Surprises in Bangladesh

How people with a vision are changing lives.

Not Without a Witness

Angels in My Classroom

Utopia in the Caribbean
A Literal World to Come

Regarding Samuele Bacchiocchi's "Life in the World to Come" (Nov. 12). How wonderful to read of a real home for real people! It was enough to make a person homesick— for heaven. And I believed it all, even the part about the 12 gates and the 12 foundations (which the author doubts are to be taken literally). I believe it, not just because Patriarchs and Prophets, Early Writings, and a host of other Spirit of Prophecy writings say they are real, but because my primary source, the Bible, tells me so.

Keep all these good articles coming— until He comes!

— Bob DuBose, Pastor
Hot Springs, North Carolina

Inflated Numbers

Long overdue is Bill Knott's sensitive yet direct confrontation of one of the church's most serious problems (see "The Uses of the Past—II," Nov. 12). The article implicitly reminded me that David's prideful sin of numbering Israel is considered by God, but unfortunately not by us, to be of a more serious nature than his twin sins of adultery and murder. At least his numbers were honest, not the disingenuous figures of 800,000-900,000 North American members that we fling around so readily. Doesn't this make our sin worse before God?

Over the past two years our local church has prayerfully and carefully removed some 30 percent of our listed membership. We have another 10 to 15 percent to be evaluated. It goes without saying that it is humbling to my ego to say our membership is 240 or so rather than the 325 I inherited. But doesn't Paul say in Galatians 2:20 that the cross took care of ego?

Has this destroyed our church? We just finished a fall evangelistic series emphasizing "Christ Our Righteousness," and had a number of baptisms. Just as great a blessing has been the many requests for rebaptism, which include four elders who have seen the truth of baptism in a fuller light and desire the most intimate walk with their Saviour. Their attitude of reconsecration has humbled me. Oh, yes, by God's grace, tithe is up 10 percent over last year.

Thanks to Bill Knott for allowing God to use him to address this issue with wisdom, courage, and honest compassion.

— Dale Martin, Pastor
Kenhorst Boulevard SDA Church
Reading, Pennsylvania

November 12 Faith Alive!

While I am an avid reader and supporter of the Adventist Review, I was dismayed to see Calvin Rock's comments regarding Viagra, the impotence drug, in which he stated that Rock believes regarding Faith Alive! (Nov. 12).

My concern is not Rock's opinion— which I agree with— but the publication of such topics. They are strictly personal between spouses and don't need to be publicized in the church's official literature.

— William A. Moreno, M.D.
Salem, Oregon

Reading Calvin Rock's response regarding whether Adventists should help those cleaning up their property after a Sabbath tornado prompted another question in my mind: What would Jesus do? Rock's answer was right on. With a testimony if we got out there and helped on Sabbath and rubbed elbows with our neighbors and others. My Lord commands us to love another as He has loved us.

— Kimberly Trewitt
Belton, Texas

Waiting and Waiting

I read with interest Andy Nash's comment in "NET '98: A Titanic Step Forward" (Nov. NAD Edition): "While NET '98 was a watershed campaign, it's quite possible that its numbers won't be much different from those of past campaigns. Many Adventists brought a wait-and-see attitude to this series—and didn't risk inviting unbelieving friends."

I found this to be so true in the various churches I visited during the series. Empty pews . . . and hearts empty of the love of Jesus. What a golden opportunity has been missed in bringing others to a knowledge of the truth. We have certainly been unprofitable servants. What blessings the Lord might have bestowed on us if we had done our part.

The greatest unbelief is not of "unbelieving friends," but of our own unbelief. Or is it that Adventists don't have unbelieving friends?

— Nancy Jacobson
Soap Lake, Washington
Praise and Worship
I read Mystery Visitor C’s review of the Olympia, Washington, church with interest because I live within easy driving distance and have visited this church on more than one occasion. The reviewer writes: “I admit my personal bias for majestic hymns, words that are not repetitious or trite, and music of a more classical tradition.”

My dictionary defines trite as “worn out by constant use; stale.” It’s obvious that this comment was in reference to the more contemporary praise choruses used by the Olympia church. What’s interesting to me is that the majority of contemporary praise songs and choruses are nearly word-for-word Scripture. How can repeating Scripture in song ever be trite? It’s interesting that the most vivid picture we have of the heavenly throne room in the book of Revelation describes the four living creatures who do not rest day or night, but continually praise God by saying over and over, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev. 4:8, NKJV). Maybe someone should tell them that they are being repetitious.

Unfortunately, the real issue here is not styles of praise and worship. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and many of us have not yet learned how to “worship” God corporately because we have not learned how to “praise” God corporately. It’s an issue of those moving forward with God to worship Him in spirit and in truth and those who want to continue just to play church.

Mystery Visitor C gives a fine review of the church from a “natural” point of view, but nothing was said about the spiritual aspect of entering into worship. What really matters when we attend any church is, Was the power of the Holy Spirit there? Did I meet God there? What did He say to me?

I can say with joy that when I have visited the Olympia church, the Holy Spirit was there in power, and God did speak to me.

—Tammy Brear
Shelton, Washington

I agree with reader Lou Ellen Jenkins (see Letters, Nov. NAD Edition) on the need for tolerance toward different worship styles. But her case falls into special pleading when she says that “some...genuinely love to praise the Lord,” contrasting that with others who are “quiet and ultraconservative.”

In my view, the tensions in our congregations come most often because advocates of celebration continue to imply that more conservative expressions fall short of genuine praise. In some places the church calendar will even announce “praise Sabbath,” and the bulletin for that week includes a period of “praise songs.” This clearly places all other worship music outside the approved style.

It’s this invasive intolerance that divides us. Scheduling multiple services won’t solve the problem, because it will foster a spirit of competition between the factions. The answer, I suggest, is to maintain a standard service style, but include a weekly period of more contemporary music and singing. This is the only way we will exhibit tolerance and maintain unity.

—Frank Hutchins
Church Organist
and Pipe Organ Builder
Mountlake Terrace, Washington

Looking Good
I think your graphic artists and designers deserve recognition for the amazing look of the Review. I especially enjoyed the visual allegory on the “God Loves New York” cover a while back. Keep up the good work!

—Michael Herndon
Indianapolis, Indiana

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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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My seatmate was halfway through her second shot bottle of Jack Daniel’s before she noticed the Adventist Review logo on my shirt. Not that I was flaunting my employer’s name, mind you: after 10 days on a transatlantic trip, you wear whatever’s left in the suitcase.

“Are you a Seventh-day Adventist?” she asked in a husky, conspiratorial tone.

She hardly waited for my “Yes” before continuing. “I know a lot about Seventh-day Adventists,” she said confidently. “My father spent the last week of his life in an Adventist hospital.”

The words came more slowly now as she searched a whiskey-clouded memory. “He was a minister who ran a gospel mission in D.C. for 40 years. And the Adventist hospital there didn’t even send us a bill.”

Other stories tumbled out. “I did my nurse’s training under an Adventist nursing instructor,” she remembered. “Was she ever tough! And I even worked a while—three months, I think it was—at Loma Linda University Hospital.”

“Then there was that time in North Africa when the only doctor who knew how to treat my husband was an Adventist physician who ran a rural clinic.”

“I listened as the topic shifted, amused at how the mix of alcohol and anonymity encourages confession at 40,000 feet. Even before she drifted off to sleep, head slumped against her husband’s plaid sport coat, I was recalling similar exchanges across the miles and years.

“Seventh-day Adventist?” they would ask. “Let’s see; I had a friend [brother, mother, aunt, neighbor] who was treated at [worked at, lived near] an Adventist hospital five [10, 20] years ago. Good people, you Adventists,” they would say, keeping any reservations about distinctive theology well hidden.

My pastor’s heart has winced to note that local churches and evangelistic campaigns are almost never mentioned in those airborne conversations. With 4,500 congregations in North America and 10 times that number worldwide; with hundreds of outreach efforts—from living rooms to stadiums—occurring at any given moment, it is nonetheless the contact that persons have with an Adventist health care that often shapes their image of our church.

A cknowledging that fact—and embracing it—must become the centerpiece of any thoughtful outreach strategy for the next five years. At a time when many rank-and-file Adventists have grown wary of our health-care system, uncomfortable with its size and uncertain of its goals, we dare not overlook the fact that millions of our neighbors persist in defining Adventism by what they or those they love experience in a church-owned living center, clinic, or hospital.

It is impossible to overstate the dramatic, even revolutionary, changes that have come to the health-care industry during the past 25 years, both in North America and around the globe. Technological advances, government regulation, and vastly increased competition have forced Adventist hospitals and health-care facilities to adapt “on the fly,” often at the cost of members’ understanding the necessity or the wisdom of those changes. A quarter century ago concerns were aired in regular hospital constituency sessions. Today they merely rumble underneath the pews.

A dventist health care can be justifiably proud that it has even survived in this turbulent era. It must also be perplexed, however, that fewer and fewer church members seem able to articulate its mission or are willing to promote its ministry.

The bridge to renewed understanding, like other good bridges, needs to be built from both ends.

