

mission

FROM THE OFFICE OF ADVENTIST MISSION VOLUME 8 • NUMBER 1



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EDITORIAL

The sound of rhythmic clacking jarred me from my slumber as my train wove its way across north-central India. The odd noise became louder and louder until its producer, a young boy in dirty clothes, stood before me, deftly clicking together two small, flat rocks.

His performance over, he stared at me expectantly.

"Oh, dear, he wants money," I said to my colleague who was sitting beside me, "I haven't had a chance to exchange dollars for rupees, but I so wish I could give him something."

"Give him your extra sandwich," he replied.

Wouldn't that be disappointing? I wondered. But I bent down to retrieve the second of two bread-and-butter sandwiches that had been graciously prepared by the wife of my host. I hadn't been hungry enough to eat them both.

The boy took the aluminum foil-clad package, unwrapped it slowly, and gazed curiously at its contents. Gingerly, he raised it to his mouth and took a small bite. Then, he chewed and chewed, his face expressionless.

Maybe he doesn't like it, I thought. Maybe he isn't hungry. Maybe . . .

Suddenly, his big, black eyes beamed with wondrous delight. It was as if I had given him a shiny, new bicycle.

"Do you like it?" our host asked him in Hindi.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed. "It's delicious and sweet. I've never tasted anything like it!"

Our host turned to me and said, "He says to tell ma'am thank you very much. He is so happy; he can't believe he has the whole sandwich to himself."

As the boy continued to savor one tiny bite at a time, I noticed that he broke off the crusts. *He must not like them, I thought. Or maybe he's not that hungry.*

Then, at his bidding, a small girl appeared at his side. She held out her hand, and he filled it with the crusts. She was so excited. "This is my sister," he said.

My eyes filled with tears. I wished my host's wife could have seen her gift pass from one eager hand to another that day.

I thought of Jesus, the bread of life, and all the people sitting around me, hungry for food and something more—love, meaning, and hope.

And I thought of you. Each time you support the mission offering or Global Mission, you share a gift that fills one life, then another, and another as it's passed along. Thank you, dear reader, for sharing!

Laurie Falvo,
Editor



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ABOUT OUR COVER PHOTO . . .

Ryan and Sharlene Hayton enjoy a rare moment of relaxation in Malawi, where they have served as medical missionaries for the past nine years. See their story, "See One, Do One, Teach One," on page 16!

From the Office of Adventist Mission

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VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1

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Like a Pumpkin in the Dark

A story of God's faithfulness in transition



Originally from Australia, **Theresa Wood** serves as a missionary in Fiji with her husband, Paul, and their four sons.

Have you ever heard someone say, “It literally grew overnight”? This is an expression of speech common among gardeners, particularly those of us who grow pumpkins!

But did you know that pumpkins actually do grow more at night? I once watched a time-lapse video of one growing over several days. During the daylight, its growth appeared to pause. But in the darkness, it grew rapidly, almost like a balloon being inflated. It’s a scientifically proven fact that growth happens best in the night shift! Tuck this thought away for a moment while I share a little of my story.

I’m a passionate gardener. I love being outside with the sun on my back, the wind in my hair, and dirt under my fingernails. It’s my happy place!

So you can understand how overjoyed I was when my husband and I purchased 100-plus acres of sun-kissed land in rural Australia. It was a dream come true. We immediately planted an orchard, bought a tractor, put up fencing, set up beehives, and bought a dog, who became a loyal friend to our four boys. It was a peaceful, beautiful country home filled to overflowing with purpose and satisfaction. It was our own little slice of paradise, teeming with natural wonders and daily miracles, and we thanked God abundantly for bringing us there.

Five very short months later, my husband was asked by the church to move to Suva, the capital of Fiji. And just like that, our perfect world was shattered!

Generally, my heart was willing to follow God’s leading, but this time I was in so much turmoil about where we were being sent. “Lord, send us anywhere except to a city!” I cried.

Paul and I prayed earnestly and became convinced that God was indeed leading us to Fiji.

And with that conviction grew an ever-deepening sense of His abiding presence and faithfulness. I experienced numerous moments when He was so real and so close to me that I knew without a doubt He would be by my side every step of the journey. I could ask for nothing more.

Several weeks later, my family and I arrived in Suva during rush hour. This wasn’t the Fiji you see splashed on billboards promoting endless, white sandy beaches and well-manicured resorts. Suva was congested, noisy, dirty, and smelly. For the next several months, my senses would be overloaded: the rubbish on the streets offended me, the noises of the sirens scared me, and the stench of the grocery store nauseated me.

Despite my best attempts to find fascination in our new world and have a positive mindset, I found myself spiraling downward mentally and emotionally. There were too many changes, and I wasn’t processing them well. I was deeply grieving the countless losses and goodbyes. Our family dynamics had been upended by putting our previously homeschooled children in school. My husband was required to travel to other countries, leaving me to parent the boys alone. I was socially isolated and found it difficult to connect with the locals on more than a superficial level. The lack of opportunities to get out in nature severely impacted me, and I felt trapped. In this new place, I had no role, no purpose, nothing to do but turn in meaningless circles. Then, as if to add insult to injury, it rained for two solid months. Depression hit me like a tsunami.

In the darkness, I wondered what had happened to my commitment to trusting God. What had happened to my assurance that He was faithful? Did I still believe He was by my side?

I opened my journal and began to write. As I did, God’s presence, blurred by months of sadness, became clear again.

I feel lost, disorientated, inefficient, frustrated. I don't really know who I am, and I am lonely. So this is my life now, and I have only one place to go: God. He is my strength. In fact, He is the one and only constant that I can cling to as literally everything else in my world has either disappeared or changed. Knowing God doesn't change my reality. . . . But I know I am not alone. I can cry on His shoulder and beg Him for strength and a smile to press on.

“DESPITE MY BEST ATTEMPTS TO FIND FASCINATION IN OUR NEW WORLD AND HAVE A POSITIVE MINDSET, I FOUND MYSELF SPIRALING DOWNWARD MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.”

I knew that no matter what, God was enough!
When everything familiar has disappeared, *God is enough!*

When you begin each day with no sense of purpose and end each day with no sense of accomplishment, *God is enough!*

When you have no friends to turn to, *God is enough!*

When all that brought you joy and fulfillment is gone, *God is enough!*

When all of life is upended, and you are disorientated because of it, *God is enough!*

When you don't even know who you are anymore, *God is enough!*

God has promised that He will never leave us. It is a fact that He is faithful to His Word. This isn't about feelings—it's about faith. I had zero warm fuzzies while I was flailing about in that pit of depression. Rather, I clung to God through sheer grit and determination. And in the process, far from my comfort zone, I learned to trust Him as I never had before. I learned to enjoy living in Fiji and praise Him for the lessons I learned during the difficult transition. I grew, just like a pumpkin in the dark!

Do you grow spiritually when you're walking through the trials of life? When you're walking by faith and not by sight? When you're hard-pressed on every side, forced to trust in God's realness even though you can't see or feel Him? In the dark, He is still there.

The Word of God speaks to this concept in James 1:2-4: “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing

that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (NKJV).

Did you catch that last line? “Perfect, complete, lacking nothing!” Herein is God's goal for our growing in the dark. We can be confident that “He who began a good work will complete it” (Philippians 1:6).

Praise God for trials! Praise God for the dark! Praise God that He is able to “work all things together for good” (Romans 8:28). Praise God that He is able to help us grow like pumpkins in the dark!

