnson Dialope and his family

Photo: Adventist Record

Mongolian Mission celebrates 30th anniversary by preaching and baptizing

ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA

What do people usually look for as a present when they celebrate a 30-year anniversary? Some would like to have a memorable trip, a special dinner, or special clothes. Others are simply satisfied to have some food and hope for a better future.

The Mongolian Mission, part of the territory of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, decided to celebrate its 30th anniversary by preaching and baptizing. From August 20-27, 2022, simultaneous evangelistic meetings were held in 21 cities across the country of Mongolia. The outreach was a Total Member Involvement event, including the participation of many church members, pastors, and church administrators. Hundreds of people attended the meetings, were inspired by the health talks and Bible presentations, and decided to be baptized.

Mongolia has 3.4 million inhabitants, and 1.6 million live in Ulaanbaatar, the country's capital. The Seventh-day Adventist Church currently has 3,090 members in Mongolia. Adventist missionaries first entered Mongolia in 1992, two years after the fall of Communism. The country is located in what is known as the 10/40 Window, and more than half its population is Buddhist.

Commenting on the recent outreach event, **Han Suk Hee**, Mongolia Mission president, said: "We are celebrating thirty years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's presence in Mongolia with an integrated effort to carry the message of salvation in Jesus."

Yo Han Kim, the Northern Asia-Pacific Division president, also in Mongolia for the event, stated, "I trust God has great plans for Mongolia, and the pastors and administrators have excellent projects to expand and consolidate the mission of the church here."

The president of the General Conference, **Ted Wilson**, preached daily throughout the week at the Mongolian Labor Union Auditorium in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. During the final weekend, he met with a large representation of



the church at the Suut Youth Camp, 35 miles north of the city.

On the final Sabbath morning, Wilson challenged the large group to develop a Christian life through Bible study and prayer. He urged all members to engage in Total Member Involvement and stay faithful to the Lord’s call to be missionaries throughout Mongolia until “we meet with Jesus in the clouds of heaven.” Wilson said, “Since this mission is celebrating the 30th anniversary reunion of the Seventh-day Adventist message arriving in Mongolia, I challenge each of you to look forward to and invite others to be present at the greatest of all anniversary reunions—the second coming of Christ.”

That afternoon, the pastors baptized 155 people representing 21 locations that held simultaneous evangelistic meetings. Wilson is encouraging all pastors, teachers, health care workers, church administrators, church workers, and church members to be active in

Total Member Involvement and engage in local personal and public evangelism sharing Christ, His three angels’ messages, and His soon second coming. There is no better way to celebrate three decades of existence in Mongolia than preaching and baptizing. [Williams Costa Jr., General Conference Communications]



Photo: Henry Stober

Nancy Wilson, left, wife of the General Conference president, giving a health seminar with the assistance of a Mongolian interpreter during August 20-27, 2022, evangelistic meetings in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.



LETTERS

Mentoring disciples

Kudos to *Ministry* magazine for Ron Clouzet’s article “A Plan to Mentor New Believers” (October 2022). To bring in new believers without a follow-up discipleship plan is akin to leaving a newborn baby on the sidewalk. Many new believers have to change their lifestyles significantly and have their worlds turned upside down. This simple yet comprehensive and effective plan that Dr. Clouzet presents is an excellent way to ground new believers in the faith and support them in this major transition of life. My

prayer is that every one of our churches will have a plan similar to this. We owe it to our new believers and to God’s kingdom.

—Gary Mayer, vice president for Administration/executive secretary, Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Conditional prophecies

I’m glad the article “The Tests of a Prophet” was published (August 2022) to help remind our people to be able to discern with wisdom on the matter.

Regarding principle 2 (“Prophetic predictions fulfilled”), I found it helpful all the years I taught Spirit of Prophecy to clarify that all

prophecies that are dependent on man’s response are, by their nature, conditional. The article alludes to the fact that some prophecies are conditional, but I found it helpful to really emphasize that point. Good work!

—Warren S. Ashworth, PhD, Pacific Union College (retired)

Resourceful articles

I am grateful for the *Ministry* magazines you have sent over the years and look forward to getting more as you are able. *Ministry* is certainly a timely tool that both advocates and motivates those who desire good resources for servanthood. Thank you!

—Nicodemus Waka, Nairobi, Kenya



Baptize

Edited by José H. Cortes Jr. and Ivan L. Williams Sr., Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2022.

Baptize is written by 20 authors and edited by Ivan Williams, NAD Ministerial Association director, and José Cortes, associate director. This book is the second in the series of books that is “a collective vision of pastors, members, and administrators to multiply the kingdom of God in North America through baptizing, equipping, planting, and revitalizing.”

They divided the book into eight sections focusing on different aspects of evangelism, including “Vision for Evangelism,” “Proclamation Presentations That Lead to Decisions,” and “Reconnecting and Reclaiming Former Members.” The chapters were written by a diversity of authors, who bring their experiential journey with evangelism. Each section’s first chapter is a devotional written by Cortes and is an introduction to the section and an admonition for readers to help their congregations process the practical implications of the section’s topic. Each following chapter applies the topic in the local church.

