Do we still hear it, or have we become deafened by the noise of our own busyness?
When the Family Splits

I appreciate your publishing William Johnsson’s “When the Family Splits” (November NAD Edition) so soon after this sad occurrence. I felt the article was both kind and straightforward, as well as informative. One question: What part, if any, did this congregation’s “innovative” worship style have?

—Betti Knickerbocker
Laurel, Maryland

Worship style was not an issue in the church’s separation from the conference.—Editors.

Douglas Devnich
Orlando, Florida

I have no problem with the traditional way marks of Adventism that Johnsson mentions. But if these are the only definition of Adventism, then we really are in trouble. At Damascus Road Community church their core doctrine is Christ and Him crucified. Where did they find such heresy?

—Nell and Marvin Griffin
Via E-Mail

Looking for more letters on this subject throughout the month.—Editors.

On the Internet

Congratulations to James Arkusinski on his highly informative article regarding Adventist ministries on the Internet (“Net Notes,”
November NAD Edition).
I wish somehow there had been space in that article to inform Seventh-day Adventist churches, schools, conference institutions, and supporting ministries that they can publish on the Internet by using the services of TAGnet. So far there are more than 400 organizations with accounts on TAGnet, from dozens of countries, publishing in many languages. Each week TAGnet is visited by approximately 10,000 people from an average of 80 countries worldwide.
Site usage is increasing about 100 percent every couple months. The more the merrier. You-all come! http://www.tagnet.org

—Sean Carney
President, TAGNET

Praise and Worship (cont.)
The special issue on praise and worship (Oct. 30) had some excellent articles, especially “Set Free to Worship,” by Dale Martin and Richard O’Fill.
Martin and O’Fill mention the calls for the church to be more “accepting.” This needs further discussion. It appears there is much confusion in our church over unconditional love and unconditional acceptance. God’s attitude toward each person is that of unconditional love. And when a sinner comes to Him in repentance, He shows unconditional acceptance. However, if that sinner persists in sin, God’s acceptance ceases (see Deut. 28).

There are times when God’s church has to say “That kind of behavior is not acceptable.”

—Donald E. Casebolt
Via E-mail

“Set Free to Worship” is a major positive contribution to the Adventist Church. It could well have been the most important article for sincere Adventists who do not appreciate the divisive elements foisting their celebration-type service and inappropriate music on possibly the majority.

We should no longer hear supporters of inappropriate music justify its use by referring to Martin Luther’s music, as that contention has been effectively and authoritatively debunked.

—Gerald M. Freeman
Via E-mail

Three points regarding this article:
1. It’s always easy to criticize something if the critic has no model to recommend that, in turn, can be critiqued. Martin and O’Fill would have been so much more credible if they had offered a model of worship and music that meets the criteria they used against contemporary worship. By not doing this, they imply that a model doesn’t exist or that they are afraid to suggest one for fear that it might be criticized.

2. I always cringe at the use of extreme examples. Where has anyone heard “Pray Around the Clock Rock” sung in any setting that even gets close to Willow Creek, let alone an Adventist church?

3. The idea that a piece of music must be “perfectly balanced” with praise, correction, and teaching cuts both ways. Yes, much of the praise music is primarily “praise.” Its goal is to heighten praise; the correction and teaching comes in the preaching of the Word that follows. By comparison, the hymns “Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart” and “Come, Thou Almighty King” do little more than praise also. Should we consider these unusable because they aren’t “balanced”?

—Terry Pooler, Pastor
Apopka, Florida

Letters Policy
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“Behold, I come quickly . . .”

Our mission is to uplift Jesus Christ through stories of His matchless love, news of His present workings, help for knowing Him better, and hope in His soon return.

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Whatever hoped-for gift we did or didn’t receive at Christmas, God now puts in your hands and mine something infinitely more precious—another year of life. As I step into 1998 I want to light seven candles each day.

1. **Live in grace.** Grace is measureless, indescribable, wonderful. Grace is God loving us, dying for us, planning a bright future for us.

   To live in grace is to live with the assurance that I am loved and accepted, that I can trust all that I am and would be into the hands of a compassionate Father. It is to be set free from the vaunting ego, the soaring self that compares, envies, boasts, and tramples; it is to see the world tinged with wonder and beauty. It is to know that whatever arrows of heartache and pain life flings at me, the odds are stacked in my favor, because God will work in all that happens for a good end.

2. **Live responsibly.** “You . . . were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love,” counsels the apostle Paul (Gal. 5:13, NIV). Some Adventists today still don’t get it. In the name of grace they flaunt their rejection of our time-honored values, make fun of our heritage, and so on.

   This isn’t freedom in Christ—it’s spiritual adolescence. All that God gives is for our good. The counsels of Ellen White, like the teachings of the Word, bring us health and happiness as we practice them. As followers of Jesus, we wear a yoke—His yoke. But it is easy and light, and we bear it gladly (Matt. 11:29, 30).

3. **Live in love.** Life, after all, is really the chance of the prize of learning love, as the poet said. God is love, and the person who loves dwells in God and God in them (1 John 4:16).

   Jesus sets us free to love. Because He assures us of His acceptance, we can feel positive about ourselves and appreciate others. We can strip off the masks we wear in an effort to fool others—and ourselves. We can accept and value others; we can commend and appreciate them; we can overlook their flaws and focus on their good qualities; we can treat them as God has treated us.

4. **Live with purpose.** As sons and daughters of the King, we can walk with a spring in our step and a lilt in our voice. No one can put us down when the only One who matters claims us as His own.

   To us as Seventh-day Adventist Christians He has given a knowledge of the times and a sense of mission. There is a heaven to be won and a hell to be shunned; we have a mission to the world—to every kindred, nation, tongue, and people (Rev. 14:6, 7). Time is short; the judgment has set; Jesus is coming. Every moment vibrates with meaning, with intensity. What a time to be alive!

5. **Live in joy.** God has put His Spirit in our hearts, and that Presence overflows in joy. Joy is a song at midnight; joy is a fountain; joy is music in the soul. “No one will take away your joy,” said Jesus (John 16:22, NIV). “Jesus is a wellspring of joy,” wrote Ellen White (Messages to Young People, p. 38).

6. **Live in hope.** Our very name—Adventist—shouts it out: Jesus is coming again. We have this hope, the hope that God is about to bring an end to sin and suffering; crime and violence; poverty and pain; starving, potbellied babies with staring eyes; murder and rape; corruption and injustice. God is about to bring in His new world order. Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, who made this world and redeemed it, is coming again.

   He is coming for us, coming to take us home, coming because He loves us, wants us to be with Him forever. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

7. **Live in the Word.** In the last days God will have a people who live by the Scriptures, who take only what the Bible says as their rule of life (The Great Controversy, p. 595). Will I be one of them?

   At this dawning of 1998, my earnest prayer for the Advent people is: **Lord, bring us back to Your Word. Break our addiction to television and movies and the Internet. Make us a people of the Book once again. May we feed on it daily. May we delight in its counsels. And may we walk in its light. In Jesus’ name, amen.**
All the talk about the year 2000 and the new millennium has gotten me thinking about longer time spans and truly significant people and events.

Life magazine recently published a special double issue on the millennium. A team of journalists and historians picked the 100 greatest events and the 100 most influential people of the past 1,000 years. In my opinion they made a few mistakes. Their perspective doesn’t allow consideration of what will be significant a million years from now.

For example, the editors picked the printing of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455 as the most important event in the millennium. Not a bad choice, though they missed the reason for the event’s significance. They said the importance was related to development of printing with movable type and the dramatic increase in the availability of readily accessible reading material. They missed the importance of the fact that it was the first time that the Bible was made available to everyone. No longer were clergy the sole readers—and interpreters—of Scripture. All who could read could study the Scriptures for themselves. They could read for themselves what Jesus said. They could read for themselves Paul’s descriptions of the plan of salvation. They could resonate with David’s words, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10, NIV).

The invention of Coca-Cola made the list (number 82), as did the beginning of rock and roll (99). But interestingly, the editors of Life could find only two other religious events that they thought merited the top 100: Martin Luther’s nailing of the 95 theses on the door of his church in Wittenberg (3), and the rise of Pentecostalism (68). They missed the great divide in time that occurred in 1844, when preparation for judgment ended and judgment began.

They also missed some important people. Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan got mentioned. They got Napoleon and Hitler. They even found Martin Luther, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

But they missed William Miller and Ellen White. They didn’t recognize the importance of Rachel Oakes Preston and Joseph Bates. Adventist missionaries such as Fernando Stahl in South America and Georgia Burrus Burgess in India went unrecognized.

These Adventist pioneers are at least as important to the people and events of the past thousand years as are Marx and Lenin. These Adventists—and many more like them—have had an eternal impact on the history of humankind.

The truly significant events in this world are those that lead people to Jesus Christ. The publication of The Desire of Ages, by Ellen White, is more significant than the publication of The Wealth of Nations, by Adam Smith (number 74 on the list of people). The broadcasting of satellite evangelistic events is more significant than humans landing on the moon (number 33 on the list of significant events).

