Why I Stay

10 reasons to be optimistic about the church
Thank you for breaking the routine with a special issue on the 27 Fundamental Beliefs.

The portion of the special issue devoted to our belief of stewardship underscored for me the apparent tendency for Adventists to apply this concept fairly narrowly. We nearly always apply the concept of stewardship to the management of financial and monetary resources (and occasionally the environment). While I do agree that we should be conscious in our use and management of money, I would like to suggest that good stewardship goes far beyond this. We are responsible to God for the proper use not only of money but also of our time, opportunities, abilities, and possessions. It is easy to forget that not only our money but everything that we “have” on this earth is essentially on loan to us. Understood more broadly, principles of good stewardship should fundamentally affect every aspect of the church’s ministry and of our personal lives.

—Jeffery Wright
Laurel, Maryland

The special issue was indeed “special.” What a delightful blending of artistry as seen in childhood vision, the lilt of poetic rhythm, the distilled wisdom encapsulated in modern proverbs, the intimate glimpses into anecdotes of Adventist life, and the well-chosen, crisp, prophetic gems. Truth became very much “present truth.”

I sensed that I was experiencing the type of presentations that must have delighted the common people in A.D. 30 who “heard gladly” the lessons of Jesus.

—Lester Bennett
La Grange, California

I am a pastor who is away from home most of the Sabbath. Normally I do not turn on the computer on this day.

When my wife and I arrived home today, Fresh 27 was in the mailbox. I just had to forward a line of appreciation. This issue is a hit! Surely a keeper. A fresh source of sermon references. It will also be replayed piece by piece in our church bulletins.

Thank you, Adventist Review editors and 200 contributors.

—Bill Skidmore
Via E-mail

I have been delighted with the Review. But this time I question having Mrs. E. G. White’s picture and quotations from her. For an Adventist it may pass, but non-Adventists may think we are following one woman, as one man accused me recently. She herself told the ministers to study the Word, study the Spirit of Prophecy, then preach it from the Word. Quotations from the Bible would have been better.

—Ruby Williams
Abbotsford, British Columbia

I was delighted to find Karen Ritchey’s picture and story on the cover of the Review (May NAD Edition). During an extended and often overwhelming illness her recordings of hope reached past my pain and despair to bring me comfort and peace. Thank you, Karen, for not allowing your song to be silenced; and thank you, Review, for telling her story.

—Janelle Scott
Aldergrove, British Columbia

Those who do not have access to the Internet and cannot view Karen’s website (www.members.cox.net/kritchey) can get information by calling Karen at (250) 491-0292.

Kinder, Gentler Church

There was a statement in Sharon Weaver Pittman’s article (May NAD Edition) that disturbed me: “Well-intentioned but untrained church members do their best to help those who are hurting, but they often feel frustrated and have a limited impact.” I must object to the statement on a couple grounds. First, the use of “well-intentioned” usually means people who mean well, but don’t have any business doing anything because they are such idiots they’ll only mess things up. Doesn’t this encourage Laodicean viewpoints when we tell members that love doesn’t matter in helping people, only whether
you've been trained or not?
Second, in my personal life, it is the
trained counselors that have had the
limited impact, not the "well-inten-
tioned" church members. The times I
have turned to professionals such as
pastors or teachers, I picked them
because I felt they had spiritual dis-
cernment or wisdom gained from years
of living, not because they were
trained. And even then, their guidance
has formed only a portion of the guid-
ance I have sought and received.

Much of the guidance I have received
through times of turmoil has been from
"well-intentioned" friends who loved
me. These people had lived through
many of the same things and were will-
ing to share God's grace. Thank God
they hadn't read the article's statement
and decided they didn't have an obliga-
tion to be there for me.

— Melody D. Snow
Via E-mail

Dear Pastor . . .
Royson James's article (May NAD
Edition) made reference to the number
of youth who will have slipped through
the "back doors." He called this "bleed-
ing." It's not just the hemorrhaging of
youth that impacts the body. The losses
are getting close to 55 percent.