Your weekly mission offerings and World Budget Offerings help support the ministry of more than 400 missionary families around the world. Thank you for your support!



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Adventists *in the* FIRST CHRISTIAN NATION



Ricky Oliveras,
Office of
Adventist
Mission

M eet Vigen, a Global Mission pioneer serving in Armenia. Although Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as its official religion, Adventists have been praying for opportunities to share a *unique* message with the people living in its capital city, Yerevan.

“Our main goal is to spread the three angels’ messages in this area,” Vigen says. “To serve people through health ministry.”

After working in this neighborhood for two-and-a-half years, Vigen started a small group of believers. This group is excited to share the Adventist message, and they have found that health ministry is the best way to connect with the community.

Over the past year, they’ve run small health expos featuring lifestyle seminars such as the “Breathing Free” program for smokers. Healthful cooking classes are a favorite among people in the community. They love learning new recipes and tasting food in a social setting.

Some members started a colporteur ministry, knocking on people’s doors and offering them an opportunity to buy Adventist literature. As their group became known in the neighborhood, they decided to hold a series of Bible meetings in their small rented space.

They mailed and passed out dozens of invitations to these upcoming meetings, but just before the day of the event, they were evicted from the building. It’s very difficult and expensive to rent space in this part of the city, so the members did the only thing they could at that point: they prayed.

“After a few days of prayer, we found a building on the same street, only two doors down from our former building!” Vigen says. “It was an incredible miracle from God.”

Taking this as a sign from God, the meetings continued as planned. Karine, a woman from the community, was willing to try anything to fill a feeling of emptiness she couldn’t explain. “I met Vigen about two years ago,” she says. “When I heard him speaking, it touched my heart. I began

to understand the Bible, and that empty space inside me was filled.”

Karine was baptized and is now actively engaged as a member of the Adventist church.

“I became like a new person,” she says. “I’m more faithful to God now. Wherever I go, I feel a peace and comfort that wasn’t there before.”

Mission work in cities such as Yerevan can be extremely difficult. Church planting can seem like an impossible task at times, but through prayer and God’s power, new groups of believers can start. Global Mission pioneers such as Vigen have found that by using Christ’s method of ministry, they can break through barriers that they couldn’t otherwise.

“We want to show people that we love them, that we’re interested in them and are prepared to help them solve their everyday problems,” Vigen says. “I think the gospel is the answer to many problems that people have.”

Thank you for supporting Global Mission through your donations and prayer. Your support is helping pioneers such as Vigen plant new churches in unentered areas of the world.



GLOBAL MISSION

Please support Global Mission pioneers in their endeavor to reach those who don’t know Jesus.

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1



- 1 Vigen, a Global Mission pioneer serving in Armenia, shares the gospel with a new group of believers.
- 2 Church members demonstrate how to create tasty, healthy meals.
- 3 Participants in the healthful cooking class enjoy the fruits of their labors!
- 4 Karine attended Bible meetings and gave her heart to Jesus.



Watch this story in action at m360.tv/s2013.

2



3



4



Are Mission Offerings Still a Thing?

Have you ever felt as if you're putting your money into a "black hole" when you give your weekly mission offerings? Maybe you should think about it more as pouring your offerings into the river. Not to get rid of them, but to help mission flourish around the world.

Mission offerings don't seem to get as much attention anymore. Yet they're still vitally important to supporting work around the world. Think of your mission offerings as a river flowing through the entire world, providing life-giving water to help sustain the mission fields.

You probably know countries and projects that are supported by part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. But what about the regular mission offerings you give each week? Where do they go? What do they support? And what do they achieve?

You may be surprised to learn that your weekly mission offerings help support the work of some 400 missionary families around the world. In fact, 70 percent of the weekly mission offerings each quarter help support overseas missionaries and the international work of the church.

Appropriations from the General Conference to world divisions, the Middle East North Africa Union Mission, and the Israel Field help these regions build and sustain mission activities in their territories like water to irrigate fields when there's not enough rain.

The remaining money helps various institutions and agencies that serve the world church. For example, it helps the compassionate medical mission work of Loma Linda University, the outreach of Adventist World Radio, and the humanitarian ministry of ADRA, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

In recent years, millions of people from challenging areas of the world have found salvation in Jesus and have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On average in 2018, every 22 seconds, someone became an Adventist, and every 4 hours, a new church was organized.

Thanks to your offerings and the Global Mission focus, thousands of new congregations have been established in unreached areas and among new people groups. But after these new believers have been baptized, how are they nurtured? How do we make sure that their new faith is strengthened and they grow as disciples?

Your river of mission offerings helps grow and sustain new work throughout the world.

Please keep this life-giving river flowing.

Thank you for your faithful weekly mission offerings and your continuing prayers for Adventist mission.



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the world.

**Please keep
this life-giving
river flowing.**

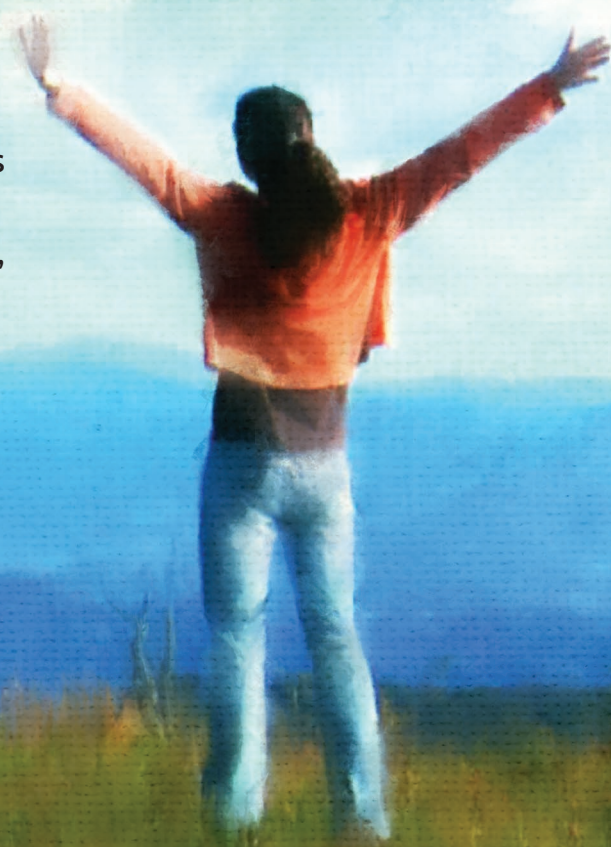


Want to share the video version of Are Mission Offerings Still a Thing? Visit m360.tv/s2014.

Kirsten's Legacy

On November 18, 2009, I received a call from my sister-in-law, Karen, her voice fraught with worry and confusion: “Kirsten never showed up to her second grade classroom today. The principal just called to tell us she’s missing. Please pray they find her and that she’s OK.”

I knew at that moment that something terrible must have happened to our Kirsten, who was serving as a student missionary on the North Pacific island of Yap, because she would never just not show up to her classroom.



“Of course! We’ll pray right now,” I responded. “Maybe she got injured on her morning run. Maybe she’s at a hospital.” I turned to my husband and told him that his sister had just called to tell us Kirsten was missing. We knelt right there and prayed.