Likewise, the people who matter this millennium are those who proclaim Christ’s coming. Faithful Adventist members—missionaries, teachers, skilled and unskilled laborers, professionals, and students—will be honored when Christ’s eternal kingdom is established.

Phineas T. Barnum made the list (81) because he claimed there was a sucker born every minute. Countless Adventists are significant because they are helping to bring someone to Christ every minute. (Actually, the Adventist Church is baptizing, on average, approximately three people every minute.) Thomas Edison made the list as the most important person of the millennium because he invented the light bulb. Uncounted Adventists will make heaven’s list because they are bringing the Light of the world to millions of people every year.

I urge you to take the long-range view. Think about the impact of your actions a million years from now. Whether or not you make any magazine’s list of influential people, if you reflect Christ’s character you’ve already made a difference that will last throughout eternity.

Let that guide your year.

Alfred C. McClure is president of the 850,000-member Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.
GIVE & TAKE

ADVENTIST QUOTES

“If you think that was good, you should hear him on the chain saw!”

—World church president Robert Folkenberg, at the Maritime Conference camp meeting, after his administrative assistant, Gerry Karst, played a hymn on a saw.

“There should be an absolute upper limit of 144,000 for the total membership of all church-related committees in our denomination.”

—Philip Law, Union City, California

“Dear Jesus, please help me clean my room. I’ll clean half and You can clean half.”

—an entry in the prayer journal of the first-grade daughter of Linda Small, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

“Let’s fold our heads.”

—a mother of four young children, just before leading in prayer at a Colorado Sabbath school

ADVENTIST LIFE

The only way to have personal devotions was to include my toddler son, Donnie. I held him on my lap as I read aloud from Leviticus. I wondered what he would get out of Leviticus, but he sat wide-eyed as long as I continued to read.

That week in Sabbath school, when it was time for the offering, Donnie amused all of us by reaching into the waistband of his diaper (the wallet of the younger set) and pulling out several soggy Cheerios to drop in the basket.

Later I realized that my early-morning devotion that day had been about cereal offerings. Donnie had brought a cereal offering to the Lord!

—Sally Dillon, Timberville, Virginia

One Sabbath dinner I placed a plate of food before my 3-year-old daughter, Kaitlyn, and sat down to say the blessing. When Kaitlyn saw what was placed before her, she earnestly asked, “Why don’t you make me pulse so I can grow stronger and stronger?”

I assured her that this was pulse. She then brightened up and ate her rice casserole with gusto!

—Becky Wolfe, Porterville, California

During church one Sabbath my 8-year-old, Matthew, pulled out his box of Fuzzy Felt and put together a beautiful picture. Showing it to me, he whispered, “See, Mom, here’s Jesus praying and the disciples sleeping. It’s Jesus at the Olive Garden.”

—Iris Shull, Hagerstown, Maryland

Attention, Give & Take contributors: We love “Adventist Life” anecdotes about kids and grandkids. But we also need anecdotes from the world of adults. (Come on—give adults fair representation.) Send submissions to the Give & Take address below.

SPECIAL DAY AND SPECIAL GUEST

QUITE A SIGHT: The Jordan River it wasn’t, but John the Baptist (Dick Duerksen) attended a Sligo church baptism held at Antietam Creek in Maryland last June. It’s a scene that must look especially pleasant to our northern readers about now. Photo by Darrell Milam.

WE NEED YOU

Send Give & Take submissions to . . . Give & Take, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Fax: 301-680-6638; E-mail: 74532.2564@CompuServe.com. Please include phone number. Submissions will not be returned.
Have you noticed that often in North America, religion, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder? Take the woman in Atlanta who claims she saw the face of Jesus in a forkful of spaghetti on a Pizza Hut billboard. Or the man from Texas who reckons he saw an image of the virgin Mary on the bathroom floor of a shower stall at the back of an auto parts shop.

Of course, neither of these caused quite the stir that Christ's image in a flour tortilla did when spotted by a man in New Mexico. Many would put it down to serendipitous frypan burns, but not the devoted. For months busloads of tourists descended on the small town to get a glimpse of the "holy tortilla."

These are bizarre examples of a phenomenon that seems to be sweeping the continent concurrently with the New Age movement and a fascination with the supernatural. This search for a supernatural experience appears to be one of several indicators that even in this materialistic, humanistic, secularistic age, humankind has and recognizes powerful religious needs.

Add to this the growing strength of evangelical churches—churches that have not become secularized—and the explosive growth of cults during a time when religious institutions are in a state of decline, as well as the demonstrated favorable attitude of young people toward their spiritual needs (though they seem to be skeptical of institutional religion), and one begins to get the picture of a society that is confused and groping.

In the words of Emil Brunner: “The church nowadays speaks not chiefly to Christians, as it did in the Middle Ages and at the time of the Reformation and even 100 years ago; it must speak primarily to heathens.”

Obstacles or Opportunities?

It is said that the nonchurched population of America would be equivalent to the eleventh-largest nation in the world—larger than any nation in Europe, three times the population of Canada, and more than double the population of California.

Yet our secular age may present some very interesting opportunities. For one thing, it has been demonstrated that without God people are lonely, insecure, and disoriented. They face problems with solutions that are invalidated as quickly as they are tried. This leads to a great need for fellowship with other people and an awareness that certain needs are not being met.

This was much in evidence a little more than a year ago at the Million Man March and again last fall as nearly a million men gathered on the Mall in Washington, D.C., to seek an experience with God and a transformed life. People are hurting. They need help in the midst of the pain of human existence. Somehow we must show them how the Adventist Christian and the Adventist message meet those needs.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have a clear mission from God: to make Him known. Although this mission is sometimes muddled and obscured, it remains the same. And it awaits discovery—or rediscovery—by those charged with the...
leadership of God's people. We have a special responsibility to keep that mission clear and focused.

Researcher George Barna says, “How ironic that during this period of swelling need for the proclamation of the gospel message and the healing powers of the church, the ranks of the messengers have dissipated to anemic proportions.”

He goes on to say, “Many of the people whom Christ is counting on to spread the light of salvation throughout a spiritually darkened nation have . . . become influenced agents— influenced by the very society that they have been called to transform with the love of Christ.”

Would to God that this were not true of Seventh-day Adventists. But it seems clear that only a small proportion of the church sees its mission as something that relates to them—for only a small percentage of our membership is involved in any type of meaningful outreach.

While fellowship is important, the purpose of the church is not just to fraternize with the righteous, but to call lost sinners to repentance. That is the ministry of the church. We aren’t saved just to experience the joy of Jesus in our hearts. We aren’t saved just to grow toward spiritual maturity. We’re saved to proclaim the message of a living, loving Lord to a dying world.

Evangelism, in its truest sense, is not a duty to be added, a program to adopt, a technique to learn. It’s not a “must,” a “should do,” or a “will do.” Rather, it’s something we are unable not to do. For before evangelism can truly be successful it must be a consuming passion. And we are called individually and as a church to have hearts that beat with a passion for souls.

Some have observed, “Evangelism never seemed to be an ‘issue’ in the New Testament . . . Evangelism happened. It issued effortlessly from the community of believers as light from the sun. It was spontaneous, continuous, and contagious.”

Isn’t that what was written about the apostle Paul in Acts 18:5? “Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying . . . that Jesus was the Christ” (NIV). In other words, the apostle was compelled to testify about Jesus by the sheer pressure of the Holy Spirit upon his soul. This is the man who cried, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Of the 300 million people who live in this division, there are some 299 million who are not part of us. And the compelling fact is that the majority of them have no concept of a loving God, no idea of the issues of the great controversy, and no inkling of the events about to break upon our world.

As we see men and women beaten by sin and bound by Satan, the love of Jesus compels us. We are mandated by Jesus Christ Himself to present “this gospel of the kingdom” in the most alluring manner we know how.

How are we doing? Better? Better than what? Better than we were doing?

One way in which we are doing better is in how the members and leaders of this church are beginning to feel about evangelism. It’s no longer fashionable in most Adventist circles to make light of soul winning. When you have a part in the process by which God brings a man or woman to faith in His Son, you aren’t apt to make fun of that process.

I’m delighted to see the North American church developing a “culture of evangelism,” whereby it becomes central to the activities of the church at every level, in every institution.

I’m amazed and thrilled with the dramatic response of the church to the global evangelistic approach through satellite technology. Never in our history have we seen anything like the wholesale involvement of the North American church (not to mention how other parts of the world have been inspired, blessed, and revived through these efforts). The year 1996 saw the greatest number of baptisms ever in the North American Division, and our sense of mission has been renewed.

Our Mission to the Masses

Of immense importance to the advance of mission in North America
today is a reflection on the role of the city—or urbanization—in the plan of salvation. Our traditional attitude toward cities has perhaps prevented us from giving a meaningful response to the opportunities presented by this huge challenge.