Church members must acknowledge that there truly are issues beyond their ken that require the gifts of trained and Spirit-led health-care administrators. Members must covenant to pray more than chide, encourage more than criticize, urging those they elect as conference and union leaders to responsibly carry their concerns to executive boards and advisory panels.

Health-care leaders must likewise embrace the sometimes messy and inefficient process of listening to Adventists in the pew—creating more opportunities for on-site visits and increased dialogue. They must show a willingness to hear the pain of those who have felt wounded, even by a healing ministry. They must open a respectful discussion with those who urge that Adventism’s image in health care should be simpler, smaller, or more “natural.” They must illustrate that they have anchored mission statements deeply in the pages of inspired counsel.

Nothing, save perhaps our pride, prevents this useful conversation. A world—hurting, hungry, hopeful—waits.
Few reading this would controvert such a statement as “this world is in a mess.” An article in a recent Baltimore Sun, by Alec Klein, reads “The corner of Ashburton Street and Edmondson Avenue is quiet this morning.” But what Theresa Smith remembers is gunfire—a kid who “got popped here just a few years ago.” A shot that killed her friend’s father. A mother shot that same night. “That’s all you see around here,” she says. “Death.”

She remembers “the man who sexually molested her throughout her childhood. The father she never knew. The fits of violence that got her kicked out of high school. A flirtation with heroin that nearly killed her.”

Now she is a 28-year-old mother of three by three different fathers. She’s living on a $468 monthly welfare check in a small upstairs room in her mother’s decaying house.

Klein claims that “at this corner, in this hollowed-out Baltimore neighborhood, there are no answers.”

The statistics for Baltimore are alarming—unemployment rate almost double the national average, thousands of births each year to unwed mothers, twice as many people living below the poverty level as the five surrounding counties combined; and hundreds of homeless. And Baltimore is only a classic example of people and their needs worldwide.

Besides this unnumbered, nearly unreached (by our church, at least) people group just described, there are thousands of “secular” people who are not connected to any religious group, do not know the Lord, and, for that matter, do not want to know Him.

A woman responded to an article in Modern Maturity (yes, I’m entitled to read this magazine, thank you), “Weighing in on Weighty Matters.” “We Americans are fat because we’re an anxious and depressed people. We keep looking for the right way to love, the right answers, the golden goose. When we don’t find it—we get scared.”

Rather dismal picture, wouldn’t you say? Globally dismal too.

A nd what is the Seventh-day Adventist Church doing about it? Let’s applaud the Roman Catholic bishops who have just called on their church members “to protect human dignity and to stand with those who are poor and vulnerable...to give more generously to those in need...to live more simply in an affluent culture.”

Let’s praise the Lord for dedicated, sacrificing, self-effacing Seventh-day Adventist Church groups and individual members who minister to the hungry, the lonely, the downtrodden, and those who know not God. And we’ll not forget we have ADRA. But we should (and could) do more.

Isaiah proclaims that God’s chosen method to purify our motives and reform our lives is to share our food, provide for the poor, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked.

Now, I’m not a church leader. Not even a minister. But I can read, and my reading includes such straightforward instructions as, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people.” Mingle, show sympathy, minister to needs, win confidence. Then do evangelism.

Do we really need to ask, “How can the Adventist Church effectively reach major cities?” Or “What are the best methods and most effective tools?”

We know. Then let’s do it.

1 Alec Klein, “Theresa,” Baltimore Sun, Nov. 15, 1998, p. 11F.
4 John Rivera, in Baltimore Sun, Nov. 18, 1998, p. 3A.
5 The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 306.
GIVE & TAKE

ADVENTIST LIFE

In the early days of our college in France, Alfred Vaucher and Professor T were probably the most popular teachers on campus. One day Professor T told his students, "I am at your disposal. Feel free to contact me any time if you have something to say, and even if you have nothing to say."

Someone reported this to Vaucher, who then said to his students, "I am at your disposal any time. Feel free to come and see me if you have something to say. If you have nothing to say, go to Brother T."
— Pietro Cepiz, Hinterkappelen, Switzerland

In our recent Sabbath school class at Scheer Memorial Hospital church, the teacher asked, "What is the difference between constructive and destructive criticism?"

A member answered, "When I criticize you, it’s constructive. When you criticize me, it’s destructive."
— Ira Bailie, M.D., Scheer Memorial Hospital, Banepa, Nepal

I have been receiving application letters from students all over Uganda ever since our hospital opened a laboratory assistants training school. I have been addressed as “Principal Tutorial,” “Principle Tutor,” “Madam Principal,” etc.

However, one title vested on me by an applicant read: “Principal Torture.”
— Leila Rotero, Bushenyi, Uganda, East Africa

ORDINANCE OF HUMILITY: Last March a team representing the Middle East Union visited Oman, the "land of frankincense," to meet with believers and explore possibilities for church growth. Some 50 Seventh-day Adventists have come from India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines to live and work in Oman and are actively sharing their faith in this ancient land.

During their visit the team conducted evening meetings, celebrated Communion (see photos), dedicated a new building for a church for us in the city of Muscat, and visited members in outlying areas. Story by Bruce Campbell Moyer; photos by R. P. Sunil Kumaraar.

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.

AN INVITATION: FRESH 27

Hey, Give & Take readers:
Do you have a real-life anecdote (serious or light) pertaining to one of the Adventist Church’s 27 fundamental beliefs? How about a short testimony, photo, drawing, painting, or (tasteful) cartoon?

And kids: Do you like to color? The best coloring of each fundamental belief will merit a free Review cap. (For that matter, we’ll award all published contributors with a free cap.)

We invite your contributions to our blockbuster April issue highlighting our beliefs—but we need them by February 1. Send to “Fresh 27” at the Give & Take address. Help us make this one of the most creative, interesting treatments of Adventist beliefs ever produced.

OLD LAND, NEW RITE

ILLUSTRATION BY TERRY CREWS
Bangladesh is a vast rice field. The country lies like a huge mud pancake formed by the delta of the Ganges (which becomes the Padma), the Brahmaputra (which becomes the Jamuna), and the Meghna rivers.

The rivers and the silt they carry are its hope and its horror. Rich soil and abundant water provide ideal conditions for paddy fields, but the flatness of the land makes it vulnerable to flooding. Periodically cyclones sweep in from the Bay of Bengal and back up the rivers already swollen from snow melt thousands of miles away in Tibet. The raging waters change course, cut new paths, burst their banks, and inundate Bangladesh. Homes of mud and thatch melt away, and millions of people who live perpetually on the cruel edge of poverty become destitute yet once again.

Last summer Bangladesh suffered the worst disaster in its history. The waters rose and rose in a hundred-year flood that eventually covered an astonishing 70 percent of the country. Its population—126 million crowded into an area smaller than Wisconsin—plumbed new depths of misery.

Bangladesh has endured political instability as well. It is a new nation, carved out of the subcontinent when India
shook off the yoke of the British Empire in 1947. In their final act, the departing rulers, faced with the mutual animosity of Hindus and Muslims, dismembered the land to create Pakistan (“land of the pure”) for the Muslims. Pakistan itself was a geographical monstrosity: not only did it lack natural boundaries, but it came to birth in two parts, one in the west and one in the east, with more than 1,000 miles separating the two.

The nation of Pakistan was doomed to fly apart. Eventually the eastern segment wrested its freedom and went its own way as yet another new nation, taking the name Bangladesh. That was in 1971.

But internal violence threatened the country. After just four years of independence the first leader of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur (Mujib) Rahman, and his family were assassinated in a military coup. Only 21 years later, when Sheikh Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina, was elected prime minister, were efforts successful in bringing those involved to trial.

But there is another side to Bangladesh, and I hadn't been prepared for it. The waters rise, but the waters fall, and the land grows rice in abundance. I saw rice, rice, rice; rice on all sides; rice stretching to the horizon. I saw men swinging sickles and harvesting an abundant crop. I saw rice lying in beds on the road after the winnowing. I saw men pedaling bicycles and cycle rickshaws laden with sacks of rice. I saw children playing cricket and soccer, fishing in ponds. I saw a happy, friendly people who smiled and waved as we passed by.

I learned about the new bridge over the Jamuna that opened last June, an engineering marvel. The river cuts Bangladesh in two, preventing produce from the east from flowing into the capital, Dhaka. The Jamuna shifts course as much as 25 miles (40 kilometers) in a single year; further, you would have to dig down two miles through the silt to find solid rock for conventional pylons. But with Bangladesh putting up $300 million and other countries chipping in, modern engineering has accomplished the seemingly impossible: the Jamuna has been held on course and spanned.

Life in the village of Bijatpur is simple, basic. If you can afford a vehicle, it will be a bicycle. If you need a taxi, you hire a cycle rickshaw. The one paved road is narrow, but it is choked with these vehicles and the occasional truck or car.

Bijatpur sits in the northwest of Bangladesh, and there is no way to get there quickly. We went by plane from Dhaka, then a couple hours by bus, then (when the road became too narrow for the bus) crowded into the back of a pickup.