My oldest daughter, Kamila, who was only eight years old, said, “Don’t worry Mom; let’s pray for her safe return.” About four long hours later, I received the call that changed our lives forever: “*They have found her body.*”

I remember how confused and sad Kamila and her siblings were when I eventually told them that someone had hurt and killed Kirsten. Had their faithful little prayers gone unanswered? “But Mom, where were Kirsten’s guardian angels?” they asked. “Why didn’t they keep her safe?”

About two weeks later, on Thanksgiving Day, Kirsten’s body arrived from overseas. The family gathered at the home of my in-laws, Dr. Niels and Mrs. Tove Oster, her maternal grandparents, as we had done many times before. This time, however, we weren’t feeling very thankful or joyful as in past years. Instead, we sat quietly while we waited for Kirsten’s casket to arrive from the tiny island of Yap.

At the funeral home, her parents, Hollis and Karen, allowed the closest relatives to see Kirsten. I never expected Kirsten to return to us in a coffin, and I had no idea what to expect when they opened it. It seemed incredibly surreal beholding her lifeless body—only 20 years old. She would remain 20 years old in our minds forever. She would have turned 21 the first week of December. Yet, at the same time, she looked absolutely beautiful and peaceful.

I was relieved that she did not appear battered or bruised. Her long, curly brown hair was lovely, and her face looked flawless, yet when my eyes gazed down at her hands, I could see how defense wounds were carefully disguised with makeup and hand positioning. I also noticed a pretty purple scarf draped around her neck, and at once, the horror of what this precious child endured during her last moments on earth became an overwhelming and heartrending reality.

Kirsten wasn’t just a student missionary. She was a teacher to 10 second graders who loved her, a sister to two older brothers, the only daughter of the Wolcotts, the first granddaughter of the Osters, a cousin to more than 12, and a niece. And she was *my* niece.

Deep Desire to Serve

At Southern Adventist University, where she studied education, Kirsten dreamed of becoming a teacher, just like her mother, Karen. I, too, shared the love of teaching with Kirsten, and we connected through her desire to learn more about the profession. She had shadowed my classroom when she was a student at Richmond Academy and I was teaching at a large public high school in Fairfax County, Virginia. I remember her looking hesitant when I asked her to walk to the photocopy room to make some copies for me while some 2,000 students flooded the halls on their way to their next classes, but she did it anyway.

In 2011, I was recruited to teach at Richmond Academy, an Adventist school where the total enrollment, kindergarten through grade 12, was some 120 students. It became clear why Kirsten must have felt a little out of place when she visited me at the large public school. Richmond Academy was a quaint school where everyone was like family. One day, as I sat at my teacher’s desk, I pulled out a wooden ruler. Scribbled in pencil was the owner’s name, “Kirsten Wolcott.” On the other side, it said,



Judith Rosa-Oster is Kirsten Wolcott’s aunt and serves as the elementary principal of Spencerville Adventist Academy in Maryland, United States.

Kirsten and Karen on the Rappahannock river in Virginia.



“Kirsten loves Reed,” a high school crush, no doubt. It’s a keepsake that makes me smile and tear up at the same time.

Ever since Kirsten was a little girl, she dreamed of being a missionary. During her sophomore year of college, she decided to take a year off from her studies to serve as a volunteer. The following are some of the words she wrote on her application form: “I love the feeling that comes with service, it’s such a rewarding experience. I want to challenge my walk with God by pushing myself to do something more than what I have done before. I really feel like God has called me to serve Him and I believe this will be a huge growth experience for me. I want to be able to share Him with kids and adults and have them learn practical skills as well. My goal is to be the teacher who inspires them academically, pushes them spiritually and comforts them emotionally.”

When her dream of serving on the island of Yap finally became a reality, Kirsten couldn’t wait to go. She was so excited when she learned that she would be assigned to teach the littler ones at the Yap Adventist School from August 2009 to June 2010.

At the airport, her parents, Karen and Hollis, said their farewells. As she walked away, she moved onward confidently to her final destination. Her parents remember that she never did glance back, not even once. In her journal, she wrote, “I

Kirsten with her family (left to right) older brother, Nathan; middle brother, Scott; father, Hollis; and mother, Karen.



keep thinking how this isn’t just a vacation. I’m going to be educating young kids and I don’t even have an education yet. But God, you’ve kept me calm and You’ve brought me this far. . . . God, use me and give me extra patience, faith, hope, courage, and boldness to spread your gospel. Prepare the hearts of those I’m coming to serve. Shine out of me and let my example show these kids and adults how amazing You really are!”

I emailed Kirsten some tips and ideas for her classroom and promised to send her a box of materials for her students for Christmas. I never did get around to sending her the package.

On Yap

As was her custom, early in the morning, Kirsten would spend time with God. She journaled her thoughts and conversations with God in her diary. She also loved to exercise. Despite being such a positive influence on many others, she, like many of our youth, struggled with body image issues, undereating and overexercising at times. When she first arrived in Yap, she and another student missionary purchased bikes and requested to ride off campus. The principal granted her permission, but only after he warned her that missionaries had been victims of serious crimes on the island of Yap.

Principal Fonseka also requested written approval from Kirsten’s parents. Karen and Hollis reluctantly agreed. They communicated their preference for her to remain on campus and “get creative” with her exercise routines, such as adding a jumping rope.

About two weeks before, Karen had been at my house for the birthday of my daughter, Kamila. Kamila enjoyed hearing her aunt Karen talk about Kirsten’s second grade students since she was also in second grade. We were talking about emails



Would you like to help make a positive impact in the lives of others? If so, please consider being a volunteer missionary through Adventist Volunteer Service which facilitates church members’ volunteer missionary service around the world. Volunteers ages 18 to 80 may serve as pastors, teachers, medical professionals, computer technicians, orphanage workers, farmers, and more. To learn more, visit AdventistVolunteers.org.

I had exchanged with Kirsten and the materials I was planning to send her. At one point, Karen brought up how Kirsten used to run with a roommate but that lately she was running by herself in the early morning hours. Because it was still dark, she carried a flashlight. I could see the concern on Karen's face. "It worries me that she's running in the dark with a flashlight," I said. "Someone could watch her, learn her routine, and target her."

"I know," Karen responded. "But Hollis and I can't really keep her from running. She's an adult, and she's thousands of miles away . . ."

But I could see how this really bothered Karen. It bothered both of us. But we left it in God's care.

The Attack

The day before the attack, Kirsten began her day as she always did, speaking to God and asking Him to protect her and to keep her safe on her morning run as He had done countless times before. I pondered on the words she wrote in her journal. It broke my heart knowing that she only had 24 hours left on this earth: "God I'm really excited about today, I feel in love with life this morning. Come fill up my heart with your love and help me to be able to brighten someone's day today. Use me for your service. God, please help me now as I read Your words. I want to be spiritually filled. Send your Holy Spirit to come and speak to my mind as I read and study. Then please help me to have the energy and be safe when I am on my run this morning."

As I read and reread her journal entries, there is no doubt in my mind that Kirsten loved the Lord. That she wanted to be filled with His Spirit daily, and her desire was to serve Him. She loved her students, and her students loved her. She was kind and thoughtful and always had a warm smile on her face. One of her friends at Southern Adventist University described her as a light. When others were feeling down or overwhelmed with schoolwork, she would encourage them and offer to help.

The day of the attack was a rainy day. Kirsten was disappointed about the weather, but she didn't let it keep her from running. A local, who was high and drunk and had just left a party, observed her light. He knocked her over from behind with his bike, eventually overpowering her, as he was twice her size. Kirsten fought as hard as she could but lost the fight for her life. He stabbed her to death.