North America’s large cities are grossly underrepresented in our membership figures. It seems that the large cities are generally not responsive to evangelism. However, if we are to reach the unreached people groups in North America, we must develop strategies for evangelistic beachheads in these formidable bastions of secularism. After all, the challenge of the gospel is that it be taken to the challenge of the gospel is that we must be able to reach the unchurched people groups in North America. The American Statistical Association gives the following figures: In the 20 largest metropolitan areas in North America, one third of the total population of our division. Ninety million people inhabit these metropolitan areas in North America contain this majority population.

The 20 largest metropolitan areas in North America contain one third of the total population of our division. Ninety million people inhabit these metropolitan areas, of which 40 million are completely unchurched and another 20 million are inactive dropouts from church. The secular influence is pervasive, and there are millions of adherents to the great non-Christian religions—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.

In the past decade the number of Adventists in the 20 largest cities in North America has increased by more than 100,000. Nearly 1,000 churches are located in these cities (out of a total of nearly 4,800 churches).

A closer look, however, reveals a very different picture. Right here in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area we have 24,000 members and 53 churches. But when we look at the area as a mission field instead of as an institutional structure, we find that six of those 53 churches are all in the same neighborhood. So 224 of the 272 neighborhoods in this metropolitan area have no Seventh-day Adventist presence. Seventy neighborhoods, averaging 10,000 residents, don’t have even one Adventist family. So more than a half million people live in communities in which they will never rub shoulders with an Adventist neighbor.

More than 2 million live in communities in which there is no organized Adventist outreach. That’s in just one city, and a city with a better than average Adventist presence.

The largest unreached people group in North America consists of the Anglo residents in our largest cities. Most of our local churches in these cities are congregations made up primarily of ethnic minorities. We praise the Lord for the evangelistic success and growth of these churches, but we mustn’t leave undone the mission to the majority population.

The majority in each of these cities is made up of White, or Anglo, people. For example, out of 7 million New Yorkers, more than 4 million are White, non-Hispanic people. The ratio of Adventists to non-Adventists in this people group is one to 1,131—much higher than that for most of the overseas mission fields.

Notice Ellen White’s comment, written in 1905: “We stand rebuked by God because the large cities right within our sight are unworked and unwarned. . . . We have done none too much for foreign fields, but we have done comparatively nothing for the great cities right beside our own doors” (Evangelism, pp. 401, 402). It’s time we took seriously this inspired counsel.

I can’t drive through or fly over New York City—this “capital of the world,” with its enormous influence on people around the globe—a city with millions and millions of people who have never heard this last-day message, without wondering, How can we make a difference, Lord? What can we do to penetrate the barriers to proclaim Your message to a dying world?

**Planting Seeds**

If we’re going to be serious about growing and making Christ known, there’s no more effective way to do it than to plant new churches. Church growth guru Peter Wagner says, “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting churches.”

But we don’t have to turn to church growth gurus to learn that. Ellen White used these strong words: “Those who are the chosen of God are required to multiply churches wherever they may be successful in bringing souls to the knowledge of the truth” (Testimonies to Ministers, p. 199; italics supplied).

Just a little more than a year ago we conducted the first-ever church planting summit in North America—Seeds ’96. It was a beginning, a watershed, a stake in the ground. We challenged pastors and laity present to change the way we think about “church” in North America. We suggested that there are thousands of places where there needs to be a Seventh-day Adventist church. We also suggested that it would be pleasing to God if our 4,800 churches in the North American Division became at least 5,000 churches by the end of the decade—5,000 by 2000. (That’s between three and four new churches per conference. We may have individual congregations that could plant that many.)

The litmus test of a church’s value system is where it spends its money. The average well-established church in North America spends 5 percent of its budget for evangelism, but 30 percent of its budget for buildings and maintenance. That’s why, if your church is more than 25 years old, you can expect

**We will offend God and do the lost no favor if we dilute our commitment to the clear teachings of Scripture.**
to have about one new convert each year for every 100 members.

But if your church is less than 5 years old, you can expect one convert for every 20 members. Researcher Roger Dudley tells us that “new Adventist churches grow at 10 times the rate of established churches.” An interesting study in the Mid-America Union revealed that 70 percent of their baptisms occur in churches planted within the past 15 years.

Seeds ’97 recently concluded, and there were more than 400 individuals in attendance. Since Seeds ’96, 136 new congregations have been organized in North America. That’s an average of a little more than two per conference.

A growing number of members, pastors, and administrators recognize that if we are going to accomplish our mission in North America, we must catch the vision of going beyond the bounds of our presently established churches and switch from adding to multiplying churches.

Cultivating Our Distinctives

I greatly appreciate the tools and techniques outlined by church planting consultants. And while we share a common concern for the lost and a passion for leading them to Christ, we must be true to our calling as a movement and our understanding of God’s mission for this people—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Our message and mission cannot be reduced to a Willow Creek or some other congregational model.

I want to say again as I said last year—we are not here to accommodate our theology to a sick culture. We aren’t talking about making concessions to the clear teachings of Scripture so that we can somehow become more appealing and less unique. “Church planting” and “Seeds ’97” are not new expressions for theological compromise. From the birth of this movement we locked onto Scripture as the North Star of our beliefs, and we well offend God and do the lost no favor if we dilute that commitment.

Our ecclesiology grows out of our understanding of God’s call. Christ’s marching orders were to be His witnesses, first in Jerusalem, next in Judea, then in neighboring Samaria, and finally to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Christ’s commission is global.

While we unquestionably have a special responsibility for our own communities, this is a world movement. And our vision needs to be shaped by our worldview. It must also be shaped and driven by the additional vision of what Adventist church planting and

“New Adventist churches grow at 10 times the rate of established churches.”

Adventist congregations can and should look like.

Certainly it’s possible to attract a crowd and lull people into a false sense of security by offering watered-down theology, non-Adventist sermons, and antiorganizational rhetoric, but that is inconsistent with what we believe God has called us to do.

While we need to learn about techniques and methods, our greatest need is not so much to learn something, but to become something—and then to do something.

Actions Speak

I’m interested in the observations of George Barna, founder and president of a religious market research company and author of numerous books on church growth. In his book Evangelism That Works he confesses that he spent nearly two years and tens of thousands of dollars researching evangelism, hoping to alert church leaders to the waves of the future and to provide some new strategies and novel concepts for outreach.

But he said that many days and hundreds of pages later, the bottom line was not what he expected. Barna confessed that he had been snared by one of the seductive but erroneous notions promoted by our culture: “To be on the cutting edge, something has to be newer, flashier, more complex.” Also erroneous, he says, is the belief that “the future will be dominated by those people who are the most innovative. To be the best, they will have to be the most unusual, the most creative, the most energetic, the biggest risk-takers.”

The truth, he says, is that new models of evangelism are unnecessary. “We only need to understand the theology, the heart, and the passion of Jesus Christ as exemplified for us in His ministry. We must be sensitive to the people we are called to reach, true to the principles given to us in Scripture and committed to reaching people with the love of Christ through personal commitment and persistence.”

Barna asserts, “Evangelism is effective when people do whatever is necessary to reach the unreached, rather than maintain the traditions and accept outdated assumptions for the sake of continuity. Effective evangelism,” Barna contends, and I agree, “is not about programs, methods, or techniques. It is about people who love Christ, about loving other people in the name of Christ.”

“As it turns out,” Barna concludes, “Nike uses a promotional slogan that should be the church’s evangelistic slogan: Just do it!”

Alfred C. McClure is president of the 850,000-member Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. This article is adapted from an address given to the delegates of the year-end meetings of the North American Division, held last October in Silver Spring, Maryland.
For years I had concealed the effects that drugs and alcohol were having on my life.

BY ROGER BELCOURT

I AWOKE IN AN INTENSIVE-CARE UNIT ON JULY 21, 1988, at an Air Force hospital in southern California. It was four days past my last remembrance, and I was unsure exactly how I’d gotten there. After a short period of contemplation I realized that I had overdosed on prescription drugs. It was not the type of overdose that occurs when one attempts to take one’s life; I had accidentally overdosed. I wondered how I, an Air Force major and physician, had ended up in such a position. My superiors would not take this lightly. I was in deep trouble.

I had no desire to be an alcoholic when I was growing up in Reno, Nevada. I went through the usual fantasies of being a major league baseball player, police officer, rocket scientist, etc. In part because of my parents’ influence—my father was a physician and my mother a nurse—I decided to pursue a career in medicine. I was raised in a nominally religious home, the eldest of four children. My early years were characterized by a God-given gift for academic pursuits that coexisted with a tremendous insecurity about my personal worth. I was plagued with the idea of never being good enough.

At the age of 14 I began experimenting with smoking, alcohol, and street drugs. These substances provided a fellowship with my peers that I had felt incapable of achieving by any other means. When I used drugs, I was as good as anyone, and my insecurities seemed to vanish. Early on, however, I began to experience difficulties with alcohol. I frequently suffered from blackouts and would often have to reconstruct the events of the previous evening with the help of my friends. This led to some frequently embarrassing revelations, which I shrugged off with the notion that the next time this would not happen, or I would control it better.