On the way I made the acquaintance of Bob and Carole Dennis. They left a comfortable situation at Pacific Union College—where Bob was principal of the prep school and Carole worked as a cardiac nurse at St. Helena Hospital—to serve in Bangladesh. Bob is now president of our senior college, which recently took the name Bangladesh Adventist University and Seminary, and Carole runs a medical clinic. They told me about an earlier visit to Bijatpur.

"I visited our academy at Bijatpur three years ago," said Bob. "The students were in a terrible situation. The flood had washed away the mud walls of the dormitories and filled in the space with silt. Students were sleeping on mats laid over the mud. Those who had a place to go to had left; others who

HIGH JINKS: Editor Johnsson gets the Bijatpur orphans ready for bed.

HEADS UP: A village schoolboy shares his books with leader of the Adventist Church in Bangladesh Harald Wollan.
They hardly had any food. It was deplorable." He told how he had helped them dig out the mud from the dormitories, and gathered clothes and food for them.

We drove through Bijatpur and saw on the outskirts a white wall with new buildings rising behind it. We jumped down from the pickup, the gate was opened, the band struck up a tune, and the honor guard snapped to attention as Elder Folkenberg made his entrance. Stretching out before us was a gleaming new campus, a rectangle with buildings ringing three sides and a landscaped quadrangle with cement sidewalks.

I blinked. The contrast with the village of Bijatpur, with all that we had seen along the way, was total.

A round of dedication ceremonies followed. First, a meeting in the new auditorium, filled with a thousand people—many of them students and faculty—speeches, acknowledgment of local officials, thanks, praise to the Lord, garlands, gifts. Then dedication of the entire campus (renamed the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Seminary) and building after building in turn—administration, boys' dormitory, girls' dormitory, orphanage, cafeteria.

Besides these large buildings we saw 10 new staff homes and a block for single teachers and guests, while beyond the quadrangle a new elementary school and a building to provide a play area for the orphans during the monsoon season are rising up.

If the very existence of this campus amazes you, the story of how it came to be will blow you away.

Seven months before the day of dedication, November 12, 1998, this campus did not exist! A wonderful complex of 125,000 square feet has risen from the mud in an unbelievably short time.

I cannot imagine this feat being accomplished in the United States, Canada, Germany, or any place on Planet Earth. I lived in India for 15 years and have a sense of how long construction takes in these parts. This new campus was a project requiring more like seven years than seven months.

And all this—in Bangladesh! What happened here seems unreal. The story no doubt has a multitude of facets and players; here is what I pieced together.

A couple years ago Garwin and Marilee McNeilus, of Dodge Center, Minnesota, were watching a program on 3ABN about orphanages in Bangladesh. As they heard David and Beverley Waid describe the pitiable conditions at Bijatpur, they determined to help build a new home for the children.

They came to Bijatpur in February 1998 and were appalled at what they saw. The orphans had a new building, but the students were housed in a bamboo structure with dirt floors. "Garwin, we need to get them a new school," Marilee told her husband.

McNeilus returned to Bangladesh in April, along with Don Kirkman, an architect from Auburn, Washington, who donates his services to church projects around the world. Together they caught a vision of a new and enlarged campus that would become a center for helping and training young people and for camp meetings for the church.

But before any development could occur, a huge problem had to be solved—a pond three football fields long and 40 feet deep. McNeilus can make big decisions and make them fast: he decided to fill in the pond and build over it.

McNeilus asked Maranatha Volunteers International to make the vision a reality. This lay organization has built thousands of churches and schools around the world, relying heavily on volunteer help. But the task at hand would challenge their ingenuity as nothing in their history.

Maranatha turned to Robert Poblano. Poblano is a building contractor from California who went into banking and left it five years ago to help Maranatha. He and his wife, Doris, arrived at Bijatpur April 5, 1998. "We just came on a visit," said Doris, "but we extended our stay a bit, then more, then on and on."

The first task was to fill in the pond. Poblano located contractors and subcontractors who could help him. Soon trucks were hauling in fill and dumping up to 300 loads a day. Hundreds of men and women worked as hired laborers, carrying dirt in pans on their heads.

In seven weeks the pond had been filled. Its only remaining evidence is the boat the locals used on it!

Soon buildings began to rise around the campus. By the time the monsoon hit, roofs were up and the work could go on. The big flood came, but now a wall was in place, and although the waters rose to within a foot of the top, the campus escaped harm.

At the height of the activity about 1,000 people were employed on the project, most of them day laborers. I can only imagine the organizational and human relations skills involved in
guiding this massive undertaking, marvel at what was accomplished, and give God the glory.

The wonder of Bijatpur isn’t in the buildings, however. Indeed, a big new facility can become a white elephant because of the costs of operation.

The McNeiluses, however, have looked ahead: for every dollar spent on buildings they have set aside another dollar for endowment. This endowment will not only help maintain the campus; it will provide education for poor children. And in view of limited opportunities for girls, the endowment stipulates that an equal number of girls and boys will be helped.

A ready a vegetable garden is growing where once was 40-feet-deep water. Land beyond the campus will be developed into paddy fields and a rice mill installed. The plan envisages a self-sufficient facility that will provide work for students, service to the community, and a center for church growth.

The buildings are wonderful, but they aren’t the heart of it all. Look at the bright-eyed youth, see their smiles, hear their “Good morning, sir” as you meet them on the sidewalk, and you know what this story is really about.

But if you want your heart to be tugged hard, if you can stand one more surprise on this amazing journey, come with me to the orphanage. There they are, kids from 2 to 12, singing songs about Jesus before they go to bed. A lovely young woman, so full of love, is leading them. I ask her her age; she says it’s maybe 12, but she does not know.

Time for bed, but first—something important. Wade into the sea of young bodies and hug, hug, hug. Lift them up, hold them close, put them on your shoulders. Put your arms around them—four, five, six—and squash, squash, squa-a-a-a-sh until they giggle with delight. Then say good night and try to disengage the bodies clinging to your hands and legs.

The next day, a procession. Seventy-four, from the baby hardly walking on up through the tallest. Seventy-four kids holding toys and dolls and soccer balls. Seventy-four orphans march out of their old cramped quarters across campus and into new rooms. Running back and forth. Exploring, bouncing on new beds. A nd hoping for a parting hug.

I choked up. I couldn’t take any pictures. It was all too beautiful and too sad.

Those who help a child build for the future. Those who help an orphan build for eternity.

Harald Wollan directs the work of the Adventist Church in Bangladesh. It is a hard field: we have been here more than a century, but growth has been glacial. Surprise! Things are changing. In 1998 the church added more than 3,000 members; it will double during the period 1995-2000.

I asked Elder Wollan what has made the difference. “Three factors,” he told me. “First, the Global Mission pioneers. We have 64 of these young people, with 36 more in training. They commit themselves to go into new areas and establish a church within five years.

“Next, the 1000 Missionary Movement. These are teenagers or youth a little older who give a year of their lives in service.

“Finally, our departmental leaders have become actively involved in mission. Together with the laypeople they are helping to grow the church.”

Maranatha is helping also, building 200 churches with adjoining schools, and digging wells.

And the biggest needs? Upgrading the education of the ministry and developing work in the cities—we are still primarily a rural church, said Wollan.

His has been a trip of surprises—divine serendipities made all the more welcome because of my reluctance to come to Bangladesh.

Surprise—to meet students of mine from Spicer College days. U nion secretary Swapo n Halder, treasurer Ramesh Biswas, Global Mission coordinator Pradip Bairagee, and others now lead the work in Bangladesh.

Surprise—to run across Chris Smoot heading up ADRA’s efforts, supervising a staff of about 110. When last saw Chris, he was a student at Andrews University.

A nd of course, the big surprise—the incredible accomplishment at Bijatpur.

Once again I am impressed at how laypeople are making the church go. The surge in church growth here—laypeople are behind it. The new seminary—lay funding, lay vision, lay planning, and lay leadership made it happen. Most of the building was done by paid workers, but laypeople were there also: Paul and Evelyn Conrad from Colorado, Walter and M axine Johnson from Iowa, Cecyl and Marilyn Rentfro from California; fine men and beautiful women toiling with their hands, getting dirty, losing fingernails.

The last scene, however, that I take away is the young people, and especially the orphans. I think of them less than a year ago sleeping on mats over dirt floors in buildings made of bamboo, with leaking roofs. I see them parading across the campus clutching their dolls and toys, and I choke up again.

A nd I think: Here is grace.

William G. Johnsson is editor of the Adventist Review.
A Community Connection

Volunteering is a great way to show our love.

BY BETTY KOSSICK

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ORDINARY WAYS to share your faith? Do you really want a Christ-connected focus to the people in your community?

My husband and I have a great desire to share our faith in Jesus with others. Working at several jobs in a variety of places through the years, we’ve found that community volunteerism is a fine platform for faith-sharing.

Involvement Beyond Church Doors

When we enter into the public sector and are willing to roll up our sleeves, people take us more seriously than if we volunteer just within the cloister of our own church activities—no matter how outreach-oriented the projects might be. This is especially important to Seventh-day Adventists because we’re sometimes mistaken for a sect or cult.