I often think about Kirsten's last minutes on earth. It caused nightmares in which I would dream that I was being stabbed, and I would wake up in a panic. Her mother asked me at the funeral whether I thought Kirsten felt a lot of pain during the attack. Clearly, those thoughts tormented all of us. No one truly knows what she went through, but I prefer to think that she was as connected to her Maker as

"My goal is to be the teacher who inspires them academically, pushes them spiritually and comforts them emotionally."



was Stephen in the Bible, his eyes and thoughts on God while he was being stoned.

Kirsten's legacy

The enemy tried to snuff out Kirsten's light when he cut her life short. But he failed, and the opposite happened. One would think that after a horrific tragedy like that befell one of our student missionaries, parents and students alike would be too fearful to engage in mission. But after Kirsten's death, students continued to volunteer to serve

Kirsten and one of her second grade students at Yap Adventist School.

in Yap and around the world. Inspired by her story and love for mission, they said they “wanted to carry the torch, to complete the work she had begun.” The light would continue!

Ten years later, I struck up a conversation with Lindsay Dever, a young woman who works with me at Spencerville Adventist Academy. During our conversation, I discovered that she had known Kirsten. They had met at a camp meeting in Virginia when they were kids. She shared a couple of fun memories with me, one of them a little mischievous, and I loved hearing all about it. She related how she and Kirsten would climb the rafters that led into the different cabins. She also shared with me how Kirsten changed the trajectory of her life. After Kirsten’s death, she took a year off to serve in the mission field as a task force dean. She is now working at Spencerville Adventist Academy and teaching like Kirsten would have.

On the 10th anniversary of Kirsten’s death, Karen and Hollis, their two sons, Nathan and Scott, and her family and friends gathered in Kirsten’s hometown of Tappahannock, Virginia, to commemorate her love of mission work. Together, we packaged 27 boxes filled with various supplies for the student missionaries at Yap. They collected and donated food, health and beauty aids, and

Kirsten and Judie on the Rappahannock river in Virginia.

school supplies to support the education of Yapese students. I was finally able to send those promised school supplies.

In addition, Kirsten’s family was invited to the headquarters of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Columbia, Maryland, for a showing of a special documentary called *Discovering Kirsten*. The documentary chronicles Karen’s journey to Yap after Kirsten’s premature death.

This June, the 2020 graduating class of Yap Adventist Academy will be the students who were in Kirsten’s second grade class. Karen, who spoke at their eighth-grade graduation and has built a relationship with many of these students, desires to be present for their senior graduation.

Every year on the anniversary of Kirsten’s death, the island of Yap observes the Kirsten Wolcott Memorial Day, a sort of “holiday” to remember her service on the island and the senseless loss of her life. It is a day when the Yapese promote their strong opposition to the use of drugs and alcohol and to domestic violence against women.

My hope is that instead of remembering Kirsten as the student missionary who was murdered in the South Pacific, people will remember that she was a beautiful, vibrant young



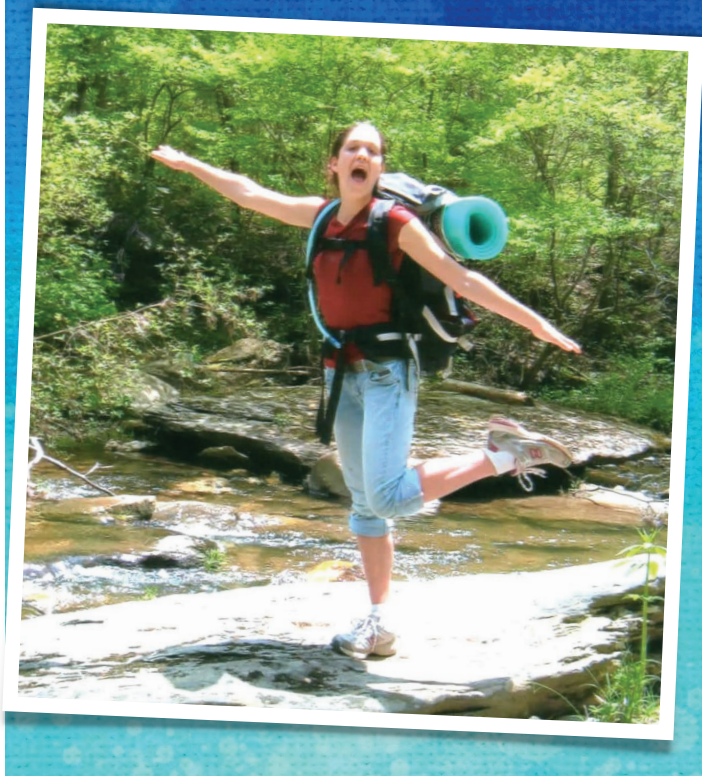
“My hope is that instead of remembering Kirsten as the student missionary who was murdered in the South Pacific, people will remember that she was a beautiful, vibrant young woman who was passionate about her convictions to share the love of Jesus with others.”

Kirsten at a river in Oregon.

woman who was passionate about her convictions to share the love of Jesus with others. She loved her family, her friends, and her job as a teacher of second graders. Although she had her struggles and insecurities, she shared her thoughts with God every day. In one of her journal entries, just two months before her life was cut short, Kirsten, in her own words, resounds her legacy.

“As I study (Ecclesiastes 3: 1–8) I wondered why there are both bad and good things? Why should there be a time for death? But as I read the commentary I realized that it was to illustrate that nothing lasts forever . . . we never know when our ‘time’ is, and so we should take every advantage of the good times we have and work hard to get through the bad times with the help of Jesus Christ because He wants to help us. . . . Think about it: Someone dies every second. Do you think many of them expected to die? I want my heart to be prepared for death. I want my life to be lived so that there is something good to say about me when I’m gone, and hopefully my death can lead others to eternal life! Come fill my heart today with YOUR thoughts, words and actions so that I can be a ‘silent’ witness with my actions. God, help me to live each moment like it was my last so that I will be ready when my time actually comes. Love ya, Amen.”

I find comfort knowing in my heart that Kirsten rests for now; however, that moment when the trumpet resounds, she will rise and be caught up with Jesus in the heavens, where all the mysteries of this world will be revealed. Though her existence was brief on this world, Kirsten accomplished her mission. She inspired many to carry the torch and share the light of Jesus in a dark world in need of a Savior. One day in heaven, we’ll know just how many people got to know Jesus and accepted Him as their Lord and Savior because of the impact Kirsten had on their lives.

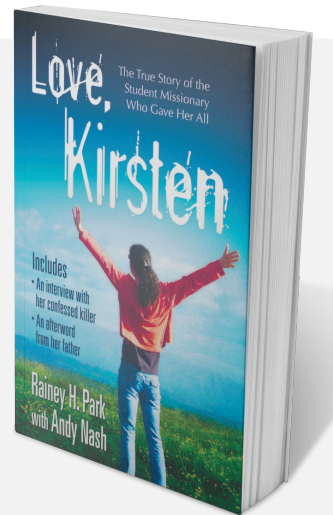


Love, Kirsten

The true story of the student missionary who gave her all by Rainey H. Park with Andy Nash.

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Discovering Kirsten

This video, produced by the North American Division Communication department, shares the story of Karen Wolcott's visit to the island of Yap as she searched for closure following the tragic loss of her daughter Kirsten, a student missionary who was murdered in 2009. To watch, visit vimeo.com/369979533.