My early college years were characterized by ever-increasing alcohol and street drug use. After a period of particularly heavy drinking at age 21, I went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, where I heard them speak of a God who could solve their problems. Having been raised in the school of science and evolution, I quickly rejected this notion. On the basis of the knowledge obtained in this meeting, I did not drink for a period of four months. This period of abstinence convinced me that I had no difficulties with alcohol. I was still in control.

In the fall of 1978 I was accepted to medical school. My drinking and drug use at this time became more episodic, as there were times when some discipline was required to grasp the volume of material that is presented to medical students. However, as my studies progressed, my drinking became more frequent, with the ingestion of larger and larger amounts. After a school party during my sophomore year, I was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol.

My desire for control led me to marry a woman who I, at some level, hoped would curtail my alcohol and drug use. After medical school I entered a residency in family practice in northern California. Again the demands of internship and residency held back my alcohol and drug use for a time. Whenever I
used any mood-altering substance, I could either have a relatively good time or end up blacked out, sick, and hungover. I just never knew what was going to happen when I began to use chemicals. Control was lost.

After my internship I received my second driving-under-the-influence arrest. It came on the heels of separation from my wife. I had driven over a treacherous mountain pass in a blackout and awakened in a jail two hours from my starting point, not knowing the path I had taken. My whirlwind marriage ended in divorce.

Knowing that this conviction would bring me to the attention of the medical licensing boards, I entered an alcohol treatment center for a month. Here I heard that same talk about God. Now fearful of losing my medical license, I reasoned that it was time to start seeking a relationship with God, whether I understood Him intellectually or not. This was the basis of my initial spiritual experience—running to God because I was alone, frightened, and unsure of the future. As I began to cultivate this relationship with my Creator, I found a certain peace that I had never previously known. A year and a half passed without any drug or alcohol use. I began to feel that I had some control over my life again.

In my second year of residency I met a beautiful obstetrical nurse. Within a short time we were engaged. I was still smoking at the time, and she was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I had no preference for any particular religious belief, but I began attending church with her. I was intellectually intrigued by many of the church doctrines and began to study them on this level. We married on February 3, 1985. Three months later a Sacramento pastor held an altar call for the “one person that he knew was still out there.” I felt myself launched to the front of the sanctuary, beginning to prepare for baptism. I was baptized at the end of my third year of residency. The decades of prayer by my dear born-again mother were answered.

I was obligated for three years to the United States Air Force (the service had generously paid for my medical education) and was stationed at a southern tier base. We transferred our church membership to the local Adventist church, and almost immediately I accepted an appointment for church office. I was a Christian babe who should have been drinking the pure milk of the gospel. Pride allowed me to accept a position I was spiritually unqualified for, and I began “spitting up” some of that milk. Insidiously I began to discontinue communion with God. Looking good became more important than spiritual relationship. Soon I began experimenting with prescription drugs. In no time at all I was right back to where I was before treatment.

In 1987 my wife found me incoherent one evening when she returned from work, and I went through another alcohol treatment center, courtesy of the Air Force. The next 11 months were some of the most miserable that I ever experienced. Although I went through the motions and tried to portray the facade that I was in control and doing well, I was having exceptional difficulty surrendering myself to God.

I remained in this “white knuckle” state of mind until July 1988, when I was assigned to a large military exercise in southern California. I was in charge of a portable pharmacy and vaguely remember taking that “one” Valium tablet that started the chain of events that landed me in the intensive-care unit, overdosed.

My despair was indescribable. Everything important to me—my marriage, my 2-year-old daughter, my medical license, my Air Force career, my relationship with God—was threatened or gone. I was unsure if my physical freedom would remain, as the Air Force could seek punishment.

I was discharged from the intensive-care unit and placed in a locked psychiatric ward, where I could tell that the technicians taking care of me and the investigators questioning me were thoroughly disgusted by my actions, as was I. I wept bitterly for several days.

In my despair I reached into the bedside stand and pulled out a Bible. It opened to Psalm 51, not because I was aware of it, but rather because I was led to it. There I read, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (verse 1).

This was a balm to my soul. I realized that my separation from God had nothing to do with Him, but with me. He beckoned me to return to Him according to His loving-kindness and...
not my works or goodness. As a matter of fact, my best efforts had gotten me into the mess in which I now found myself. I began to feel streams of hope filtering into my existence. “A broken... heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (verse 17). There was much difficulty to come, but I knew at that moment that God was with me.

I returned to my Air Force home base, where my wife and I began a two-year separation. She had been deceived and hurt badly by my dishonest and manipulative behavior. I waited to see how the Air Force would deal with the problems I had caused them. They proceeded with legal action, which meant a court-martial. The wheels of government turn painfully slow, and during this time I immersed myself in activities nurturing my spiritual growth. A loving God and a 12-Step sponsor pulled me through this difficult period.

The court-martial date was set for February 1989, two days before my fourth wedding anniversary. Since I was pleading guilty, there was only a sentencing hearing. After hearing my testimony, the panel of Air Force officers returned with a three-part verdict: dismissal from the service (which is the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge), forfeiture of all pay and benefits, and a year’s incarceration in the United States Disciplinary Barracks at Leavenworth, Kansas.

I had anticipated the first two parts of the sentence. But the third part—imprisonment—caught me completely by surprise. My initial feeling was anger. I was angry with God for “doing this to me” after I had at last been walking on the right path. Didn’t God know I was finally converted? Couldn’t He see how damaging this would be to my marriage, my family, my career?

Our fourth wedding anniversary found my wife moving to northern California with our daughter, and me being transferred to Leavenworth, Kansas, to begin my prison term. The despair returned as I contemplated a year of my life in military prison, separated from everything I felt I needed.

The interior of Leavenworth prison resembles a dungeon. Along with other newly sentenced military personnel, I spent a month in maximum security. The chasm between my wife and me deepened still further, and we ceased communicating. She became more introspective and began confronting what she later told me was the first real difficulty that she had ever faced in her life. The experience caused her to grow as a Christian, a woman, and a mother. I was not sure I liked this all that much; growth in a spouse can be threatening.

Four months into my sentence I surrendered control of our marriage, leaving it in God’s hands. I realized that all my energies were directed toward holding on to things that I thought I needed and trying to circumvent God’s will with my own. I was now imprisoned, jobless, separated, and not in possession of any of those things I felt I required, but I knew in the depths of my being that I was going to be all right. At last, none of these things mattered to me in the face of my relationship with God.

With absolutely nothing to my name, I experienced the most freedom of my life. God’s grace was sufficient. I purposed to become a man of God, a contributing member of my church family, whether or not they elected to sanction me. Separated or not, I determined to be the best husband and father I could. At the tender age of 34 I began to grow up.

In October 1989 I was released from prison and returned to the same northern California city where my wife lived. We entered counseling together to see if we could find some common ground. After several months of separate living quarters, we moved into the same apartment and attended the same church in Roseville, California. A spiritually active church body accepted us into fellowship and nurtured us into ministry. We found as we studied and ministered to others that the resentment we harbored against each other was miraculously removed.

How great is the gift of God in doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves! Had we not experienced a separation during which we could grow individually, I’m not sure our marriage would have survived. How often we think we know what’s best for us, but really are clueless. God endured our anger, protests, and insubordination while He attempted to draw us to Him. God placed His
loving hand upon our marriage, and ever so gently He sculpted us back into a relationship. The only thing we did was to allow Him to do so.

As far as my profession was concerned, the California Medical Board had been notified of my narcotics conviction and was ready to meet with me when I returned to California. They elected to monitor me with counseling three nights per week and frequent drug screenings. But I still didn’t have a place to work.

An interview with a potential employer was arranged through an old friend. As the interviewer examined my résumé, he noted, “I see you just got out of the Air Force.” I nodded my head. “I was a registered nurse in the Army for 10 years,” he said, “but my last assignment really burned me out. I was a nurse at the military prison at Leavenworth, Kansas.”

I could feel the blood draining from my face while shivers ran up my spine. In a forthright manner I explained in detail my recent past. I felt the presence of angels ministering to me in my time of need. The interview was successful, and it concluded with the statement “If we get an opening, we’ll give you a call.” I thanked him for his time, but it appeared to be the old “Don’t call us; we’ll call you” message.

I returned to my wife’s apartment. It was late afternoon, and the Oakland A’s were playing the San Francisco Giants in the first game of the 1989 World Series. I sat down to watch the game and was shocked, as was everyone, to see this World Series game canceled by the San Francisco earthquake.

The next morning I was awakened by a frantic call from the medical group with whom I had just interviewed. Their chief physician had been in attendance at that ball game, and in the confusion that followed was unable to report for work. Desperately they pleaded for me to come work for them—now.

Thus began a successful professional association of several years. It was a change from my previous medical career into a field I ended up loving. I would never have chosen occupational and preventive medicine had it not been providentially arranged. Out of the most desperate and horrible conditions, God can make some good.

My wife and I have now been married for nearly 13 years (with two off for bad behavior), and I’m the father of a precious 11-year-old girl. My career is successful beyond any of my expectations. Most important, I have the assurance I am a child of God. After the miracles God has performed in my life, one would think that I would cease to have struggles. The Spirit, however, continues to war with the flesh, and the battle is won only by His grace.