From our experience of getting to know a new community, we’ve found that there are ways to offer much-needed help to volunteer organizations. Here are some suggestions:

1. Write a letter to the city manager and offer to volunteer in any way you can to benefit the community. My husband discovered that these kinds of letters are a rarity and are welcomed by the city officials. Because of work experience in supervision and decision-making, he was asked to fill a vacancy on the board for the airport authority even though he is not a pilot (nor does he have financial clout!).

2. Contact service organizations personally and offer your talents. I’ve had the privilege of writing a fund-raising letter and a script for a video for the local United Way campaign. Later I was asked to participate in the production of the video in an acting role. These opportunities came because of my presentations to civic groups and businesses to help raise funds for those who have nowhere else to turn.

3. Offer to help operate the booths for health fairs. In this way we have represented various agencies, such as the Tobacco Reduction Coalition and Down With Drugs. We have also worked with a clearinghouse called Love in the Name of Christ (Love INC). This organization is a bevy of Christian churches and public agencies that work together to help people who fall through the cracks as far as aid goes.

It’s possible to team with other Christians by volunteering our services in the community without entering into entangling ecumenical alliances. Volunteering expresses to other Christians that we really do love them and our community unconditionally.

Church members, though, often think of “our” community outreach programs as the ultimate in community involvement. However important church-sponsored programs are, they remain just that—church-sponsored programs. The public knows this because we use our denominational name with our efforts (and in our opinion, we are remiss if we don’t).

Often we expect the public to attend or participate in our programs, yet we hesitate to participate with non-church-
sponsored outreach, fearing that we are being disloyal with our time and money.

Are we? What is our reason for helping people or causes? Is it solely to bring them into our church as members, or is it because we care about both individual and public needs?

Connecting With Others

There are so many ways to connect with others. Of course, none of us can help with every good program in our community, but there are many worthy ones, including:

- March of Dimes
- Heart, cancer, lung, and other disease-related groups
- Hospital auxiliaries
- Hospice care
- Volunteer fire and rescue teams
- Board or committee involvement in service organizations that help decide important community policies.

What about attendance at city council meetings? Do we care enough about our city or township government to attend meetings, to help influence the idea people, or to become idea people ourselves?

Local Church Involvement

Of course, we need to stay actively involved in leadership positions in our local churches and contribute faithful tithes and offerings. Diverting time and money that belongs to the church to help outside the church is not a worthy answer.

As our understanding of our community has grown, my husband and I have come to see our community volunteer work as another aspect of our faith sharing. There is always ample opportunity to speak of Jesus. All humanity belongs to God. He has wonderful friends waiting to be connected to each other through the volunteer process.

Yes, sometimes we can rejoice if they sit next to us in our church pews, waiting on the Lord with the same hope. But if they don’t, we will still be just-do-it volunteers. We believe the word others is more than just a word; it’s a certain sound to rally Christian volunteers.

And only God knows the ultimate end of the connecting process.

Betty Kossick writes from Cadillac, Michigan. She was recently awarded the Eagle Award for her positive lifestyle articles in the Cadillac Evening News.
My husband, who was a loyal Adventist, went to sleep in Jesus six years ago at the age of 81; I am now 85. Our only child, who was always in church with us and who went to Adventist schools through college, has left the fold and shows no inclination to return. We thought, from Proverbs 22:6, that he would “not depart,” but he did. I ask the Lord to forgive our mistakes, and I pray that our son will return to Him.

The primary message of Proverbs 22:6 is not that proper training guarantees our children’s fidelity to God. That likelihood is enhanced when the training is correct, but this statement’s primary reference concerns vocational training, not the assurance that godly rearing inevitably produces godly children.

Our oldest daughter, who was 12 at the time, made this point in a memorable way on an occasion when I attempted to “reach her” by insisting that I was to blame for a certain bad habit she had. Other approaches had failed, so I tried getting her attention by insisting that it was really my fault, not hers; that though I had tried to be a good father, I had failed and was therefore responsible. She was visibly sobered by my approach and tearfully replied, “But Daddy, you shouldn’t feel bad—God gave the devil good home training, and look what happened to him!” How true. If a third of God’s angels, created in perfection and surrounded by glory, fell (Rev. 12:7), should we blame ourselves when, after we have done our best, our children apostatize?

We are, of course, inevitably blamed, but not inevitably blamed. And even if we did make contributing mistakes, the ultimate choice is still theirs. Our only recourse in such cases is to ask God (and, if warranted, the offspring) for forgiveness and leave final influence and judgment with Him: He, after all, loves them infinitely more than we do.

I’m not one to criticize, but I don’t understand why congregations have to send 100 percent of tithe “up the ladder” to the local conference. How can this be defended given the various needs of individual congregations?

First of all, by the authority of the Scripture, the writings of Ellen White, and church policy, tithe use is restricted to the support (salaries, etc.) of pastors and certain other church employees. What I assume you mean by “various needs” of the congregation are matters to be cared for not by tithes but by offerings, that is, church expense (see the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, pp. 136, 137, 191).

Second, it helps to view the local conference as headquarters for constituent churches whose service allows congregations with larger tithe amounts to assist weaker ones in the matter of ministerial and Bible teacher hiring. If constituent congregations did not have this “common storehouse,” the present plan by which pastors’ pay is standardized and not determined by each congregation’s financial ability would be lost.

A third helpful perspective is that the local conference operates as a vital support base for: (1) union conferences, whose services tie together its local conferences and various institutions (i.e., union colleges); and (2) the General Conference, which supervises our world mission through its divisions and provides financial undergirding for its institutions (i.e., Andrews University, Loma Linda University, and Oakwood College).

Since the General Conference annually distributes to weaker divisions much more than they contribute to the world budget, the principle of the strong helping the weak has critical application at this level as well.

As these poorer divisions become self-sufficient, there will, no doubt, be policy revisions that will permit stronger divisions to retain greater tithe percentages for hiring at home.

But thinking of home, since there are no policy restrictions on the use of offerings, an immediate boon to most local churches’ finances would be an increase in freewill giving. And since, paradoxically, enhancing tithe performance usually enhances freewill offerings, stimulating the 60 percent of our membership that does not tithe faithfully will prove a triple blessing: more tithe for the world work, more offerings for home, and more personal benedictions upon individual members and families.
Angels in My Classroom
Going beyond the call of duty is their specialty.

BY LAURELEE MISSEGHERS

T’S FRIDAY MORNING, 6:00. My clock radio starts playing, and my cat starts whining. Ignoring Scamp, I roll over and drowsily hit the sleep button. Another 10 minutes under the covers would feel so good.

What, the radio’s still playing? Oh, it is 10 minutes later. Scamp whines again, and the other two cats, hearing me stir, race out the bedroom door. So begins my day.
It Has to Get Better

From this inauspicious beginning I become a whirlwind of activity. It’s Friday morning, and there’s much to be done before the Sabbath arrives: shower, make myself presentable, clean the bathroom, wash and hang a load of laundry, wash the dishes that I wasn’t motivated to do last night, etc.

A ready it’s 7:15. I have time to grab a bag of chocolate-covered almonds and a frozen loaf of banana bread from the freezer—it will have to suffice for today’s lunch. I wish my husband a good day, grab my box of corrected homework, and head out the door.

It snowed last night, and inches of the fluffy white stuff cover the ground—and the school van—like a soft blanket. As I reach for the snow scraper and begin brushing off windows, the beauty of the soft snowy blanket eludes me. It isn’t a warm snugly blanket. It’s a powder of icy dust spraying me in the face and chilling my hands.

I nervously begin my daily trek to the school. I haven’t driven a van on icy roads before. Cautiously I test the brakes. Even though I’m going less than 10 miles per hour I feel the tires slip and slide. It reminds me how fragile life is and with what a great responsibility I’ve been entrusted: to care for the new day. My own enthusiasm for being late, but I’m not a mind reader. How was I to know he would arrive at all? After all, I’m volunteering my time. Last year, when I didn’t drive the school van, I arrived at school by 8:00 a.m. Now I don’t get there until 8:45. There’s so much to be done, but there’s no time to do it.

Thinking thoughts blacker than midnight, I arrive at the church parking lot to collect more kids. I’m 10 minutes late. But no one’s waiting; no one else has arrived. I slowly pull away, but have to stop by the roadside several times for late arrivals.

The rest of the ride continues to be nerve-racking until I finally arrive at school. A gain I look at the small band of snow, the slippery driving conditions, and the crawling cars are conspiring against me. This is ridiculous, 25 mph in a 50 mph zone! I look at my watch. I’m running late.

People Problems

I remember a conversation I’d had with a parent the day before. He was upset because I had left without his children, even though I’d waited an extra 10 minutes at the pickup point. He had arrived 12 minutes late; why hadn’t I waited?

True, he had had the best reason possible for being late, but I’m not a mind reader. How was I to know he would arrive at all? After all, I’m volunteering my time. Last year, when I didn’t drive the school van, I arrived at school by 8:00 a.m. Now I don’t get there until 8:45. There’s so much to be done, but there’s no time to do it.