MALAWI

See One, Do One, Teach One



Born in Australia, **Sharlene Hayton** has spent the past nine years serving at Malawi's Malamulo Adventist Hospital with her husband, **Ryan**. They have three sons, Benson, Hudson, and Jett.

Malawi, “the warm heart of Africa,” has been home to our family for the past nine years. Our kids, Benson, Hudson, and Jett, have grown up here. They’ve learned their ABCs, transitioned from balance bikes to pedal bicycles, and planted fruit trees that have grown taller than anyone in our family.

Although we’ve greatly enjoyed our orchard, not everyone thought it was a good idea for us to plant it. “You’ll only be in Malawi five years,” one friend said. “You’ll do all that work and never get to taste the fruit.” “Yeah, maybe,” we replied, “but someone else will enjoy it someday even if we can’t!”

When my husband, Ryan, started working at the 275-bed Malamulo Adventist Hospital, he was the only surgeon on staff. The hours were long, and the work was endless. Trained as a general surgeon, he didn’t have the skills to conduct the host of specialized surgeries needed by many of our patients. So he devoted himself to learning these new procedures as well. The increased responsibility took its toll. Ryan’s health began to suffer, and at the end of our first year in Malawi, he embarked on annual leave with pneumonia and severe exhaustion. I barely recognized the man I had married.

During our time away, we asked ourselves some hard questions. How long could he continue to provide this level of care to the people? Five years? And then what? Who would come to take his place? The harsh reality hit us: we could toil for years and sweat and bleed (literally and figuratively) for Malawi, but in the end, there may not be another surgeon to carry the torch.

The grind continued for another year, and then we heard about a program that brought us hope. Dr. Richard Hart, president of Loma Linda University (LLU) in California, United States, approached Ryan about starting a Pan-African Academy of Christian Surgeons (PAACS) residency program at Malamulo. PAACS is a nonprofit organization created to address the urgent need for surgeons in Africa. LLU partners with PAACS, providing it with



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academic oversight and accreditation. “It’s a great idea,” Ryan told Dr. Hart, “but I can’t do it alone.”

He didn’t have to. Dr. Mark Reeves, director of LLU’s Cancer Center and a PAACS commission representative, provided logistical support, and Dr. Bruce Steffes, PAACS’s chief medical officer, certified Malamulo as a suitable PAACS site. Malamulo recruited Dr. Arega Fekadu, an Adventist PAACS graduate from Ethiopia, to help Ryan implement the program. Later, we also recruited PAACS graduate Dr. Moses Kasumba, our assistant program director.

The residency program was opened in 2014, and we currently have four physicians from various African countries training to become surgeons.

Recently, Ryan walked up the long hill from the hospital to our home wearing a big smile. It was obvious he was excited about something, and the kids and I had to know what it was. “I’ve just watched Dr. Lijalem Taye-Garba teaching a second-year resident how to perform a mastectomy!”

“Ah, OK,” we said, “and . . . ?”

“Well, it’s the first time I’ve realized that soon, Dr. Taye-Garba will graduate and be ready to perform surgeries back in Ethiopia. He’ll be confident to teach others under him!”

I had heard Ryan and other surgeons throughout the years talk about “see one, do one, teach one.” This referred to a physician seeing a surgery being performed then having the knowledge needed to do one. Doing one then provided the knowledge to teach others the same procedure. PAACS was providing exactly this experience for our physicians.

In December 2020, we anticipate that Dr. Taye-Garba will be the first Malamulo PAACS graduate. An exceptionally humble physician, he has achieved academic excellence throughout his entire education. As a boy, he crossed three rivers to get to school and outscored his classmates on tests time and time again. One of his primary school teachers wrote on his report card, "It is impossible to say Lijalem started to learn after he was born; it is as though he was learning while growing inside his mother's womb."

Dr. Taye-Garba and all the residents in the PAACS programs across Africa infuse hope into the hearts of missionaries such as us. Someday, our family will return to our homeland. At that point, our boys will likely pine for their rustic treehouse, weekend safaris, and the trees they have been cultivating in our garden. And when that day arrives, not only will we be happy to know that there is abundant fruit in our garden for others to enjoy, but we'll be comforted to know that there are surgeons who can carry on the ministry of healing in Malawi. For even today, down in the theaters of Malamulo, there are young physicians who are learning to "see one, do one, teach one."



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1 Ryan, Sharlene, and their sons, Benson, Hudson, and Jett, at Malamulo Adventist Hospital in Malawi.

2 Left, Dr. Ryan Hayton; center, Dr. Lijalem Taye-Garba; right, Dr. Arega Fekadu.

3 Short- and long-term missionary children visit the local village to hand out donated supplies of woolen blankets, toys, paper, and pencils.

Your weekly mission offerings, collected during Sabbath School or given online at Giving.AdventistMission.org, help fund the medical mission work of the church around the world. Thank you for your support!

Check out video stories about missionaries at m360.tv/missionary!



3





New Friends *and* New Beginnings



Ricky Oliveras,
Office of
Adventist
Mission

Iwould be dead by now [if it weren't for this Life Hope Center] because I tried to kill myself multiple times. I couldn't think of the future. I just thought of the present and what was tormenting me and how I would kill myself."

Deeply depressed, Consuelo abandoned her belief in God. She tried to start over, wanting to do something different with her life, so she enrolled in nursing school. But her past weighed on her wherever she went. After class one day, a professor noticed something was wrong and told her about the local Life Hope Center in the city of Talca.

Consuelo visited the center, where she met Michelly and Angie, Adventist volunteers with the One Year in Mission program. She enjoyed talking with them and decided to take a Portuguese course offered at the center. Over time, Consuelo became friends with the volunteers.

"I felt the presence of God in everyone at the center," Consuelo said. "In what I saw, how they acted, what they said, and everything they did."

Each time Consuelo returned to the center, she felt as if her deep wounds were being healed.

"They welcomed me with open arms," she added. "I found another family here, another home here."

The volunteers began talking to Consuelo about God, and it was the first time in a while Consuelo felt ready to talk about spiritual topics. She asked for a Bible study, in which she gradually developed a new understanding of and relationship with God.

"It helped me in every way to be here," Consuelo said. "I saw the love of God, the grace of God that I hadn't seen anywhere else. I found myself growing closer and closer to God, believing in Him, and having more faith in Him."

As a result, Consuelo decided to be baptized and join the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She now volunteers her time at the center, doing medical consultations for free.

Like Consuelo, there are many who are looking for community and love. But most people are too suspicious of religion to seek these things in a traditional church.

"Some of the people who come here may be a little distrustful because they don't really know what we will ask for afterward," says Angie. "But when they see a different environment, where there is only empathy, love, and friendship, they completely change their vision. They are very grateful and bring more people to participate."

In order to understand the needs of the community, center staff conducted a survey. As a result, the center now runs various classes and activities including Portuguese and English lessons, healthy cooking demonstrations, crafts, and a variety of exercise classes.

“We’ve seen the effect of Christ’s method on people’s lives because we see a community today open to the Adventist Church that was not easy to reach in the past,” says Michelly. “Because when you have your religion, you guard your world, and you don’t want anyone to invade your life. The centers are breaking down barriers.”

Through genuine care for the people, this center has touched the hearts of many in the community. The results have exceeded the volunteers’ expectations.

“We’ve seen how this ministry isn’t just good for the community; it’s also good for the churches. . . It’s reviving the Adventist members,” says Angie.