Although we are by faith new people after baptism, there still is a battle to be fought. This battle is the laying down of self in favor of accepting God's will into our lives. Even though I went to prison three years after I was baptized, I now know that this was not a failure of my prior experience. Rather it was God’s sculpting hand drawing me into deeper relation with Him, clearly a path I wouldn’t have chosen for myself. However, I realize now that it was probably the only way God could have gotten my attention.

God had called me earlier and in a “kinder, gentler” manner. He then shook a little harder and exhorted me, “Roger, please come to Me now.” Then, although it was not His first choice, He was required to pick up that “cosmic two-by-four” and gently slap me in the head. When this did not work, He got a bigger piece of lumber, until He found a size that worked.

Except for the pain that I caused other people, I would not change a thing. I know now that God grounded me so that one day I could soar with Him forever.

Roger Belcourt and family attend the Seventh-day Adventist church in Reno, Nevada. He practices occupational and preventive medicine and is a consultant to the Nevada State Medical Board for Addicted Physicians. Those who wish to communicate with him regarding drug and alcohol addiction are invited to address E-mail messages to: rbelcourt@powernet.net.
WILDERNESS BACKPACKING IS AN inexplicable human activity. Logically speaking, it is far from clear why a person would voluntarily strap a heavy object onto their back and go trekking over terrain apparently designed for no better purpose than to ravage knee and ankle joints. Nevertheless, backpacking has been one of our family activities since our children were small. Recently it has occurred to me that it has been one of the important formative influences in our lives.

Generations ago nearly everyone experienced the reality of daily life with a greater immediacy than is so now. It is actually still true for many of the earth's inhabitants that if they don't get the crops in, they may starve; or if they don't build an adequate shelter, they may not survive the winter. Those who live in more highly developed regions are largely insulated from these realities. But out on the trail “reality” can still get one’s attention.

Realities

Several years ago, with our toddler daughter on my wife’s back, our weekend supplies on mine, and our four-year-old son clinging expectantly to my hand, we set out with a group of eighth-grade students on a backpacking weekend in Golden Ears Provincial Park, British Columbia, Canada. The weather was unsettled—the usual for southwestern British Columbia.

Shortly after we left the cars on Friday afternoon, it began raining. By the time we reached our intended campsite, the forest was soaked. Attempts at fire-starting proved futile. Tents were pitched in the rain, and for lack of anything better to do, everyone went to bed early.

By 3:00 a.m. many were wet, and sleep had eluded everyone. By 5:00 a.m. we all were sullenly repacking our wet gear in the midst of an unabated downpour. It was more than an hour until daylight, but flashlight beams awash in the storm, we began our slog back down the trail. Hours later, after collapsing into our cars, we ate a breakfast of soggy saltine cracker crumbs, accompanied by the rhythm of high-speed windshield wipers and the hiss of tire treads on flooded pavement.

It was not a typical weekend. There was no one in the forest to take care of unpleasant tasks for us. Mom wasn’t throwing the sleeping bags into the dryer. We couldn’t catch breakfast at McDonald’s. And each person carried their own waterlogged backpack, even though they felt utterly miserable. The surprising thing is not that we all survived, but that the same group of students talked our family into going back-
packing at the same place a year later.

"Reality" was our constant companion that rainy weekend. By reality I mean such things as these: If it doesn’t come out the way you expected, you probably will not die. Life isn’t always fair. Your choices inevitably produce results.

**Choices**

Choices and their results: an essential concept, but not an easy one.

I once was enticed into a spur-of-the-moment weekend in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho. Not having replaced a recently blown-out pair of hiking boots, I quickly grabbed some cheap discount store boots that I had used for gardening, figuring it would be all right. It wasn’t.

I still have exceptional memories of the gurgling waterfall at our Cramer Lake campsite, and of high-altitude starry nights. But my most distinct memory is that of hiking the final five miles back to the car on Sunday with large blisters on both heels, both little toes, the ball of one foot, and the big toe of the other. All attempts at treatment were useless. As I continued to walk, the blisters, one by one, became raw, bloody sores.

One might think that a person could not walk for miles under such conditions, but there was simply nothing else to do. Helicopter rescues are quite rare in cases involving blisters. So, having chosen to wear untested boots on a long trail, I experienced the consequences of my choice.

Such experiences with cause-and-effect relationships have in the past been standard fare for the human race. However, modern parents must be very clear about their task, or their children will figure out ways to sidestep almost all the undesirable. Human nature being what it is, kids will certainly avoid difficulty if they can.

This role can be stressful for parents. It can feel really good to bail a child out of a difficult situation that the child has created. It’s very hard, on the other hand, to watch a child struggling with the results of poor choices. The logical consequences of a child’s choices are usually evident, but parents too often shield them from these consequences. In so doing they withhold painful but valuable lessons that their children need. In effect, they carry their children, rather than letting them learn to walk for themselves.

**Selfless in Dedication**

One of my greatest challenges is the goal of being selfless in my dedication to my children, while at the same time insisting that there are things I will not do for them. These two concepts may seem to be in conflict, but going back-
packing often has the effect of bringing them into proper perspective. My son still remembers his transition from dependence to independence on the trail. We were at Sword Lake in the Sierra Nevadas of California. It was a gorgeous, pristine autumn morning as we headed back to the car at the end of a fine weekend. In short order Joel and a friend disappeared down the trail ahead of me. He was 11 and carried a pack, but very little weight. There was no way, with my pack, that I was going to keep up with them; so, having ample opportunity for quiet reflection as I ambled along alone, I thought the situation over and prepared a little speech.

After a couple hours I rounded a bend in the trail and saw the guys up ahead, leaning against the front fender of the car, a picture of studied nonchalance. Coming nearer, I could sense poorly concealed smirks.

"Well, Joel," I said with a grin, "I can see that it's time you started carrying your own weight, buddy." This was not the result he had in mind, but the logic was compelling. Since then he has always carried his own weight without complaint.

Not long ago the kids and I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest point on the African continent. The final ascent began at 12:40 a.m. on the fourth day of the trek. Joel, now age 17, predictably set a pace that I did not attempt to follow, and was soon out of sight up the moonlit scree slope. But Sara, age 14, was my perfect hiking partner. Not only was our pace identical, but at 4:00 a.m., at 18,000 feet elevation, altitude sickness washed over us and we began vomiting together. Not good; but if you've got to do it, it's awfully nice to do it with somebody.

Dawn found us at Gilman's Point on the crater's rim. The trail, swirling around to the left, stretched on toward the distant summit.

In the rarified air above 19,000 feet, progress was incredibly slow; there was nothing to do but to keep plodding, hoping for the remote chance that there might be an end to the seemingly futile effort. As it turned out, there was! Joel, who had graciously waited at the top, cheered Sara and me on as we finally stumbled to the summit marker at 8:30 a.m., and once again threw up together. We had all reached our goal—the 19,340-foot-high Uhuru Peak.

Positive Self-esteem
Most parents are rightly concerned that their children develop positive self-esteem. It is my observation that the most valuable self-esteem builders for my children have been difficult challenges successfully met. Experiences such as those I have described, especially in the context of strong affirmation from loved ones, are unequaled in developing kids with unshakable confidence.

When I started taking my children backpacking years ago, I did not grasp what an important impact it would have on our lives. However, not every father should take his children backpacking. Challenges are to be found in a vast array of activities. Parents just need to take their kids and go find them together.

There is little question that as they move into adulthood, young people will be confronted by reality—at times a very difficult reality. Will they be equipped to deal successfully with it? This is a parental responsibility. No easy method of providing this preparation exists. It happens as children confront and successfully deal with difficulty while still in the supportive atmosphere of their parents' love and concern. It is a process that takes many years. It is never too soon to begin.

Bert Williams teaches at Maxwell Adventist Academy, Nairobi, Kenya.
All the marriage and family literature recommends it. The lucky couples who have experienced it heartily endorse it. But wish as we might that we could join the ranks of those fortunate few, the hard truth remains: since we’re “financially challenged” and residing a long 30 minutes’ drive from anywhere, the weekly date night eludes us. The monthly date night flees from us. But we have managed to nail down the semiannual date night.

Every six months or so, my husband and I throw parental dignity to the wind and exclaim feverishly, “We can’t take it anymore!” And notwithstanding our impoverished state, we find a sitter; kiss our precious preschoolers, Becky and Jenny, goodbye; and speed down Highway 93, searching desperately for that elusive commodity called “time alone.”

Of late our dates have taken on an epic, ill-fated quality, similar to my fortieth birthday last January. My husband, Don, and I had planned to hike through the Cerbats, the mountains above our small town of Chloride, Arizona, then drive to nearby Kingman for dinner. But the hike was rudely rained out, and after our Chinese dinner we found ourselves all dressed up (for us) with no place to go.

As we cruised through the rain-soaked streets of downtown Kingman, Don, a scrap metal recycler, hit upon a winning idea: Why not treat me to a driving tour of the local industrial park, where he had earlier spotted some especially intriguing fuselages and abandoned freight cars? Twenty exciting minutes later Don sighed, “So what should we do now?”