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Rising to the Challenge

My students enter the classroom with the joyful exuberance that comes from being with their friends once again. As they slowly drift to their desks, I’m looking frantically for an interesting worship story. We finished our other book yesterday. I finally find one they will enjoy, and ask for silence. Still fuming inwardly, I decide my best course is to warn them. After all, they aren’t to blame for the way I feel—yet.

Once they’re quiet I begin my little speech: “Listen, I’m upset and angry about a few things right now. It would be best if you just sat quietly in your desks and don’t talk. OK? Or I might respond a bit differently than usual.”

The kids sit in silence. We get through worship and begin the day’s work. When the phone rings, I go to the office to answer it. When I return to the classroom, there’s a note on my desk. “To Mrs. Misseghers.” It’s folded in two. Curious, I open it up and begin to read:

“Dear Mrs. M,” it begins predictably. “We are sorry you are having such a bad day! We hope that whoever and whatever is bugging you will turn out fine! We hope you have a good weekend, and get lots of rest for tomorrow. We will try to be good and save you a hazardous day. Don’t get discouraged, and keep on trying. We like you a lot; you are always so fun to be around. Don’t quit now!”

“From those who care (TW C).”

My heart is touched, and I quickly leave the room as tears threaten to spill over. The black fog that had enveloped me until now vanishes as this ray of sunshine warms my heart. I’ve been ambushed by God’s grace—demonstrated by the ones who are supposed to be looking to me as their role model.

Later in the day my students ask: “Do you like teaching?”

“Yes,” I answer, “I do.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s so rewarding.”

“What makes it rewarding?”

“Don’t get discouraged, and keep on trying. We like you a lot; you are always so fun to be around. Don’t quit now!”

Laurelee Misseghers teaches grades 5-8 at Grand Valley Adventist Academy, near Paris, Ontario, Canada.
The school bell had rung, the last student had scurried out the door, and quiet had settled on the room like the dust motes shining in the afternoon sun in the open window. Nisa tidied his desk, looked at the palm trees swaying against the blue Indonesian sky, then, glancing at his watch, he too hurried from the room. If he hurried, he would arrive home in time for the Voice of Hope program he had been listening to with growing interest for several weeks.

At home Nisa turned on his radio and got out a pen and paper, for he wanted to write down the address. He had made a decision: the radio program offered a free Bible course, and Nisa wanted to know more about the Bible. Until then his only religious book had been the Koran.

Nisa did take the Bible course, and he found it so interesting that he made another decision. “These lessons would be good for my students,” he said to himself. “They have problems making good decisions and understanding about life.” So Nisa wrote to the Bible School in Jakarta, Indonesia, and asked for 84 sets of Bible lessons—one for every student in the small government school where he taught.

But Nisa didn’t stop there. He wrote again to the Bible school, asking for 36 more lessons—these he distributed to neighbors in his village in west Kalimantan. Soon he had distributed a total of 150 Bible lessons, and a dozen people were ready for baptism.

Adventist World Radio, broadcasting Voice of Hope in nearly 50 languages, plants seeds of hope and joy in the hearts of many people, but the results of this ministry don’t stop there. As in the story of Nisa, other listeners become convinced of the truth of the message they hear and share it with others.

One Listener, Many Believers

Mr. Wu heard the AWR broadcasts in Mandarin one day and took careful note of the frequency so he could always listen. With 150 hours of broadcasts to China each week, there are many programs available. Soon Mr. Wu had written for a Bible correspondence course, found a Bible, and was studying diligently. But he didn’t want to be alone, so he shared his happy discovery with friends and neighbors. At last count nearly 100 people were attending the house church Mr. Wu established.

Some people who hear the programs make extraordinary changes in their lives, and this draws others to them. Drunkards, criminals, thieves, abusers—all find the hope of release from their terrible lives through Jesus. Such was the case with Maria.

Maria was an angry and violent person, making everyone in her Guatamalan city avoid her. Then one day 25-year-old Maria heard the story of Jesus broadcast on Adventist World Radio and learned how He could give her a new life. The Holy Spirit worked on this turbulent soul and changed her.

After some weeks of listening to the programs, she stopped hitting her husband. All of the neighbors in her Guatamalan city avoided her.

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A fter some weeks of listening to the programs, she stopped hitting her husband. Then her neighbors noticed that she was kinder, friendlier, more accepting. The change was so complete that they began to seek her counsel.

“I promised God,” Maria says, “that I would never beat my husband again. The Voice of Hope programs have given me hope. I don’t need to be violent or afraid ever again!”

Please pray for people whose lives change and who share their faith when they find Jesus through the programs of Adventist World Radio.

Andrea Steele is director of public relations and development for Adventist World Radio.
It all started with a series of evangelistic meetings Kenneth Mittleider, a retired General Conference vice president, conducted in Riga, Latvia. While en route to the meetings through Cyprus, Mittleider was diverted to another airport because of airstrip repairs in Larnaca. His taxi ride with a government official from Iran led to a conversation about health and smoking. When Mittleider saw him light a cigarette, he voiced his surprise, as the Muslim faith teaches not to smoke.

"What followed was an invitation to visit his home in Iran," Mittleider recalls. "It was a friendly exchange between two stranded passengers who shared a common need. We exchanged our business cards, and weeks later faxes followed. But when a business visa was requested, I was introduced to Mahmoud Rostámabadi."

From that casual meeting a relationship started that opened many doors to the church. "There is no question that God brought our lives together. You have become a blood brother and blood sister to us," said Mahmoud about the times Ken and Barbara Mittleider spent with his family.

"What [Rostámabadi] desires is to do all that would benefit the people of Iran and bring a closer understanding between Iranians and the people of the world," says Mittleider. It was this desire that led to two official visits made by a team of Adventist leaders to Iran in December 1994 and April-May 1998.

Iranian Connection

Adventists have a relationship with Iran that goes back to 1911. More recently, in 1990, in the aftermath of an earthquake the Adventist Development and Relief Agency built 86 houses for suffering victims in the Gilan and Zanjan provinces. With the aid of ADRA/Germany a hospital was also established that now performs an average of five surgeries per day. At first the hospital lacked such basic items as X-ray equipment and incubators, but ADRA secured the needed equipment.

In Roodbar the German Army built a hospital for which ADRA provided an X-ray machine. In August of 1994 the German ambassador inaugurated the medical center there.

1994 Visit

During a five-day trip in 1994 Adventists established contacts with several government officials, some of whom remembered well ADRA’s response to the earthquake in Roodbar.

As Adventist leaders met with Iran’s...
The Iranian hosts also shared the chal-

ences in each of the meetings.”

“M y knee was giving me trouble,” she
says, “so I spent time sitting on the bench
in front of the museum. Some school-
childen came by—little girls—and they
came up and tried to talk to me.

“Realizing I was an A merican, they
became excited. They giggled, smiled,
and did all the things that 9-to-12-
year-old girls do to show their
approval. As we left, two of the girls
gave me bouquets of wildflowers they
had picked from between the rocks of
the ruins. I had tears in my eyes and
only wished I could have preserved the
flowers. The children were delightful.”

Dialogue with Iranian officials
reached a new level in 1998. “I think it
was very important that we returned
and they appreciated the fact that we
wanted to accomplish something,”
Coggin says. “We met with new people
in charge of the Ministry of Health who
seemed much more friendly, open, and
interested in developing a relationship.
Both Ken and I could sense the differ-
ce in each of the meetings.”

Mittleider noted the thoughtfulness
of their hosts. “Our Iranian hosts
quickly learned that we are vegetarian,
so they provided vegetarian meals
throughout the visit. After they got to
know us, they offered grace at the offi-
cial meals,” he recalled.

“It became obvious that the people
of Iran love Americans. It was demon-
strated on so many occasions during
my two visits,” says Mittleider. “As we
embarked on our second visit, we
wondered how we would be received.
Who would meet us when we arrived?
We found the church leadership in
Iran apprehensive at first. They had to
look at all aspects of the visit and eval-
uate the advantages of being involved
with representatives of the interna-
tional church. But apprehensions
quickly disappeared.”

During discussions with the govern-
ment, the church leaders sought reso-
lution of two issues: (1) recognition of
the Adventist Church and (2) the for-
nal registration of ADRA/Iran as an
official agency.
The Adventist Church, which owns property in Tehran, was registered in four places, with one pastor looking to local sources, the churches were able to meet on a regular basis throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As with every event when believers come together, Sabbath, May 2, was a special day for believers in Tehran. The visit of the world church president as well as the fruitful discussions with the church, but it is not a church. The visit had yet another dimension, a prospect for future contacts and openness. "Many Muslims were surprised to discover that there are Christians who don't smoke and don't eat pork. Such a discovery endears us to them," Mittleider says. "During the visit we were challenged to organize a group of Seventh-day Adventists for a tourist excursion to Iran that would allow us to get acquainted with the Iranians." The idea was pressed by the ministers of culture and tourism. "Please, think about it. Bring a few families and we will give them the time of their life. We will open our homes to them and take them to see the country. After all, we have a history that dates back millennia," they said.