In response to the article, I reply:
No, the seminary didn't equip the stu-
dents of my day to deal with this flood.
It was never mentioned. Yes, these are
more than James's "tell-tale signs of ero-
sion." Yes, it's difficult to identify what
exactly keeps the stayers, while it is
easy to quantify the accessions. But
other denominations' researchers are
doing it. No, there is no corporate
move to "penetrate the programs of
the local church" other than a few
emergency tourniquets occasionally.

May I suggest: 1. Refocus on the
priesthood of all believers. It
was a major plank in the Reformation plat-
form. It wasn't that it was attempted
and failed . . . rather it was never fully
attempted. 2. The small group plan
was given us by "One who cannot err"
(Testimonies, vol. 7, pp. 21, 22) for
both nurturing believers and for
numerical growth. Could He really
want us to corporately espouse such a
quiet plan, lacking fanfare?

— J. Fred Hughes
Lincoln City, Oregon

Forever Friends
I was really happy to see Ludi Leito's
article about NET '98 on the Internet
(May NAD Edition). However, I was a
little shocked to see no mention of
TAGnet in the article at all. Maybe you
were not aware, but all the servers, the
hard drive space, the software, and the
band width for the Web serving and the
live and archived video streaming were
provided to the NET '98 team free of
charge by TAGnet. TAGnet still hosts
the www.net98.org site as well. We
spent about $10,000 and hundreds of
hours of labor to make NET '98 on the
Internet a success. Three cheers for every-
one who helped to put NET '98 on the
Internet, including TAGnet!
— Sean Carney
President, TAGnet
Via E-mail

The Other Spring Meeting
I don't need a drum and an electric gui-
tar to make the three angels' messages
relevant. I'm 19, and I have grown up
in the Adventist Church, but as I read
Andy Nash's "The Other Spring
Meeting," tears came to my eyes. Our
message will be made real and relevant
by radically obeying God's will—not by
mixing up a cocktail of Ellen White,
the three angels' messages, drums, and
blue jeans. I want to be a part of a
movement of faith that will be victori-
ous over sin and finish this work. Let
Seventh-day Adventism be a faith that
will be victorious over sin and finish
this work, a faith that works by love
and not a feeling.

— Samuel Stapleton
Via E-mail

Land of Opportunities
Unprecedented church growth is
becoming commonplace in one of Asia's
most densely populated nations.
“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isa. 45:7, KJV).*

A pastor friend of mine drew my attention to the above passage during a recent visit to the General Conference. “It’s a troubling text for several in my congregation,” he said. “How about writing an editorial on it sometime?”

As you’ve probably already guessed, the issue here centers on the character of God. How can a good God “create evil”?

A Closer Look
Perhaps the first questions to ask are Why does the passage give us trouble? Why are we uncomfortable with it? A nd the simple answer is that, on its face, it seems to portray the character of Deity in terms that fall short of our expectations.

But whence came those lofty expectations that we have—those high moral and ethical standards against which we measure the character of Deity? A fter all, did we not each come into the world as helpless babes, our mind a tabula rasa, completely blank in regard to morals or ethics? Every moral concept we possess, every ethical sensibility that dwells within our breast, was acquired—imbibed from those who went before.

But did they invent the standards—those who went before us? N o, they didn’t. You may spend a lifetime probing every human civilization, but at the end of the day the quest will always lead inexorably to a divine Source—to God. It is God who, through His Spirit, makes us sensitive to right and wrong, to good and evil. A nd because the Bible is the preeminent inspired medium through which we come to know that, a red flag immediately goes up whenever we happen upon a text that seems to contradict the overriding sentiment of the whole.

W hen that happens, the first order of business should be to reexamine our own interpretation.

Watch the Context
The Hebrew term for “evil” in our passage is rā, and occurs at least 17 times throughout the book of Isaiah. It means “evil,” “wickedness,” “harm,” “injury,” “calamity.” A s in the case with English terms that carry multiple meanings, we must allow context to determine the particular nuance a word requires in each place. The English word “sentence,” for example, may mean one thing in a book of English grammar, and quite another in a set of court documents. M oreover, beneath the denotation (or raw definition) of a word lies its connotation (its more subtle drift).