“I don’t know, honey,” I deadpanned. “The industrial park is pretty hard to beat. How about a long romantic drive around the county landfill?” We laughed and turned toward home. As the sun set behind an impenetrable curtain of clouds, we pulled off the highway for a quiet romantic interlude before returning to family life as usual.

But this was one date that was not destined for romantic greatness. Our interlude was soon intruded upon by a faint but insistent scratching at my car door, followed by a soft whimpering. I sighed in disbelief. Surely the kids hadn’t followed us here!

I peered through my streaming window into the deepening dusk and found myself muzzle to muzzle with an ancient brindled boxer, her mouth fixed in a desolate cry of woe, her emaciated body convulsed with cold. Her clouded brown eyes gazed into mine, pulsing out palpable waves of guilt-inducing sorrow.

So much for romance. Wet as she was, Don and I loaded her into the car and hailed her home. We soon regretted our hasty compassion. Day and night she stood at our front door, moaning pitifully to be let in, which my allergies would not permit. And when she attacked our beloved cat, Sam, we reluctantly drove her to the pound.

As the sun sank westward, my husband consulted his watch. “I think it’s time,” he said.

Rested, invigorated, and fortified against another six months of parental combat duty, we descended the trail to our humble brown wagon. “Back to the real world,” Don smiled, as he turned the key—which coaxed not one spark of life from our intractable vehicle. “Oh, no,” we groaned in unison as we gazed longingly at our beckoning home, still 2,000 feet down and eight miles away.

Real world indeed. Apparently it had followed us all the way to the mountain, once again intruding upon our well-scripted date. But we didn’t really mind. We had already agreed that “two are better than one, because . . . if one falls down, his friend can help him up” (Eccl. 4:9, 10, NIV). And whether we fall down, bog down, or break down, my best friend and I would rather meet life’s inevitable intrusions together than face even the best of life alone.

* Good news, dog lovers. The boxer was later seen romping through a Kingman park with her loving adoptive owner.

Leslie Kay; her husband, Don; and her two children, Becky and Jenny, make their home on a 20-acre mining claim that’s a short drive from downtown Chloride, Arizona.
More than 100 years ago the great Lakota leader Crazy Horse cried, "Yaka Hay [it’s a good day to die]!" He cried this every day because of the dreadful way his people were treated. Eventually starvation of his people drove him into a fort, where he was dealt a fatal wound. Crazy Horse believed that his courage in dying would lead to a better life for his people.

I have discovered that in the past 100 years not much has changed for the Lakota or other Native Americans. The unemployment rate on the Pine Ridge Reservation, near Crazy Horse’s home, is 84 percent. Fifty-one percent of the people have substandard housing, 21 percent still do not have indoor plumbing, and 29 percent are homeless. Yet there are Lakota who proclaim that it is a good day to live because the Adventist message of Jesus, our Saviour, provides hope for tomorrow without sacrificing lives or their culture. They find courage in the price Jesus paid for their salvation.

For many years the Adventist outreach to Native Americans in the Dakotas was centered in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. With 17 Native nations in the area, Dakota Conference leaders decided to create a conference-wide Native evangelistic program. Steve and Darlene Custer are major part of this effort. Steve is a distant relative of General George Custer, who was slain at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Steve’s partner and wife is Darlene Two Bulls, a direct descendant of Sitting Bull, the nation chief of the Lakota at the time of the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Today the Lakota love Steve and Darlene. Currently nutrition and substance-abuse classes are being offered at the Adventist Native Center in Pine Ridge. Literacy classes, teen programs, and other important courses are being planned. Special Bible study classes will begin soon in order to pave the way for evangelistic meetings. These efforts need to be duplicated within two years for every Native reservation or nation in the Dakotas.

Four years ago Don and Linda Felkley, of Oregon, packed almost all their possessions to go to the far tip of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where 30 Native Adventists were meeting. The company had been gathered by dedicated non-Native families in the area. Although the Felkleys had no ministerial training, within three years a $350,000 church was built, paid off, and dedicated. Now there are almost 100 members, and attendance tops 150 each week. The pastor’s salary is paid through special donations by area Native people, and a Native business person built a parsonage.

In October 1996, 25 nation leaders from all over the island and some from the mainland held a special ceremony. They presented the Felkleys with Native hand-sewn blankets and Native names, and accepted them into the nation. Many chiefs proclaimed that the people should listen to the pastor because these Adventists lived and walked in the words of the gospel.

Navajo Outreach

Navajo land reaches into three unions and four conferences. These conference and union leaders agreed to allow Navajos to be reached as a language group. Native members voted an evangelism committee and an Adventist Development and Relief Agency committee to serve all Native people in this vast expanse of the Southwest. Today attendance has increased at all Adventist Native churches, even after the closing of Monument Valley Hospital in Utah. By September 1997, baptisms within this region surpassed the total for 1996.

During a pilot project sponsored by ADRA/North America, a mobile medical clinic visited isolated areas of the Navajo nation. Staffed by physicians and nurses from all over North America, the
Bomb Damages Kazakhstan Church

A bomb thrown into the Adventist church in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, on November 16 caused limited damage to the windows and interior, according to Barbara Huff, administrative assistant for development at the Euro-Asia Division, based in Moscow.

The attack came as we held evangelistic programs in the city. The rented hall used for the meetings was closed by the hall’s custodians, who refused to allow the church to continue with its program.

“A crowd of more than 1,000 people became very agitated,” says Huff. “The deputy mayor talked to them and tried to calm them down. The crowd proposed a demonstration at the mayor’s office. But Adventist Church leader Alexander Shvarts told the mob, ‘We are preaching about moral things here; we do not want a demonstration. Please go home peacefully.’” He told them to return the following night, when a new venue would be arranged.

The series continued in a new hall despite opposition, reports Huff. However, a law recently passed by the Russian legislature is inappropriately being used to prevent church activities in other areas.

For four months Adventists have been preparing for the meetings in Buzuluk, in the Urals. Permission for the meetings had been obtained from the religious affairs office in the regional city of Orenburg.

Days before the meetings were to begin, religious affairs personnel in Buzuluk refused to allow them to go ahead, citing the new law. Their interpretation was that since no Adventist church existed in Buzuluk, thus no meetings were permissible, regardless of the official permission already obtained from the regional office.

Despite appeals from the Ural Conference, the restrictive interpretation was maintained: that before church activities could be approved, the organization needed to be registered locally for 15 years.—Adventist News Network.

Amazing Facts Series Yields 5,000 Baptisms

The Amazing Facts television ministry estimates that between 5,000 and 7,000 persons were baptized as a result of its “Next Millennium” satellite seminar, which aired last year. More than 1,000 downlink sites registered for the series, which was also viewed in churches and homes in 50 states, Canada, Guam, and the Caribbean. The seminar attracted 130,000 independent viewers, says Debra Hicks, Amazing Facts spokesperson.

Amazing Facts director Doug Batchelor was the featured speaker. The series was cosponsored by Amazing Facts, Three Angels Broadcasting Network, and Seminars Unlimited.
Most television—like most movies, music, video games, and Web sites—is garbage. Add to this a new television ratings system that actually encourages garbage: What show, after all, wants to be rated TV-G? Not many. For kids, there's little decent left; for adults, it's no different. “Adult programming” is a joke; there's no such thing. If the sex, violence, and bad language affect your 8-year-old's brain, they'll affect your brain—maybe even more so.

Many Christians correctly speak out against indecent shows. But what do we do when the rare decent one comes along? Register our support? Or keep quiet, saving our comments for combat?

Take Monday night’s 7th Heaven—a one-hour family drama so wholesome, so well done, that it’s a wonder the Mormons didn’t produce it. “TV’s fastest-growing series” (appearing on the new WB network) features a real-world family of seven facing real-world issues: heartbreak, peer pressure, the dangers of gangs, the effects of lying.

In a recent themed episode, “I Hate You,” 11-year-old Simon discovers the hate of the Holocaust when he interviews a survivor; teenage sisters Mary and Lucy dismiss their brother’s new girlfriend—“Hate her,” says Mary; “Hate her,” echoes Lucy—because she’s too perfect; and 6-year-old Ruthie, modeling the hate she hears, tells Mom she hates her for making her wash the walls she colored. Apologizing later, Ruthie is distressed to find that Mom still hurts. “I want your heart to feel better right now,” she pleads. By show’s end, viewers all ages have no choice but to hate hate.

True, television is market-driven, and even good shows like 7th Heaven have a way of degenerating. That’s why it’s important to support them now, while they’re still good. WB’s fax number is 818-977-6479.

GC to Enter Trademark Case in New York

The General Conference has authorized its attorneys to file a trademark infringement lawsuit against an independent New York congregation for that body’s improper use of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s name.

The unincorporated body separated from the Immanuel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brooklyn, New York, and goes by the name Emanuel Seventh-day Adventist Church. This group has asserted claims against tithes and offerings belonging to the established Adventist Church that is recognized by the Greater New York Conference. The claims were subsequently brought to civil court.