Please pray for Life Hope Centers like this one. Pray that through friendship and compassion, people will see a glimpse of Jesus’ love. Thank you for helping us transform lives through your gifts to Global Mission projects like these!



Adventist Mission supports wholistic mission to the cities. This includes a rapidly growing number of Life Hope Centers (urban centers of influence), which serve as platforms for putting Christ’s method of ministry into practice. The centers provide an ideal opportunity for Total Member Involvement in outreach that suits each person’s spiritual gifts and passions. To learn more about Life Hope Centers, please visit MissionToTheCities.org.

To watch more videos about Life Hope Centers, visit m360.tv/s2019.

- 1 Consuelo, a Chilean woman determined to end her life, found hope at a Life Hope Center.
- 2 Michelly and Angie, volunteers with the One Year in Mission program at the Life Hope Center, showered Consuelo with love and acceptance.





Making Paradise



Kris Akenberger served as a volunteer Bible worker in Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, where he helped plant a church and disciple a new group of believers. He is currently a theology student at Mountain View College in the Philippines.

God showed Jeremiah a vision of a potter at work. He explained that He was the Potter, and we, His people, are the clay. Just like a potter takes a lump of clay into his hands and forms it into something useful, God takes broken people into His hands and makes them the way He wants them to be. The tiny island of Saipan has been my potter's house. There, on that little island, God took me into His hands and made me into something useful to Him. And I am grateful for that experience.

When I was invited to serve in Saipan, I immediately went home and Googled the Pacific island. Beautiful images of white sandy beaches, breathtaking sunsets, and pretty flowers splashed across my laptop screen. I began to dream of what it would be like to live there and sing ukulele worship songs while drinking from coconuts and looking out over the endless blue sea. I said a quick prayer of thanks to God, accepted the invitation, and boarded a plane headed for paradise.

When I arrived, the island had just been hit by a typhoon and didn't look anything like the pictures on my computer. In fact, during my years of service there, the island was destroyed twice by devastating storms. Both times I had to learn to live without power for a couple of months and often didn't have enough water. The typhoons killed the flowers, trees, and vegetables, and people mostly ate canned meat with rice.

However, the physical discomforts were nothing compared to the spiritual challenges. I had left a home where people loved me to come to a place where I couldn't understand anyone and not many people could understand me. Even though the language of Saipan is English, for many people it's their second or third language. So at best, you're only partially understood. I began to complain in my heart. I drifted deeper and deeper into depression. Everywhere I looked, I saw only problems and reasons to give up.

In truth, it wasn't the first time I'd struggled with complaining. I have a history of blaming circumstances and other people for my unhappiness.

I can't tell you the exact moment or the reason, but something broke inside of me, and I realized for the first time that I was responsible; I could either make the best of it or make the worst of it. I knew for the first time it had always been up to me. I get to choose what I think, feel, and believe, and ultimately how I act.

Proverbs says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." I love the text in Joshua 1:9 that says, Be strong and of a good courage because God is with us wherever we go. I've learned that courage is about asking God for a way to succeed rather than finding an excuse to fail. All my life, I had been making excuses. No more! I asked Jesus to give me a clean heart and determined to be a different person with a different attitude.

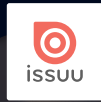
After many months of hard work, I was sitting under a mango tree by the church I had helped build, enjoying time with friends who had just been baptized. We were singing songs together while my friend Jonah played the ukulele. You could smell the flowers we had planted, and the cool breeze felt amazing. Children were laughing, and the women were preparing a Sabbath fellowship lunch. This was what I had dreamed Saipan would be like. My dream had come true!

God had given me that dream of paradise many months ago, not to complain that it wasn't that way but because He wanted to use me to help make it that way.

Complaining and excuses have become hateful to me. God has taught me that not only am I responsible, but in Him, I am capable. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.



If you're interested in being a volunteer, please visit AdventistVolunteers.org.



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now available on
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**There, on that little island,
God took me into His hands
and made me into something
useful to Him.**



البشارة كما دوّنتها متى

My Very Own Injil

Editor's Note: This story, written by a tentmaker, comes from the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission, which relies heavily on the Total Employment tentmaker program to reach thousands in their region who don't know Christ.

like you! You don't just take care of Mamma. You take care of me as well!"

I didn't think I was doing anything extraordinary for Nafisa, the young-adult daughter of Mamma Salma, the elderly lady in the hospital bed nearby. But I've learned that my patients' families experience challenges when their loved one is very ill. So I had engaged Nafisa with small talk, encouraged her, and explained how to relate to her mother when she was frustrated. I had even suggested, "Why don't you talk to God about how you feel? He can hear you!" And I had given her a hug.

I was leaving the room when I felt impressed to ask if she'd ever heard of the Injil. Her response caught me by surprise. "Yes, but this is so strange you should ask me. I was reading the sacred book of my religion, and it mentions the Injil many times, so I thought I would like to read it."

I told her I could get one for her. She hugged me again. I was so thankful for the few copies I had brought back with me from a weekend in a neighboring country.

The next evening I was excited to get to work. To my delight, Mamma Salma's nurse asked me to cover her patients while she went to eat dinner. When I entered the room, Mamma was sleeping. This was my opportunity! I told Nafisa I had the Injil with me. She jumped up, clapped her hands, and ran to me as I held out the New Testament wrapped in bright red foil.

Then the whole story poured out.

In her reading, Nafisa had noticed that the sacred book of her religion repeatedly mentioned that believers should read the Torah and the Injil. She showed me a tattered piece of notepaper where she had written all the references that said



GLOBAL MISSION

so. She had decided that she must know what was in it, so she had searched big bookstores and little out-of-the-way bookshops. But nobody carried it. A Christian coworker suggested she contact the largest online bookstore in the Middle East. She called a branch of the company that was based in a country where the Bible is sold legally. *Finally*, she thought, *I will get my very own copy.*

When the manager realized where she was calling from, though, he was apologetic. “Sorry, madam, we cannot ship it to you. I am an honest man, and I cannot take your money because you will not receive it. They will not deliver it to you; it is forbidden.”

Tears filled her eyes as she told me, “I lost hope. I thought I would never get an Injil.” She held the New Testament close to her heart. I encouraged her to pray first before reading it so God could help her understand His Word. “Yes, I will. I will,” she assured me.

Two days later, I had a chance to stop by Mamma Salma’s room. Nafisa was excited to see me. “Oh, I read the story of Jesus’ birth. It’s so beautiful. I shared with my sister how much peace I have as I’m reading this book.”

Nafisa then told how her sister had come to relieve her for a few hours so she could get some sleep. When Nafisa returned to Mamma Salma’s room, she thought she would have a few minutes to read from the New Testament before Mamma woke up, but she couldn’t find it anywhere.

“I searched the room. I knew where I’d left it. I knew it couldn’t just disappear. I finally called my sister, wondering if she had seen it. I worried about what she might think. To my surprise, she admitted taking it without permission. I was irritated. I told her, ‘It’s mine. I need it. Why did you take it?’ She slowly explained that she just wanted to experience what I’m experiencing. She told me she was reading the book right then and couldn’t put it down. She said, ‘It’s comforting to me, too.’”

Nafisa called her father and asked him to get the book from her sister and bring it back to the hospital room as soon as possible. “Do you know what he said?” Her face lit up as she mimicked her dad. “Let your sister read the book for right now. I will get it back to you when she’s finished, I promise.”