So how does the Bible student know when to make the critical shift? The answer is context. In Isaiah 13:11 the Lord says: “I will punish the world for its evil [rā]”; in 32:7, “The scoundrel’s methods are wicked [rā]”; and in 56:2, “Blessed is the man who . . . keeps his hand from doing any evil [rā].” Such clues about God’s attitude to evil call upon the translator to treat a passage such as Isaiah 45:7 with special finesse, to allow for a more subtle semantic drift.

T hat’s exactly what the translators of the New International Version did when they came to the clause, rendering it: “I bring prosperity and create disaster.”

In so translating, the NIV (like many other modern versions) gives full weight to the passage’s immediate context, whose theme is the restoration of Israel following the Captivity. In the narrative (beginning back in chapter 44) God singles out Cyrus, king of Persia (more than a century before his birth), as His special agent; and the words of our opening text are ensconced in a message to him. T he gist of that message was that no one—especially not Cyrus—should doubt God’s omnipotence (see Isa. 45:1-6). A nd verses 6 and 7 then encapsulate God’s crowning affirmation: “I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity” (NKJV).

A nd the calamity in question had already been spelled out in the text: God subdues nations, strips kings of their armor, levels mountains, breaks down gates of bronze, and cuts through bars of iron (see verses 1, 2).

B ut evil in the sense of corruption or wickedness is foreign to God’s nature. For it is He who calls believers to the highest level of spiritual attainment.

* Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture passages in this editorial are from the New International Version.
The question I hear more than any other these days is “Are you Y2K-ready?”

I’m sure that you’ve heard all the alarmists talking about events connected with the midnight hour, A.D. 2000—planes crashing, water and utility systems malfunctioning, and all kinds of other terrible things.

However, I’m asking a greater question. Are you RFJ2C? Are you ready for Jesus to come?

I don’t wish to appear flippant about the computer problem of A.D. 2000, but the question of whether or not we are ready for Jesus to come is the larger question. If we are RFJ2C, then we are prepared to handle any other life situation.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). I well remember a woman back in the sixties who had become a specialist in “the time of trouble.” She knew all about prophecies and attended every meeting on the subject she could. She began to warn her friends that the banks were going to fail and that food supplies would run low. Her constant worry was “Can I get through the time of trouble?”

I saw her not long ago. She was still worried. Thirty years of wasted worry and energy, I thought to myself; time better spent having a relationship with Jesus than worrying about the future.

Oh, the time of trouble is coming; and just because it’s been delayed doesn’t mean that it isn’t real. But to focus on these events is the wrong preparation for facing them.

Jesus said, “Be not therefore anxious for the morrow. . . . Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34, RV).

A gain and again in Scripture the Lord tells us to fear not. Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear brings with it doubt, the opposite of trust. And doubt brings inner turmoil, the opposite of peace. The peace Jesus gives us, if we have faith in Him, will save us through all the tumults of life.

Yes, Jesus would have us move forward in a state of peace, no matter what world conditions are. If the world suffers financial collapse, if Social Security and private retirement programs fail, we can still have peace when we trust Him completely.

We mustn’t look to the things of this earth, the economy, our savings or income, as the sources of our security. God is our strength; our security is in Him alone. In Him we must put our trust, and as we do, we will find peace even in turmoil.

I recently read these words: “If you have given yourself to God, to do His work, you have no need to be anxious for tomorrow. He whose servant you are knows the end from the beginning. The events of tomorrow, which are hidden from your view, are open to the eyes of Him who is omnipotent.

“When we take into our hands the management of things with which we have to do, and depend upon our own wisdom for success, we are taking a burden which God has not given us, and are trying to bear it without His aid. We are taking upon ourselves the responsibility that belongs to God, and thus are really putting ourselves in His place. We may well have anxiety and anticipate danger and loss, for it is certain to befall us. But when we really believe that God loves us and means to do us good we shall cease to worry about the future. We shall trust God as a child trusts a loving parent. Then our troubles and torments will disappear, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God” (Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 100, 101).