A ccording to Mittleider, a plan is being developed to take a group of up to 60 people from the United States in April or September 1999. Arrangements are being made with professional people in Iran to entertain visitors and learn about each other's culture. The trip is to include a visit to historical sites, such as Persepolis, near Shiraz, one of the capitals of ancient Persia, with the ruins of the palaces of Darius I and Xerxes I (probably Ahasuerus of the story of Esther).

In the words of another visitor to Iran, tourism is still a new concept in the country. Bill Heavey put it plainly in his Washington Post report: "The people are proud of their heritage, and are almost desperate to show it all to you."

"It's quite a feat to walk where Esther walked, where her husband is buried," Mittleider says. "I'm certainly looking forward to returning."

Controversy Breaks Out Over World Council Membership Vote

By Roy Adams, Adventist Review Associate Editor, Reporting from Harare, Zimbabwe

The Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Zimbabwe, voted December 5 to receive into full membership eight new churches from six countries. The action brought the number of churches belonging to the WCC to 338, two Orthodox churches having opted to leave the world body during the past 12 months.

The reception of new churches, usually a time of applause, was tempered by the decision of the WCC policy reference committee (PRC) to postpone the decision on the application for full membership by the Celestial Church of Christ of Nigeria. When I talked to them following the assembly's action, the leaders of the Celestial Church claimed not to understand the reason for the postponement, but remained hopeful that the matter could be resolved later in the session.

That hope seemed well founded when the PRC, in its second report to the assembly five days later, recommended admission. The sticky issue, the committee said, had been that of polygamy. The committee expressed satisfaction, however, with assurances received from Celestial that as of 1986, only monogamous clergy were being admitted into its pastorate. (That assurance implied, of course, that older clergy may still be living in polygamous relationships, not to mention the membership at large. Yet the committee "became convinced that membership would be beneficial for the church in its efforts to proclaim and live out the gospel message within the African culture.")

As the debate opened on the issue, speaker after speaker took the floor to question the wisdom of the committee's recommendation. But in an assembly noted for its liberal stand on certain issues, no one could be sure which way the vote would go. In the end the vote to deny was overwhelming, and spontaneous applause broke out, perhaps out of relief.

The controversy continued the following day, however, when the official WCC newspaper, quoting Densen Mafinyani, general secretary of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, ran a four-column headline proclaiming "Polygamy No Problem for African Churches." Hours later an infuriated African delegate rose in the assembly to denounce "the implication that Christians in Africa had polygamy in their blood." Not so, he said, amid loud applause from his fellow African delegates and the whole
Who’s Correct?

BY BERT WILLIAMS, MAXWELL ADVENTIST ACADEMY, NAIROBI, KENYA

At the hour that this is being written United States cruise missiles and British bombs are reaching targets in Iraq. China and Russia have condemned the action. In a particularly strong move, Russia has pulled its ambassador out of Washington, D.C., in protest.

The United States and Great Britain say that Saddam Hussein has broken his commitment to the United Nations yet again, and thus an action to degrade his ability for creating weapons of mass destruction and waging war on his neighbors is absolutely essential.

Russia and China, siding with Iraq, say that the attackers have used an insignificant misunderstanding as a pretext for launching the attack on Iraq, which only adds further to the unjustified suffering of the defenseless Iraqi people.

It must be challenging being a leader of a world power at such times.

If Russia and China are correct, what can they do to convince the world community that the attack must be stopped and that suffering of defenseless Iraqi people must cease?

If the United States and Great Britain are correct, what can they do to convince the world community that the attack is essential in order to save innocent people in the future from a well-armed Saddam Hussein?

At this point it is unlikely that anyone will be convinced of anything that they don’t already believe on this issue. Right or wrong, people are going to think what they think, and that is pretty much the way it is.

Which causes one to wonder how God must feel when citizens of Planet Earth misunderstand His governance of the universe. Is He simply reconciled to being misunderstood? Does He despair of convincing people with minds already set that His strategies are correct?

It must be challenging at times being the ultimate superpower of the universe.

NEWS COMMENTARY

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NEWS BREAK

Adventist Pastor Wins Preacher of the Year Award

Adventist pastor Ian Sweeney took first place in the finals of the prestigious London Times Preacher of the Year competition November 27 at the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster.

Sweeney, 33, who currently pastors in the Sheffield district, was originally entered for the competition without his knowledge when a publisher forwarded to the Times a sermon he had originally written for a book on Black preachers. His first knowledge of his involvement in the competition was when he received a letter telling him that he was one of the 30 preachers short-listed for the final from an initial list of more than 250. Assessors visited each of these 30 candidates in their home churches, and only six reached the final, reports John Surridge, British Union Conference communication director.

The final event took the form of a two-hour worship in which each of the candidates was asked to speak for 10 minutes on a subject of their choice. Sweeney's winning sermon was entitled “It’s the Thought That Counts.”

Sweeney was the first Black preacher to win the contest, now in its fourth year, reports the Times.

After being announced the winner and presented with the awards, Sweeney commented: “This trophy is in recognition of the sterling work being done in our churches week in and week out. There is no greater calling and no greater privilege than to speak on God’s behalf.”

After the event Sweeney was presented with a sculpture of a dove and will later receive £1,000.

What’s Upcoming

Jan. 16 Message and Mission Emphasis
Jan. 23 Health Ministries Day
Jan. 30 Religious Liberty Day
Feb. 6 Bible Evangelism Emphasis
Prince Lazarus, a United States millionaire, recently announced that he is ready to begin constructing a new country in the beautiful Caribbean Sea, 120 miles off the coast of the British crown colony of Grand Cayman. This according to a lead story in the Caymanian Compass. A Canadian company was slated to begin construction during the latter part of 1998.

New Utopia is not a joke, nor is it science fiction, says Prince Lazarus, who has claimed a 284-mile patch of ocean for the city. And his action is legal, he says, since the area in question falls within international waters. But although New Utopia attorney general Richard Balch made formal application for recognition to the United Nations back in 1997, there has been no response from the U.N. so far.1

The city will be built, Lazarus says, where there is a naturally occurring rise in the sea floor, making for a depth grade of between 12 and 57 feet at the location.2

The first structure to go up will be a 300' x 300' platform, standing on pilings similar to an offshore oil-drilling facility. The city will be constructed in such a way that each platform will comprise a city block and will be surrounded by water. This should make policing much easier, says Lazarus, and crime should be virtually nonexistent.3

Present plans call for the construction of banks, hotels, condominiums, a shopping center, an airport with the capacity of landing 727's, a movie theater, a central park, and the finest hospital in the world, dedicated to antiaging and longevity modalities.

The economy of New Utopia would be based on offshore finance, tourism, and medical services. Prince Lazarus indicated there would be no taxes in New Utopia. Government revenue would be derived from banking fees and a 15 percent duty on everything imported.

New Utopia will be a constitutional monarchy, with Prince Lazarus on the throne. And succession will be hereditary, according to the already written constitution. A board of eight governors has been chosen to manage the country.
and there are currently 530 citizens on the rolls. Citizenship will require a clean criminal record and payment of US$1,500.4

Prince Lazarus Long was born Howard Turney. He said he changed his name to prevent people from linking New Utopia with his antiaging business that earned millions in clinics in Mexico and the U.S.A. New Utopia’s constitution imposes no religion, provides citizens with religious liberty, and allows for gay marriages. The construction cost is expected to run to about US$340 million.5

The Idea Isn’t New

Throughout history ambitious people have always attempted to invent some type of utopia. The book of Genesis depicts the postdiluvians feverishly trying to compete with God rather than serve Him. In the end God moved to frustrate their plans (Gen. 11:1-9).

Karl Marx, a German revolutionary, theorized an economic utopia. But Communism, the system he envisioned, has failed—as all human systems eventually will. Someone has said that capitalism is the unequal distribution of wealth,
while Communism is the equal distribution of poverty.

A dolf Hitler tried to build a utopian society in Germany by masterminding the extermination of more than 6 million Jews in a mad attempt to create a super race. But he failed.

**God’s Utopia**

How good to know that God has a true utopia on the horizon!

When and where will this be? And what city is it? One answer is found in Galatians 4:26: “But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.”

The patriarch Abraham looked for this utopia with eager expectancy. We read in Hebrews 11:10 that “he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

And John the revelator describes this divine utopia in glowing terms. “I saw the Holy City,” he said, “the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

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M ore important, peace will reign—between God and all creation. There will be no need for locks and keys and security systems. “One day will its gates ever be shut,” the Bible says, “for there will be no night there” (verse 25).

**Plans call for banks, hotels, condominiums, a shopping center, an airport—the works—in the middle of the open sea.**

**Who Gets to Go?**

If you are wondering who may/may not enter this utopia, you don’t have to speculate. The Bible tells us in Revelation 22:14: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (KJV).

In other words, the city will be open only to those who do the will of God.

As the earth came forth from the hand of its Maker in the beginning, it was exceedingly beautiful. Its surface was diversified with mountains, hills, and plains, interspersed with noble rivers and lakes. However, sin has polluted and devastated God’s beautiful creation. A consequence, we have war and sickness and death.