The GC became involved because of the independent body’s continued use of the former church’s name, though the group uses a slightly different spelling. GC officials are concerned about the integrity of the Seventh-day Adventist name and wants to prevent confusion with its unauthorized use. The Greater New York Conference made unsuccessful attempts to clear the matter.

NET ’98 Team Names Music Committee Chair

Organizers of the NET ’98 satellite evangelistic series recently named Kenneth Logan, minister of music at the Pioneer Memorial church at Andrews University, as music committee chair. Logan, a professor in Andrews University’s Music Department, says that “NET ’98 will reflect in its music its special mission to communicate to young adults the fresh appeal of Jesus for this age. At the same time, the music will respect the generational and cultural diversity of its audience in seeking to illuminate timeless truths of God’s character.

“We will seek to have a variety of music in a tasteful mix of new and time-affirmed styles,” he says.

GC Offers New Youth Sabbath School Guide

This month Adventist teenagers around the world will receive the newly redesigned Cornerstone Connections Bible study guides for youth Sabbath schools.

With a lesson topic on personal identity, Adventist youth will set out on a solid, Bible-based approach to everyday challenges for teens facing the new millennium, says editor Gary Swanson.
Membership Groups in North America

The increasingly diverse Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America passed the 850,000-member mark in 1996. Membership by ethnic group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descent</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian descent</td>
<td>473,607</td>
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<tr>
<td>African descent</td>
<td>262,438</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic language</td>
<td>88,321</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian descent</td>
<td>26,897</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>3,748</td>
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—Kermit Netteburg, assistant to the North American Division president for communication

For Your Good Health

Cold or Flu?
Both are respiratory infections caused by viruses. If a cold is misdiagnosed as flu, there’s no problem. But a flu treated as a cold could develop potentially life-threatening complications such as pneumonia. How do you tell the difference? Cold symptoms include a stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, and mild to moderate chest discomfort, and rarely include fever, headache, general achiness, or extreme exhaustion. Signs of flu include sudden onset of headache, dry cough, chills, severe aches and pains, and fatigue lasting two to three weeks. Stuffiness, sneezing, and sore throat may not appear until after the initial fever subsides.—U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Commuting to Trouble
Japanese men who have a daily commute of 90 minutes or more have more pronounced variations in heart rate than those who commute for less time. Investigators believe the chronic stress or fatigue resulting from excessive travel times affects the stability of the heart rate.—Lancet.

—“For Your Good Health” is compiled by Larry Becker, editor of Vibrant Life, the church’s health outreach journal. To subscribe, call 1-800-765-6955.

Adventist Communication Network Broadcasts

Here are a few of the programs planned by the Adventist Communication Network for February 1998. Call (800) ACN-1119 for complete program listings, time, and channel information. All times shown are Eastern time.

Feb. 4  First Wednesday—church news, 7:30-8:30 p.m., Galaxy 3, channel 21
Feb. 7  Together Again, 4:00-6:00 p.m., Galaxy 9, channel 1
Feb. 11 Cross Training—Women’s ministries seminar, 6:00-8:00 p.m., Galaxy 9, channel 1
Feb. 11 Religious Liberty Summit, 8:00-8:30 p.m., Galaxy 9, channel 1

What’s Upcoming?

Jan. 1  Friendship Evangelism Month
Jan. 3  Day of Prayer
Jan. 10 Inner City Offering
Jan. 17-24 Religious Liberty Week
Feb. 7-14 Black History Week
Visiting a new church always holds a certain excitement—especially with only about 30 in attendance. From the moment my wife and I walked into the Gadsden, Alabama, church and were greeted by a 13-year-old named Stephanie, we experienced the warmth of Christian Southern hospitality.

Singing was already in progress when we entered the sanctuary. Immediately a man named Michael welcomed us with a smile and a hymnal opened to the song. Before the singing ended, we were also greeted by a woman named Sherie and handed copies of *Signs of the Times*, *Family Times*, and a visitor information card. I appreciated the information card and turned it in, with a request for Bible studies.

During Sabbath school I enjoyed a dialogue between two women portraying a conversation between Peter and Mark. Mark was gathering stories for his book, and Peter was pleading that he not include his embarrassing walk-on-water experience. Mark finally agreed not to include the story in his book, but said he could not guarantee that Matthew wouldn’t write about it. After the creative dialogue, I was comforted to hear the familiar voice narrating *Mission Spotlight*. I have listened to that voice for as long as I can remember.

Between Sabbath school and church, the cliché “It’s a small world” came to mind when I recognized a couple and their son, whom I had seen a month earlier in Florida. My wife also recognized Pastor David Braun and his wife—family friends from Illinois. It seems that whatever Adventist church you attend, there’s bound to be someone you know—or at least a friend of a friend.

During the announcements I was captivated by a little girl a few rows in front of me. She smiled as though she knew me. I watched as she went up for the children’s story. Pastor Braun told the kids about having a heart like Jesus and how we adults need to be like little children. He concluded by challenging them to show God’s love to others. After returning to her seat, the little girl whispered something to her daddy and then left the pew as if she were going to go sit with her friend. She cut through my row, hesitated between my wife and me, and theniggled up on the pew right between us. She looked up with her big blue eyes, smiled, and said that her name was Bethany. My wife asked her how old she was. In a thick Southern drawl she answered, “I’m fow-err, fixin’ to be fahve on my next birthday.” She then invited us to potluck the next Sabbath. How could we resist?

Not knowing anyone can be uncomfortable for a visitor participating in foot washing. But not in Gadsden. I had to turn down the pastor’s offer, since a brother named Tim had already begun to get the water to wash my feet. I noted a genuine camaraderie among the men, which put me at ease as I lowered my feet into the warm water. (Did I mention the water was warm?) Meanwhile, my wife also had two foot-washing offers, so they formed a threesome. She found it interesting to eavesdrop on Bethany’s mother, who was explaining the ordinance of humility to her 4-year-old.

After the service Michael followed up with our request for Bible studies. I was impressed by his timeliness and gladly received the first three lessons. Several members invited us to the upcoming north Alabama camp meeting of the Gulf States Conference and the local hobo hayride and cookout. They even helped us plan our Sabbath afternoon activity at Noccalula Falls. Before I realized it, my wife and I were nearly the last to leave.

I received a great blessing from this small congregation. I admire the way the members utilized their talents and took responsibility for welcoming me into their family. And yes—we returned for potluck the next week.

Mystery visitor A is a twentysomething married male. Mystery visitors B and C will premiere in February and March, respectively.
From the day that Adam offered his first sacrifice outside the gates of Eden until Christ comes in the clouds of glory, the Lord has and will have a church on earth. Whether the clan of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac (Gen. 21:3, 4), or the end-time body of believers known prophetically as Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-18), God has chosen people, not only as a means of spreading the truth (Matt. 24:14), but also as a means of revealing His character to both human beings and to the universe (Eph. 3:10).

The church's origins aren't born of the dreams, ambitions, and schemes of humans designed to teach themselves about God. It's something invented by God to teach humanity about Himself. The church isn't arbitrary or optional, something that believers can take or leave. Christ is revealed in and through His church. To sever oneself from “the church” (as defined in Scripture) is to sever oneself from the body of Christ Himself.

Humans were meant to be part of God's “whole family in heaven and on earth” (verse 15). In the New Testament those who have come out of the world and its lusts, passions, ambitions, and fables are members of what is called the church.

The church is a crucial aspect of what it means to be a Christian. Along with Christ's work of revealing God's character (John 14:9) and paying in His own body the penalty for our sins (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24), Christ came to lay the foundation of His church, His “called-out ones,” —both Jew and Gentile—who accepted Him as the Messiah and responded to His invitation to be “the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14).

“The church is the community of believers,” says the eleventh of our fundamental beliefs, “who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all mankind, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.”

The church is a divine institution, often referred to in Scripture as “the church of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2). Of course, only God Himself is perfect, infallible, absolute; that's never been the promise for, or the condition of, His church. From the start the church has suffered from mistakes, from lack of faith, from either misreading or even purposely disobeying God's express will. The church has always stood in need of divine correction, repentance, and revival (and many volunteer to sit in God's place as judges).

God's church has faced challenges not only from without but also from within. From the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:1-3), up through the early days of Adventism, and even today, the question of authority has been an issue. Christ, of course, is the head of the church, the ultimate authority. It's from Him on down that the question of authority gets complicated. To whom in the church has Christ vested His authority? How is authority distributed? How are crucial decisions made? How does God regard those decisions? How does God expect members to respond if or when any of the church's governing bodies make the wrong decision? How does He expect members to respond when the church makes decisions with which they sincerely disagree? And most important, does our response to “mistakes” by the church reveal anything about our own salvation experience?

Recently, questions regarding ecclesiology—more particularly, how God leads His church—have been the subject of increasing discussion. A few local congregations have formally separated from this movement not over theology (at least on the surface), but over church authority.

This year's columns will be dedicated to dealing with these crucial issues, hoping that through the power of the Holy Spirit I can help clarify issues that could threaten the very foundation of that which God loves so much—His church.