So let’s face the future—the new millennium—with renewed faith in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. That faith will help us meet the challenges of these difficult and complicated times.

Are you RFJ2C?

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

James W. Gilley is president of the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference.

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Arkansas-Louisiana Conference.
Hey, kids! Herald the Review angel is back, and Herald’s trumpet is once again hidden somewhere in this magazine.

In our last contest (May 27 AnchorPoints Edition), we had 24 entries. Our three winners were: Ryan Aqui from College Place, Washington; Cole Bodner from Kasson, Minnesota; and Jessi Webb from Kenny Lakes, Alaska. Ryan, Cole, and Jessi received Danger on Seventh Street, a Pacific Press book by Jerry D. Thomas. Where was the trumpet? On page 29.

If you can find the trumpet this time, send your postcard to Herald’s Trumpet at the Give & Take address on this page. The prize is an Adventist Review cap!

Look for the three winners’ names in the August 12 World Edition. Have fun searching—and keep trumpeting Jesus’ love!

— Richard H. Utt, Loma Linda, California

HELP! HELP!

We’re running low in some Give & Take categories. We can especially use brief submissions to:

A dventist Q uotes (profound or spontaneous)

A dventist L ife (anecdotes—especially from the world of adults)

D ream C enter (church-related dreams)

J ots & T ittles (church-related tips)

R eaders’ E xchange (requests for correspondence on a specific topic)

A nd we can always use church-related photos and captions, short poems, and other fast-paced items. Send submissions (which won’t be returned) to Give & Take, A dventist Review, 12501 O ld C olumbia Pike, Silver Spring, M D 20904; fax: 301-680-6638; e-mail: 74617.15@compuserve.com.

A D V E N T I S T Q U O T E S

“I really didn’t have any alternative. You see, my grandma was praying for me.”

— a young man at his rebaptism service, Tolstoy, South Dakota

“Mom, just imagine how long a pastor’s prayer is when they get in bed at night.”

— 8-year-old C hristopher Wetmore, Silver Spring, M aryland

“Well, Sarah, that’s acceptable in the constitution of the remission of sins.”

— 4-year-old S tephanie D ruget, Galesburg, Illinois, to her 6-year-old sister, who had just said that she hopes M ommy and D addy never kiss on the lips— gross!

H E R A L D ’ S T R U M P E T

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Why I Stay
Ten things to think about before you give up on the church.

BY REINDER BRUINSMA

O BE HONEST, AT TIMES I AM FRUSTRATED with my church. Sometimes I feel it is somewhat out of tune with the times and the world I live in. Sometimes I get upset by its bureaucratic procedures and what I perceive as frequent failures to deal decisively with important issues. I wish my church could settle the issue of women’s ordination (yes, I’m one of those people) and deal with a few other hot potatoes. And I often wonder why the church allows its fundamentalist fringe to set so much of its agenda. And yes, I need a double or triple portion of grace to interact with some people in the church.

But in spite of these and other things, I’m happy with my church; it’s been part of my life from my earliest childhood. The church has given structure to my life. Most (probably too much) of my social life is in the church. The church has been a good employer. I have had interesting and challenging assignments on several continents and have, in the process, traveled the world. I have not become rich, but the church has provided me with a reasonable remuneration and has, usually, been quite fair to me.

I realize, however, that these factors alone cannot be decisive when I ask myself the question Do I want to stay in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Many leave the church or are not sure whether they want to stay.

But what about me? I’ve asked myself that question from time to time, and I have arrived at 10 reasons that I want to stay with the church.

1. I want to be a Christian.

It all begins with this basic realization: I am a religious being. Of course, I am affected by the rampant secularism in today’s society. I hear the voices that say that God is dead, or at best an absentee landlord, or an impersonal spiritual dimension of the reality around us. But I have made a choice: I want to be a Christian.

I believe in a God who is the originator of everything; the Creator to whom I am accountable. I believe He has met my most fundamental needs by entering this world in His Son, Jesus Christ. I admire many facets of other world religions, but I strongly believe that the religion of Jesus Christ is unique. “There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV).