But one day soon we will have peace. Today we have poverty; one day soon we will have plenty. Today we are prisoners in our own homes; one day soon we will be free. Today we mourn; one day soon we will be comforted. Today we die; one day soon we will live forever. Today we fear nuclear holocaust; one day soon we will study war no more. Today we have homelessness; one day soon we will inhabit mansions.

“A ND I JOHN saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isa. 35:5, 6, KJV).

“A nd the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy” (verse 10, KJV), and Jesus shall reign as King of kings and Lord of lords in the New Jerusalem (see Rev. 19:16).

I like Ellen White’s summation: “Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of immaterial space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.”

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2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Harrison.
6 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New International Version.
7 Though we do not know whether these dimensions are to be taken literally, we are sure they’re meant to portray something grander than we can ever imagine.
8 I The Great Controversy, p. 678.
Have you ever played with a top? You can make one yourself. Cut a circle out of a piece of cardboard. Poke a sharp pencil through the center of the circle. Set the point of the pencil on the table, hold the eraser end with your thumb and finger, and set your new top spinning.

Here's what I found when I made my top:
1. Use a short pencil.
2. Try sliding the circle to different positions along the pencil.
3. The circle shouldn't be too small. Try tracing around a mug to get a good size.

4. If the circle is lopsided, the top will wobble.
5. If the pencil isn't stuck through the exact middle, the top will tip over quickly.

At first I thought making a top would be easy, but I had to experiment a bit before I got it to spin. I needed to figure out why my top kept falling.

Sometimes we use the word “fall” to describe when a person sins. When Paul writes “Anyone who thinks he is standing strong should be careful not to fall” (1 Cor. 10:12, ICB), he's not actually talking about falling. He's talking about sinning.

It's easy to imagine a top when you read this Bible text. A top spinning strong and fast hits a bump and starts to wobble, loses its balance, and falls. That's what happens to us sometimes. We think we can be good and obey the rules. And then down we go.

What should you do when that happens? Get up and try again, of course. But you can do more.

You can learn from your mistakes. Figure out what went wrong. Plan to avoid the same mistake next time.

When you make a top, keep adjusting the shape, the size, and the placement of the circle. Figure out what makes it work. Figure out how to make it better.

You can think about your life the same way. But in your life you have help. When you “fall” and sin, you don't have to get back up on your own. Jesus will help you get going again.

When you make a mistake, you don't have to figure it out on your own. Jesus will help you understand.

Keep close to Jesus. Together you can stand strong.
Not Without a Witness

An Anglican Preacher’s Defense of the Seventh-day Sabbath
T WAS AN AGE OF SPIRITUAL BOLDNESS, BUT FEW COULD MATCH HIS SHEER AUDACITY.

Dedicating his new book on the Bible Sabbath to Charles I, king of England and head of the Church of England, Theophilus Brabourne called upon the king to promote the seventh-day Sabbath throughout the British Isles.

The reaction to Brabourne’s book and its dedicatory statement was predictably swift and brutal. The king directed Bishop Francis White of Ely to deal with the heretic minister. Summoned to defend his views and writings, Brabourne was subjected to enormous pressure:

“I held a conference with that reverend bishop . . . at Ely House in Holbourn, about the Sabbath; it lasted many days, an hour or two in a day; after that, I did the like once before the archbishop . . . at Ely House in Westminster, in addition to the nine weeks he was imprisoned while being examined. One judge, not satisfied that Brabourne merely serve prison time for his crime of advocating the Bible Sabbath, called for the death sentence. The minister’s wife was even informed that her husband was to be burned at the stake.

Modest Beginnings

Who was this bold spirit who could so calmly face the united opposition of both church and state in defense of the Bible Sabbath?

Theophilus (“God-lover”) Brabourne was born in 1590 in Norwich, England, 120 miles northeast of London. He attended local schools until 15 years of age, intending to enroll at Cambridge University. Though his father supported young Theophilus’s desire to study for the ministry, the difficult religious situation during the reign of James I caused him to recommend a different career. Theophilus was sent to London as a representative for the family stocking business.

Brabourne married in London and returned to Norwich with his bride. Once home, he resumed his original plans and studied for the ministry under the tutorship of three Church of England ministers. Ordained at age 31 on September 24, 1621, as a priest in the Church of England, Brabourne quickly distinguished himself as a writer on controversial subjects. Had the new minister applied himself only to his pastoral assignment, it’s unlikely that modern-day Sabbathkeepers would have ever heard of him.

By 1628 he had published his first book, *A Discourse Upon the Sabbath Day,* thrusting himself and his ideas into the midst of a heated debate about the Bible Sabbath. His second volume three years later brought him the full attention of both king and court. Following his release from prison, the undaunted preacher wrote another six books and one unpublished manuscript about the holiness of the Bible Sabbath.

Why This Man Matters

Theophilus Brabourne’s *Discourse Upon the Sabbath Day* is considered by scholars to be “the first major work to appear in the seventeenth century advocating the Christian observance of Saturday.” But it is more than historical curiosity that recommends both the man and his writing to modern Sabbathkeepers. Brabourne is an aggressive and able defender of the Sabbaths, employing many of the same methods and scriptural arguments that Seventh-day Adventists would use two centuries later. He approaches the topic by discussing the positions of the critics of the Sabbath, analyzing biblical passages, reviewing historical developments, and discussing ways that the Sabbath should be kept.

A Man Under Authority

According to Brabourne, the Sabbath must be discussed in the context of the authority of the Word of God in the believer’s life, the continuing importance of the law of God to the believer’s conduct, and the nature of the commandments.

Understanding the Word of God as the highest authority for human life is foundational to Christian life, Brabourne writes. Human reason is feeble and insufficient at best, “subservient and handmaid to the Holy Scriptures.” Because Brabourne takes such a strong position on the significance of the Bible, he spends considerable time discussing texts used by those who either support or oppose the Bible Sabbath. Likewise, in his discussion of Sunday he again appeals to the unchallengeable authority of Scripture: if God intended that Sunday should become the Christian Sabbath, would Christ not have given just such a command? Human reasoning, no matter how persuasive, cannot have equal authority to God’s revealed will.

“Never with me,” Brabourne proclaims; “I trust to God.”

Brabourne’s arguments in favor of the perpetuity of the moral law, and thus the Sabbath in which it is enshrined, ring true to the interpretive methods used by Seventh-day...
A Sabbath is "a particle of the moral law which is perpetual," he wrote in his 1628 volume. "Our Saviour Christ himself ratified the moral law, and every iota and tittle of it unto the world's end, Matthew 5:17, 18." The apostles likewise supported the Sabbath as a part of the moral law, he notes, and it should trouble the conscience of any person to hear it questioned.

**Dealing With Critics**

Brabourne's insights about the differences between the moral and ceremonial laws distinguish him from other thinkers of his era who wrote or preached about the Bible Sabbath. While Brabourne maintains the perpetuity of the moral law, he recognizes that there were ceremonial laws that were limited in duration. To answer critics of the Bible Sabbath, he extensively treats six key passages that were advanced to support the popular notion that the Sabbath was a ceremonial fixture done away with at the death of Jesus: Numbers 28:9-19; Deuteronomy 5:15; Matthew 12:8; Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16, 17; Hebrews 4:10, 11.

Using the breadth of Scripture to testify to the Sabbath, Brabourne illustrates that the Sabbath predated both the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the ceremonial law at Sinai. Thus while the Sabbath became linked to two great expressions of Jewish identity, it is not in its essence dependent on those images of redemption and time-bound regulation. "Sabbath was a Sabbath in nature and institution before there [were] any sacrifices," he concludes.

To those who argued that Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, certainly had the power to change the day of worship, Brabourne pointedly asks, "What's that to our question?" The issue is not what Christ may or may not do, but "what Christ did." And since there is no evidence that Christ abolished the Sabbath, it is still binding for Christians.

Brabourne also deftly handles the New Testament passages often cited by those who urge that the Sabbath was a time-bound rather than timeless creation of God. In Romans and Colossians, he observes, the "sabbaths" referred to are not the moral Sabbath, but other days observed by Gentiles in their preconverted state or Jewish ceremonial sabbaths, which were never intended to outlive the sacrifice of Jesus. If the Sabbath on earth is merely a type of a great heavenly Sabbath, as some readers of Hebrews claim, then the type must be in force until the antitype arrives, Brabourne urges. "So then must the Sabbath if a type of heaven endure until heaven be come."

**Prophecy and the Change of the Sabbath**

If the Bible is clear in upholding the Sabbath and does not open the door for a change, then how did the day of worship change? Brabourne cites evidence that the early church kept the Sabbath well past the New Testament era and at least until the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 364.

Most intriguingly for Seventh-day Adventists, Brabourne maintains that the change of the Sabbath was predicted by the prophet Daniel. The prophecy of the "little horn" power who would seek to change times and laws (Dan. 7:25) is dealt with no less than six times in his 1628 volume. While his identification of the little horn is not unique to his era, Brabourne's argument that the Sabbath is referred to in Daniel 7:25 marks him one of the earliest Christian scholars to link the change of the Bible Sabbath to the power described in Daniel 7.