Nafisa is now enjoying her very own Injil and I am looking for a copy of the Old Testament to also share with her. Please pray for her and her family as they study God’s Word. And please support mission in this area so that all who are seeking God may find Him.

Tentmakers

Our church faces tremendous challenges in sharing Jesus in closed countries, countries that have shut their borders to organized churches and traditional missionaries. But a tentmaker can bypass these barriers! Total Employment is the Global Mission tentmaker program.

A tentmaker is an Adventist professional who chooses to follow the example of the Apostle Paul. Paul supported his ministry with his tentmaking trade, and as he talked with his customers, he looked for opportunities to lend a listening ear, meet a need, and share the good news of the gospel.

Like Paul, tentmakers mingle with people in the secular workplace while engaging in intentional, personal outreach. They form long-lasting relationships that enable them to touch hearts for Christ in ways they never could if they were official church workers.

Your donations to Global Mission help encourage and equip tentmakers by providing them with much-needed coaching, training, and spiritual support.

Tentmakers are making a difference for Jesus, but they need your help. Please support their ministry with your prayers and donations.

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Is God calling you to be a tentmaker?

Hundreds of Adventist professionals of all types are needed. To learn more, please visit TotalEmployment.org.



Centers of Influence in the Atlantic Union: God’s Plan for Reaching the Lost



Sandra Dombrowski is a freelance writer living in Connecticut, United States.

She helps prepare church members to participate in sustainable health evangelism to cities of the northeastern part of the country.

On the cusp of the twentieth century, Ellen White called for dedicated workers to open centers of influence in the cities, which included hygienic restaurants (now known as vegan or plant-based restaurants). She saw these as places where they could teach and model health reform, which is “the Lord’s means for lessening suffering in our world and for purifying His church,” and where workers could “act as God’s helping hand, by co-operating with the Master-worker in restoring physical and spiritual health.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1948), 112, 113.

These centers, most of them plant-based restaurants, are popping up in the Atlantic Union of the North American Division with the number—though still small—more than doubling in the past five years. If you were to tour the Atlantic Union from New York to Maine, sampling your way from one tasty vegan enclave to another, you would find a diverse palette of flavors from Jamaican cuisine to Indian food, from down-home, old-fashioned fare like mac-and-cheese and pot pie to trendy

kale salad and barbecued jackfruit grilled cheese. But one flavor is central to all: each restaurant exudes the savor of Christ and His passion for the lost. And as diverse as the menus are the stories that demonstrate how God is bringing a 100-year-old vision for centers into reality.

God transformed Hulando Shaw’s catering health ministry, Real Veggie Café, into a center of influence when his tasty and creative plantain dish failed to secure first place in a cooking competition. One of the organizers, who thought Hulando should have won, offered him a small restaurant to rent in Island Park, New York, all food-service equipment included. “It was Divine intervention because we started up with absolutely no money down,” says Hulando.

God also blessed Victor and Nicole Broushet of The Vegan Nest, a catering and public speaking health ministry, with a venue when the city business development manager of Worcester, Massachusetts, suggested they open a restaurant there and personally found a venue for them, to their specifications. This was their opportunity to open a center of influence and begin full-time ministry.

Ivan Raj and Heidi Tompkins of Heidi's Health Kitchen, also a health ministry that caters, wanted to start a pop-up restaurant but had difficulty finding a venue in a convenient location whose owners would allow them to bring in a plant-based menu and share literature. They prayed fervently, and God gave Raj a dream, telling him to ask Jack Jack's Café in Babylon, New York. The owner consented, and they've been serving a plant-based menu and sharing literature there one Sunday a month since 2016.

The same God who initiates ministry also sustains and provides for its development. When Michael and Sonya Tardif started Taste of Eden Café in Maine, they met their first winter with no funds to pay for heat. They prayed, "Lord, if you want us to continue, You have to do something." God answered with miracles. They watched the gauge on their oil tank slowly move toward full and the electric bill drop from the hundreds of dollars per month to 12 dollars per month, where it stayed for six years. The electric company confirmed that, no, nothing was wrong with the meter. Later, they found an unexplained roll of cash in the cash drawer, the exact amount needed to begin the application process for nonprofit status for the health education branch of their ministry.



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Fueled with blessings and indications of God's approval, these centers, in turn, bless their communities. In addition to offering a healthy, plant-based menu, many of these centers host health classes and vegan cooking classes, either in their restaurant or store, in a local Adventist church, or even in the local library. Faith Crooker, who runs



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Farm Fresh Café in Brunswick, Maine, also operates Omega Wellness Center, offering healthy living and cooking classes.

Even those restaurants and stores without an accompanying treatment center share simple health remedies and natural treatments one-on-one. Peggy Shauffler, who runs Country Life Restaurant in New Hampshire, is passionate about sharing health information individually with her customers. In fact, she says, “My number one goal is to educate, not to feed people.” One customer, emaciated with Lyme disease, left with Shauffler’s well-researched information and returned months later, so healthy she was unrecognizable, thanks to Shauffler’s help.

The daily nature of a restaurant or a store, opened three to six days a week—as opposed to once-a-week church services and once- or twice-a-year health fairs or evangelistic series—and offering food, which all humans need every day, allow the missionaries to develop relationships with those in the community. Lance Wilbur, a veteran

trainer of colporteurs and Bible workers and a founder of Pulse Café in Massachusetts, says, “We have four to five thousand people pass through our restaurant every month. That’s more than a team of Bible workers or literature evangelists could contact in a year!”

Every center has stories of sharing literature and sitting down with a regular customer to share an answer from the Bible. At Eden Life Market and Café, operated by the St. Juste family in upstate New York, one customer comes in for food once a week and asks an occasional Bible question. He said, “I don’t go to church. I don’t believe in religion. But when I come here, I feel like I’m coming to church! If there were a church I would join, it would be the Adventists!”

Many of the centers work in harmony with the local Adventist church, passing along Bible studies and sharing interest lists or just bringing their customers to church. Because of this union, Pulse Café has had in process up to 30 Bible studies, conducted an evangelistic series, and witnessed four baptisms since they opened two years ago.

This is just a snapshot of how centers of influence in the Atlantic Union are impacting our region. Yet all their efforts, seen and unseen, are not enough to meet the needs in our communities and share Christ with everyone.

Gideon and Kerene Gurley, who both hold down full-time jobs in addition to ministry, operate a health and bookstore, Rays of Health and Happiness, in New Haven, Connecticut, with

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“Let forces be set at work to clear new ground, to establish new centers of influence wherever an opening can be found. Rally workers who possess true missionary zeal, and let them go forth to diffuse light and knowledge far and near.”

—Ellen White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, 118.

Life Hope Centers

Centers of influence provide long-term, on-the-ground ministry that connects with people on a local and personal level. Some are established by mission-driven entrepreneurs, while others are started by your Global Mission donations and are often called Life Hope Centers. Life Hope Centers have a goal to start new groups of believers in urban areas. To learn more about Life Hope Centers and how you can support their ministry, please visit MissionToTheCities.org.

a treatment room in the back and a small space for health lectures. They can hardly find time to respond to all the needs and interests they find in their community.