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
Of Violins and Love

NO VILE THING

When I played the violin, it sounded like a cat being tortured. “You won’t be taking that thing to heaven,” my brother would yell. “Why not?” “The Bible says there’ll be no vile thing there.”

There are many variables when playing the violin. When you get it together, the result is beautiful. When you don’t, the noise is cruel and can kill another human being at 20 paces.

I wasn’t a concert violinist. It wasn’t my gift. Fortunately, the apostle Paul came to the rescue of me and anyone within hearing range. “We have different gifts,” he writes, “according to the grace given us” (Rom. 12:6, NIV). “Are all apostles?” he asks. “Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?” (1 Cor. 12:29, NIV). He could have added: “Are all violinists?”

If you can’t sing, don’t join the choir. If you can’t preach, don’t preach. If you’re not called to be a Global Mission pioneer, don’t become a Global Mission pioneer. And if you can’t play the violin, please, please don’t play the violin.

Global Mission is a team of thousands of people around the world using the different gifts God has given them: praying, preaching, healing, teaching, giving, administering. What spiritual gift are you using to reach the unreached with hope? —Gary Krause, Global Mission communication director

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

LOVE WINS OUT: Karel Ataupah knew no one when he arrived in Hulu Mahakan, Kalimantan, Indonesia, to establish a new group of believers. But this young Global Mission pioneer soon made friends by teaching villagers how to plant ginger and make water pumps. He attracted young people, and they soon began asking him about his God. When some parents misunderstood something he said, they and the village chief threatened Karel and turned even his close friends against him. But he continued working with the young people, often using his small living allowance to help pay their school tuition. His unselfish and loving attitude soon won their parents’ confidence, and he brought several people to Jesus, including the village chief.

TELL ME STRAIGHT

“The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea, to all nations, tongues, and peoples. . . . Many countries are waiting . . . and your faith is limited, it is very small. Your conception of the work needs to be greatly enlarged” (Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, p. 209).

INTO ALL THE WORLD

In 1990 there were 2,300 groups of more than 1 million people with no Seventh-day Adventist presence. Since then, through Global Mission, nearly 1,000 of these groups have been entered. For more information about Global Mission, phone 1-800-648-5824.
There is a sense that we are running out of time. Whatever we do must be done quickly, before it’s too late.

For believers, the question of our standing with God is an inevitable one. We are apt to settle on the question of the rich young ruler in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10: “What must I do to be saved?” (verse 17).

By every measure of society the young man was the epitome of success—wealthy, intelligent, motivated. But one essential thing was missing from his life: he did not have peace with God. That he came to Jesus seeking answers was commendable. It’s important to notice, however, that his approach was flawed from the beginning. The question “What must I do to be saved?” was the wrong question the way he asked it.

The young man assumed he had the ability to do whatever salvation required, that he needed only to be properly informed. And we see an immediate connection to a more modern flaw: a faith in which information is the key to success.

We are a society driven by the need for more and more information. Television news and talk programs—both conventional and tabloid—have greatly increased in number. How-to books top the best-seller lists month in and month out. And with the proliferation of computers, the information superhighway is able to boast rush-hour traffic to rival that of any major city. More than ever before, we are turning to knowledge as the key to success.

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I overheard a church member say, after a prayer meeting PowerPoint presentation, “Anyone who knows how to use Windows ’95 has my respect and attention.” We must ask ourselves whether we have succumbed to the modern intoxication with knowledge. We are impressed with the person who knows, who has the latest information, who is adept with the latest technology.

As the new year begins, we need a new resolve. Saving truth is not an idea or a teaching, but a relationship with a divine Person. To have the truth is not to have the latest information, or even correct doctrine. The Pharisees of Christ’s day had correct doctrine, but it did not save them. In fact, they were able to maintain their doctrine while crucifying the Son of God (see John 19:31).

Our concept of Christ and His authority in our lives is the central issue for salvation. It’s not so much “What must I do?” but “Who must I know to be saved?” The answer? Jesus Christ. Our resolve must be to know Him better.

John S. Nixon is senior pastor of the Oakwood College Seventh-day Adventist Church in Huntsville, Alabama.
Tattoos in the Produce Section

Appleton Valley Market in Berrien Springs, Michigan, is a good place to buy raw pistachios or blueberry granola. This retail grocery store is the Adventist supermarket with an aisle-long section of analog meats and stacked rows of soy milk canisters that alert the uninitiated shopper that this is not your average Safeway. Its weekly cycle, capped by a madcap Friday afternoon rush, lets local Adventists know that this is their store.

It’s a great place for dried Turkish apricots and McKay’s seasoning in bulk. And occasionally it’s also the site for an interesting moral lesson such as the one I experienced the other day.

A friend of mine was filling his water jugs at the ever-popular water filtration machine. Les was dressed to beat the heat on a sweltering summer day and, like most, was clad in shorts and a T-shirt. The long sleeves he normally wore were a casualty to the rising mercury, and short sleeves could not cover his extensive collection of tattoos. From wrist to shoulder, they were impossible not to notice.

I’ve known the testimony of Les for some time—a 28-year-long pattern of drugs, alcohol addiction, and self-destruction transformed almost overnight into a life of joyful Christian living. Now 40, he is a vibrant presence and active witness in my local church. God gave him a new heart and erased his past addictions.

Not so easy to erase, however, were these tattoos. They were signs of strength and independence, badges for a macho code once kept. Now for the newborn child of God these permanent reminders of a life left behind were cause for regret. “I’ll get them off when I get to heaven,” Les said with a smile.

But meanwhile he had to face those of us who were shopping. You think meat would be hard to accept in an Adventist supermarket? Try heavily tattooed arms in the produce section. As he made his shopping rounds, he was catching uncomfortable stares from all sides—in the health food section, along the cereal aisle, through the checkout line.

And why not stare? This unfortunate handiwork (the stuff of electric needles and smoke-filled parlors) was as foreign to an Adventist supermarket as pork rinds. There were figures of skulls and knives, lions and tigers, devils and angels. A voluptuous woman. Barbed wire. Dragons. Snakes. Altogether more than 50 tattoos were clustered in a riot of indelible color.

For those who did not know the bearer of this fleshy tableau, it was easy to make assumptions (this guy is bad news) or value judgments (what poor decision-making; what poor taste). Those tattoos made some curious, others recoil.

Perhaps it’s only natural to wonder at the foolishness of this man’s tattoos. But how easy it is for tattooless Christians to forget our own permanent marks. Yes, tattoos can’t be easily erased, but at least they are no more than skin-deep. Our sinful natures, however, go deeper than the epidermis. Even though coupon-clutching shoppers might not see our faults as they can a tattoo, God does. To save us, He offers pity, love, and grace. For our sin tattoo, which is the hallmark of a fallen nature, He sent Jesus.

God’s grace transformed my friend. Perhaps the tattoos that mark his appearance are a constant reminder to him of that saving grace—and his need for it. They point to the folly and danger of life without the Divine Presence, but they also point him to a glorious future existence. It’s a world with no tears shed, sickness unknown, and tattoos that will give way to unblemished skin. “They’ll come off when I get to heaven.”

Long ago I was taught that Christians don’t decorate their bodies with tattoos. But on a hot summer day in Apple Valley Market I learned something new. No one, not even a clean-living, health food-shopping type like me, should consider themselves better than a tattooed man. Particularly not while forgetting their own sin problem—a condition that goes far beneath the surface.

Jack Stenger is associate director of public relations at Andrews University
Some people say that everyone should learn a new word every day. I’m sure you learn at least one word a day, but grown-ups can get out of the habit—they have to try to learn new words.

Here is a really good word: “resolution.” It’s very useful. It means several different things. And this time of year you might hear people say it a lot.

In the next few days you might hear people talking about New Year’s resolutions. These are promises they make to themselves. These promises are usually about habits they want to break or things they want to change about themselves. People make resolutions on January 1, at the beginning of the new year, because it seems like a good chance to start over, to get it right.

Probably the most common New Year’s resolution is “I’m going to go on a diet.” Lots of grown-ups think they are too fat (or else they have been eating too much ever since Thanksgiving time). But there are many other kinds of resolutions—about exercising more or reading more or watching less television or being less messy. Or learning one new word a day. As they look to the future, people want to do better, so they make resolutions.

Resolution has another meaning that looks to the past. Resolution also means that something has been dealt with successfully. If someone says a problem has reached a satisfactory resolution, they mean the problem has been solved—it’s over; we don’t have to worry about it anymore. That’s the way we look at the year that is just now coming to an end. It has reached resolution.

Resolution is a good word for this time of year. It looks back and finishes up the old year. It looks forward to the promises of the new year.

Jesus is God’s resolution. He is the resolution to the problem of sin. Jesus came to this earth to take our punishment for us. He saved us.

And Jesus is also the kind of resolution that looks to the promise of the future. When Jesus is our friend, we will have a better life. We can do better. We can be better. “If anyone belongs to Christ, then he is made new. The old things have gone; everything is made new!” (2 Cor. 5:17, ICB).

Will you make any resolutions for this new year? Be sure to ask Jesus to help you.