What power then is responsible for the change? Brabourne appears to link the "little horn" of Daniel 7 to the Roman papacy, though he by no means clears Sundaykeeping Protestants of blame. The Sabbath commandment, writes Brabourne, "is forgotten at all hands utterly by both Protestants and Papists: and so much of the word 'Remember.'"

Brabourne also identifies the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 364) as one of the parties responsible for the attempt to get rid of God's Sabbath. That council is "guilty of that sin foretold by Daniel 7.25." Drawing an unusual connection between the first-century church and the church council held there three centuries later, he reminds the reader that in the book of Revelation, Laodicea is the "worst of the 7 [churches]."

While Brabourne laments that the knowledge of the Sabbath was "utterly and altogether blotted out of remembrance in the church for 1,200 years" after the Council of Laodicea, more modern historians of the Sabbath can demonstrate that the Sabbath did not disappear nearly so much as Brabourne believed. In several regions of Europe and Africa Sabbathkeeping movements were either maintained or reemerged as part of reforming movements in the Christian church.
Other Aspects of the Sabbath

Brabourne's theology of the Sabbath moves in many directions with which twentieth-century Sabbathkeepers resonate. Among these is an important linking of the Sabbath with the process of sanctification (growing into the likeness of God). Arguing with logic that would have appealed to his fellow churchmen, Brabourne declared that the “sacraments be signs of justification.” Justification is an act of God, but so is sanctification, in which God maintains, is a sign of our sanctification and holiness.24

Unlike other Sabbathkeeping authors of that era and later, Brabourne maintains that the Sabbath should be kept only during the daylight hours of the seventh day, and not for a period of 24 hours.25 More important, however, are his statements on what it means to keep the Sabbath. While it is true that God forbade “unnecessary servile work,” God does not forbid “works of charity and necessity.”26 Brabourne appropriately places greater emphasis on what can be done on the Sabbath than on what cannot be done. He writes that it is acceptable on the Sabbath to lead a beast to water, “pluck and rub ears of corn,” help a beast out of a ditch, and kindle a fire.27

Three broad reasons are advanced for keeping the Sabbath: (1) for worship and service, or specifically to honor God with our worship and service; (2) for the good of humankind, benefiting both the soul and the body; and (3) for the good of the animals.28

Modern Sabbathkeepers might flinch over at least one part of Brabourne's Sabbath theology, however. This strong proponent of the Sabbath felt that there is a legitimate role for Sunday in the life of the church, even though it cannot in any way replace the Bible Sabbath. The rightful role of Sunday, or the Lord's day, is to remind Christians of the Resurrection, for it “was instituted for the memory of the Resurrection.”29

Brabourne is one of the earliest Christian scholars to link the change of the Bible Sabbath to the power described in Daniel 7.

With just such an acknowledgment, Brabourne was finally released from prison after the investigation that followed publication of his 1631 volume. “I wrote that I confessed it [Sunday] to be an holy day of the church,” he wrote later, “and so much I might have said of Christmas Day also.”30

An Enduring Testimony

In every age God has found a witness to the enduring truth of His Sabbath. Theophilus Brabourne's testimony, for which he suffered much, has proved both an inspiration and a resource for Bible students in the four centuries since he wrote. His clear teaching about the Sabbath as an integral component of the Word of God, illustrating the harmony between God's law, the gospel, and the Sabbath, set a benchmark of excellence for many later interpreters.

Most important, this much-abused minister should be honored for discovering the link between the Sabbath and biblical prophecies of the end-time. For those today who may doubt that the Sabbath will figure prominently in the final conflict between Christ and Satan, Theophilus Brabourne's work is a 400-year-old beacon and guide.

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Does Psalm 82 acknowledge that there are other deities with whom the Lord works and over whom He presides and rules?

Let me quote the two verses you seem to have in mind: “God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgments among the ‘gods’” (verse 1); “I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ But you will die as mere men” (verse 6). The New International Version puts quotation marks around the word “gods” in order to distinguish them from the true God.

Identifying those addressed by the Lord helps in gaining a better understanding of this psalm. Let’s look at the key issues.

1. The court is in session: Psalm 82 describes a judgment scene, and God is the presiding judge. The existence of a divine council where God sits in judgment and where decisions impact the lives of other creatures is biblical, as indicated by the stories of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-23) and Job (Job 1; 2; cf. Rev. 4; 5). This idea was also common among other ancient Near Eastern religions. In this psalm God is the judge (verse 8), and He is bringing to court the “gods” over whom He has unquestionable authority.

2. Legal charges are made: The “gods,” whoever they might be, are accused of two serious charges. First, they have not fulfilled their responsibility in preserving social justice but have rather protected the wicked and condemned the innocent (verse 2). Second, they are accused of blindness, that is, they lack the knowledge and wisdom to distinguish between what is right and wrong (verse 5). Consequently they are creating cosmic dissonance and instability (“All the foundations of the earth are shaken” [verse 5]).

3. Characteristics of the “gods”: Based on this psalm itself, we can say one thing about these powers: they are evil. They exist in the realm of darkness and lack true knowledge. Notice the phrase “They walk about in darkness” (verse 5), which expresses the idea of a permanent way of life. They exist in a state of rebellion against God’s established social order. Their lack of knowledge is not based on ignorance because the Lord told them what was expected from them (verses 3, 4); these “gods” are controlled by a spirit of rebellion.

Since the charges against the “gods” are of a social nature, one could conclude that in the subversion of justice they are working through the social institutions and through those placed there to enforce the laws. We have here a description of the powers who work behind the scenes in the social evils of our society and in the perversion of the legal system.

4. The use of the word “gods”: Now, back to the basic question— who are these “gods”? The word is used in the Old Testament in a variety of ways and not just to designate the true Israelite God or the gods of the pagan nations. Two of these usages are important in this case. First, it is used to refer to a representative of God. Moses stands in God’s place before Aaron and Pharaoh (Ex. 4:16; 7:1), and King David represents the Lord, who is the true king of Israel, before the people (Ps. 45:7). The judges of Israel also represented God as the one who, through them, judged the Israelites (e.g., Ex. 18:19; 1 Sam. 2:25; cf. Ps. 138:1; John 10:34-36).

The word is also used to designate spiritual powers from the underworld, the realm of the demonic. The spirit who came from the earth pretending to be Samuel is called a god by the sorcerer (1 Sam. 28:13; cf. Isa. 8:19). In the New Testament Paul seems to have these powers in mind when he says, “There are many ‘gods’” (1 Cor. 8:5), and in his use of the phrase “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Psalm 82 is a vivid description of spiritual and human powers who now operate through our social institutions to pervert justice and oppress the poor and the innocent. In the heavenly council the evidence against the wicked and the wicked one will be presented, and they will be convicted by this majestic court (verse 6). The divine social and cosmic order will one day be reinstated.

Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.

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Their eyes haunt me, innocent eyes piercing through the television screen. Eyes that are full of pain, resignation, sometimes bewilderment. Eyes that beg for someone to care. The faces change—Rwandan refugees, Romanian orphans, North Korean children—but the eyes remain the same. They search my soul.

Yet I sit on the couch and do nothing. I don't want to do nothing. I want to share my Special K casserole and chocolate-chip cookies. I want to hold the listless babies. I want to supply the village with clean water and modern medicine. I want to go out there and change the world for them.

I think, I am only a kid. What can a kid do? And so I turn away from the television, pick up my geometry book, and start studying about isotope triangles. But I cannot escape the eyes. They follow me to college. I decide to be a doctor. I will heal bodies. I will bring hope to the eyes.

I visualize myself in a mud hut giving inoculations to a line of children. The room is hot, and sweat is dripping down my face. The heat doesn't bother me, though, not when I look at the children. They are thin with dirty faces, but they are beautiful. I smile knowing that my injections will protect them from polio, typhoid, or some other awful disease. My life is finally one of fulfillment. I no longer have to watch idly, powerlessly, from the sidelines.

When I wake up to reality, I realize that my plan has some flaws. I hate biology, and looking at blood makes me faint. I find myself, instead, drawn to liberal arts. I reluctantly change majors. With a simple piece of paper and a few signatures, my dream is vanquished. Now I struggle to find a new direction for my life. I cringe when someone asks what I plan to do with my history major. "Save the children" sounds very limp to my ears. I'm sure she would like to be invited for a Sabbath hike—even if I do laugh too much.

I have no excuse not to. Even a history major can take the time to listen or to make a new friend. Yet becoming involved requires effort. It is much easier to sit in my idealistic cocoon because today I cannot help the children in Africa or the orphans in Romania. I can only wallow in guilt-free pity (the easiest kind). My pity even makes me feel good about myself. I'm a caring person, I can think smugly.

But that isn't enough for God. He didn't say "Blessed are you who thought about feeding Me when I was hungry" or "Blessed are you who wanted to visit Me when I was in jail." He didn't even say "Blessed are you who planned on inviting Me in when I was a stranger" (see Matt. 25:34-36). There will be no excuses at the Second Coming, because every day God gives us opportunities to help the hurting. We just need to open our eyes and get involved.

Sari Fordham is teaching in South Korea.