This book is unique compared to other books that I have read on evangelism. First, it does an excellent job going from the 35,000-foot overview of evangelism to homing in on how this looks in a local church. It talks not only about the need for evangelism in the church but also how a local pastor can practically make evangelism a part of his or her church’s ministry.

Second, from the very beginning, the gauntlet is thrown down with the idea that “evangelism needs to stop being just an event or a nonevent, which happens only during a season—in which only some participate—and become the lifestyle of each Adventist in North America, 24/7, 365 days a year. . . .

“It means we must continue to enhance what has worked, abandon what is not working, duplicate what is working for others in our context, find ways to become more innovative and



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effective in the fulfillment of mission” (12). In every chapter, despite being written by different authors, this truth clearly comes through.

Third, each chapter gives the reader practical steps on how to implement the topic in ministry. For example, the chapters in the section “Appeal and Baptisms” do not just discuss the importance of appeals. Every author, from their own context, shows how a pastor can make appeals

and calls for decisions an ongoing part of his or her ministry. This pattern holds true throughout the book.

One section that I was especially excited to see as a part of this book was “Reconnecting and Reclaiming Former Members.” I think for many years, our focus as a church with evangelism has primarily been on the number of baptisms. This is what gets reported and measured to evaluate whether a church is “successful” in evangelism. However, just as important an aspect of evangelism is the retention of members and the reclamation of members who have left the church. Joanne Cortes and Tony Liriano do a great job in their respective chapters on how to not only reconnect with former members but also create a community where members are less apt to disconnect. Liriano gives what I consider an overarching principle of evangelism in the local church when he says, “We need to win those who are outside, but we must not lose those who are inside.” While we are called to baptize, if half of those who are baptized disconnect from the church within the first year, are we really fulfilling the gospel commission?

Overall, this book has done a fantastic job of not only showing the importance of evangelism in the local church but also giving very practical tools on how it can be accomplished. If the books that follow in this series are anything like this book, churches all over the world will be well resourced to fulfill our mission. 📖



Dave Livermore, MA,
is a retired president
of the Gulf States
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Preaching as an administrator

It is Sabbath morning; you have either driven early in the morning or left on Friday evening to spend the night in a hotel. This is common practice for an administrator in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A new experience has entered our lives; we are now in a different church each week.

When we pastored, we did series of sermons on people, places, and events in the Bible. We would preach through books of the Bible. We were illustration conscious from the day we were taught to be so in homiletics class. Our lives had truly developed a rhythm of sermon preparation. But now, our lives are filled with administration: fixing problems that cannot be fixed at any other level in the church and dealing with personnel issues that arise. Committees after committees now subtly drain our time of sermon preparation. What used to take 20 hours a week is now reduced either to recycling an old sermon on Friday night or putting together a devotional thought that is, hopefully, long enough to be considered a sermon. But nothing can replace the investment of time when it comes to sermon preparation. Anything else I call “sermon lite.”

I have studied Paul as he preached on his missionary journeys. He proclaimed the Word of God in a powerful way. A way that caused a stir in his hearers—sometimes good stirring and sometimes evil stirring, but nevertheless, when people heard Paul, they were changed. He brought people to decisions regarding salvation and church life.

My point in all of this is simple: as administrators, we are responsible for preparing heart-stirring messages and presenting them to our people. But there is so little time; with the issues that I raised above, how can we do that?

I believe what caused Paul’s power was not just what he said but who he had become and the actions of his life. Even if people were skeptical of his testimony—and they were—they were compelled to listen. Pause for a moment. You are a president, executive secretary, or treasurer of a conference. In the members’ eyes, you are someone notable or important to the conference where

they elected you, where they chose you. You are a guest speaker, but more than that, a special guest speaker.

I have always imagined the congregation asking three questions of those in leadership: (1) Can we trust you? (2) Do you know where you are going? (3) Can you get us there? We do not just fill empty pulpits on Sabbath morning. We have opportunities to answer these questions and bring hope.

May I suggest a way to deal with this responsibility that might bring peace to our hearts and calm to our spirits? Give your personal testimony everywhere you preach. Do this until you have preached your story in every church in your territory. Tell the congregation who you were and now who you have become. Let them know that you identify with life before Christ. This will help answer the trust question.

In your testimony, you bring answers and build confidence in and throughout your territory, allowing members to know where you are going. They see someone standing before them with the assurance of salvation, with determination to live their lives with the Holy Spirit alongside them. When you humbly share your life story, the congregants begin to understand where this whole spiritual experience will end up. Heaven is a real place, and we can all someday enjoy eternity together. Talking about remaining faithful through life’s disappointments ignites hope in the listeners.

Show your territory that you are a survivalist, surviving with a faith-filled life in a world that fights faith tenaciously every day. Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8, NIV). Live, preach, and teach, answering that question in every sermon you share, that yes, Jesus will find your faith a surviving faith on that day. Therefore, the listeners’ faith is built up and challenged, and they will believe more wholeheartedly. Because they did not only hear a sermon on that particular Sabbath, they saw a sermon too. ❧

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