Hulando Shaw of Real Veggie Café in New York, says, “One person can’t do it!” He notes that there is no Adventist presence between his center and Rosedale in Queens, New York. Michael Tardif in Maine says, “We need more!” If Maine needs more centers of influence, what about vast and influential New York City, teeming with people, where there are no centers of influence at all! The restaurant that Stephen Haskell and his team started in Brooklyn at the turn of the twentieth century has long since closed. The Country Life Restaurants and others that once dotted the streets of that great city have also shut down. Boston, Hartford, Providence, and many other large metropolitan areas also completely lack centers of influence.

God calls laypeople, church leadership, pastors, conference and union administrators, those with great financial means and those who know how to give sacrificially, those with the passion for praying, and willing people with gifts and skills of every variety to revive this work.

What will you do?

Let this great need stir your heart. Answer God’s call with a “Yes! Here I am, Lord; send me.” Be part of the miracles and blessings.

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- 1 The Pulse Café, located in Hadley, Massachusetts.
- 2 Heidi’s Health Kitchen team: *from left*, Helen Miller, Heidi Tompkins, and Ivan Raj.
- 3 Peggy Schaffler, owner of Country Life Restaurant in Keene, New Hampshire.
- 4 The St. Juste family in their Eden Life Market and Café in Pleasant Valley, New York.
- 5 Vibrant raw flatbread pizza served at Farm Fresh Café in Brunswick, Maine.
- 6 Michael and Sonya Tardif operate the Taste of Eden Café in Norway, Maine.
- 7 Hulando Shaw’s vegan curry and rice are served at Real Veggie Café in Island Park, New York.

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This article has been excerpted from the September 2019 issue of the Atlantic Union *Gleaner*.



With Your Basket *and* My Basket



Sarah Ryan is the marketing assistant for Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) New Zealand.

Arrived safely. It's cold!" This is the first message I sent my family when my plane landed in Cusco, Peru. My friend Moala and I had just flown from New Zealand to participate in an ADRA Connections adventure. It was winter here, and at the altitude of 11,000 feet, Cusco felt freezing!

Outside the airport, Moala and I boarded a bus with a large group of volunteers whom we'd be camping and working alongside for two weeks. More than 70 of us had traveled from around the globe to build new classrooms for an elementary school in a mountain community.

Our bus wound its way through the Andes Mountains until it reached Camp Chuquicahuana. The camp, run by ADRA Peru, serves as a hub for a variety of humanitarian projects in the area. When we arrived, Moala and I were delighted to be given soft alpaca sweaters to keep us warm on chilly nights.

Morning came all too early for us weary, jetlagged travelers, but at six-thirty sharp, we enjoyed an inspiring worship time followed by a hearty breakfast. Then we boarded the bus to travel to the job site.

When we arrived, we met a team of local men who would be working alongside us and guiding us through the construction process. We put on hard hats, protective glasses, and work gloves and joined them in digging, mixing cement, and carting water and other materials. By the end of the first week, we were comparing blisters as badges of honor for our labor.

The work was tiring, but the excitement of being in a new place and knowing that we were making it possible for more children to get an education and have better opportunities in the future made each day meaningful and rewarding.

One of the workers of the local crew was Andreas. He told me that he had four children who had graduated from the school and one, named Susana, who was still attending. He had no professional training and needed to work multiple jobs to provide for his family.



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Being able to work on the school was special for Andreas. He shared that while the hours were long and the work was draining, it was worth it all knowing that his daughter's life will be better because she has an education.

Susana is 10 years old and enjoys playing with her friends. I had the opportunity to sit beside her in her classroom and listen to her read. "I am a very fast runner," she told me, "and my favorite subject is communications." Susana is very proud of her father, who is helping to improve her school.

For Susana, the new classrooms mean that she and her friends will be able to learn together. She believes that if she studies hard, she will be able to fulfill her dream of becoming a police officer. "That way, I'll be able to keep my community safe," she told me.

When I returned home from Peru, I told my family all about my adventures. I shared with them about the warmth I felt being in the room with Susana and Andreas and learning the ways they wanted to serve those around them.

This was a life-changing trip for my friends and me. As we spent time together in service and developed a deeper connection with the community, we were reminded of our call to bring what we have together and use it to serve others with love.

Andreas and Susana were examples of what happens when we look beyond ourselves. Andreas continues to serve his family, and Susana continues her education in hopes of one day serving her community.

There is a Maori proverb in New Zealand, "Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi," which means, "With your basket and my basket, the people will thrive." When we bring what we each have and use it together, we truly can make the world a better place.

- 1 Sarah (left) at the worksite with Kimberly McNeilus and Moala Wolgramm.
- 2 Volunteers making cement to lay the foundation for the new classrooms.
- 3 Susana and her father, Andreas, walking to school.
- 4 Volunteers meeting teachers, parents, and community members.
- 5 Two of the classrooms nearly finished!



The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is the global humanitarian organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through an international network, ADRA delivers relief and development assistance to individuals in more than 118 countries—regardless of their ethnicity, political affiliation, or religious association.

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Pohnpei SDA Acro Fins, the first and only gymnastics team on the island of Pohnpei.



Kissing Ground Zero Goodbye

A nursing major at Southern Adventist University, **Cameron Hodges** served as a volunteer fourth-grade teacher and high school gymnastics coach at Pohnpei Seventh-day Adventist Mission School.

From the second I arrived on the island of Pohnpei to teach, I knew that one of my top goals was to start a gymnastics team. I was the new guy arriving halfway through the school year, so I was a little shy about pushing my idea. I thought the faculty might think it wasn't worth forming a team just to dissolve it at the end of the semester when I went home.

However, a month into my mission experience, the principal called my friend Johnathon and me into his office. He told us that he had met a girl on a plane earlier that week who said she knew us. She had mentioned that we had been members of the Gym-Masters, a gymnastics team at Southern Adventist University. "Would you guys be willing to

start a team here?" he asked.

Johnathon and I exchanged glances. "No problem!" we replied.

Actually, there was a problem. We were starting from ground zero with these kids. They knew absolutely nothing about gymnastics, we had no gymnastics equipment, and we had only a few weeks to teach them a variety of difficult skills.

We set a date for tryouts and plastered promotional flyers around campus to encourage interest in the event. We were afraid no one would come, so we were thrilled when more than 30 kids showed up! Soon we had a team and a name: the Pohnpei SDA Acro Fins.

Johnathon and I started every practice session with a short worship thought and prayer. We led out in the first couple of worships, but after a week, we had the captains take over. Eventually, everyone was taking their turn. It was amazing to see the high-school students leading each other in worship, sharing a little bit of what Jesus meant to them.

The gymnastics skills we were teaching the students required a lot of teamwork, so we decided to take them on a camping trip designed to improve their team spirit. Each day we gave them obstacles that they could overcome only by working together.

One Friday evening, we asked them to share what they had learned from gymnastics so far. Their answers varied from “It taught me that there is more to life than video games” to “It’s shown me that with hard work, anything is possible.” Our favorite response was, “It showed me that there is more than one way to experience God.”

Six weeks after tryouts, the team started putting together a routine that included several college-level moves. At the end of the school year, they did an excellent job performing the routine. They were so excited with the results of their hard work that they begged us to let them perform again. We talked with the principal and arranged



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two more performances. I've never seen them so excited as when we told them the news.

Both performances went great, and Johnathon and I could not have been prouder. The students' parents were proud of them too, and they thanked us for engaging their children in a healthy, positive activity.

Now that Johnathon and I are back in the United States and in school, it brings us great joy to know that the school in Pohnpei continues to have a gymnastics team. God took a goal of ours and made it a reality. But more importantly, he took us from ground zero to flying high for the glory of His name!



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