2. I want to be an evangelical Christian.

Looking at the hundreds of different denominations, I conclude that what I would call “a diluted Christianity.” In many churches the Bible is no longer viewed as the authoritative word of God. I would find it impossible to belong to a church that treats the Bible as a storybook that may contain edifying stories but does not necessarily reflect any historical reality. I believe in the God of the Bible, who is both infinite and near.

I cannot be content with a belief in some impersonal spiritual force. I’m eager to call upon a God who is both my Creator and my Father. I find little attraction in believing in a Christ who may have been a good man, but was not the divine Mediator who came to deal in a final way with my sin. I want to be a Christian of what we today would call the “evangelical” variety.
I don’t believe that the Adventist Church provides the only gateway into heaven. Nor do I believe that my church has the truth in an absolute sense. Only God knows the full truth. We will always be searching for better, but human—and thus imperfect—ways of expressing divine truth. But I believe that in this respect the Seventh-day Adventist Church is definitely ahead of other Christian communities. Together with many others, Adventists embrace the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith.

But in addition, we’ve been led to a much fuller understanding of a number of specific truths that are so important that they must be shared with as many as possible: the perpetuity of God’s law, including the seventh-day Sabbath; the great controversy worldview and all this entails; the belief in the soon coming of Christ; and the integration of theology and lifestyle are some of the important aspects of biblical truth that I cherish.

One of the sad things in many denominations is that they seem to have lost their sense of mission. Many Christian churches are no longer expanding but are simply fighting for survival. Some seem to have lost their way entirely and appear to have conceded the fact that they probably are a generation or less away from extinction. By comparison, the Adventist Church is a dynamic movement. Every day more than 2,000 new members swell its ranks.

As I write, the church has 10.3 million members. Why does our church grow so rapidly? Because it has retained a sense of mission— it’s going somewhere. I know I shouldn’t let myself be carried away by an uncritical euphoria. The growth of the church is very uneven. In some Western countries, particularly among Caucasians, the church hardly grows, if at all. And the
church faces tremendous challenges in the world of Islam, as well as in the great urban centers all over the globe. Nonetheless, Adventism is on the move, and it’s great to be part of it.

1. I know the dangers of an “institutionalized” church. We must never forget that the church is, first and foremost, people and local congregations, evangelism and spiritual nurture. But the church is more. It has responsibilities vis-à-vis its own members and toward the world. It must work for the poor and needy. It has much to offer in areas of health care and health education, and education in general.

2. I am acutely aware of the challenges the church faces in many of its institutions—challenges in the areas of finances, human resources, and philosophy. But having visited hundreds of Adventist schools, hospitals, and ADRA projects in more than 60 countries, those concerns are eclipsed by a sense of pride and gratitude. It is truly great to belong to a church that has integrated the activities of “heart” and “hand” on such a global scale.

3. If religion is to be meaningful, it must be relevant. The Adventist Church must face the ongoing challenge to ensure that its message is “present truth”—that it speaks to the real needs of people who enter the twenty-first century. Long before the word “wholistic” became part of today’s vocabulary, Adventists developed their doctrine of the fundamental unity of body, “soul,” and mind.

4. That care for the body has a religious dimension is part of the genius of Adventism. It is, unfortunately, true that the Adventist lifestyle principles have often been reduced to a list of do’s and don’ts. The church must continue to reiterate the underlying principles and challenge its members to apply these, freely and responsibly, in their own situation. This wholistic approach to religion not only appeals to me, but in particular to many who belong to a younger generation.

The Young and the Restless
By Katie Torkelsen

Where spiritual life is concerned, I agree with those who say that a relationship with Christ is most important. However, a relationship with the church is also vital to one’s spiritual journey. My own spirituality is an intricate intertwining of Christ and the church. The church plays an important part in my life, and I’m proud to be a Seventh-day Adventist.

Over a recent vacation I had a number of encounters with friends, and we had great fun reminiscing. As we talked, the topic of religion tended to pop up. Comments ranged from “People at church are so fake,” and “Everyone is so judgmental,” to “That just isn’t important to me right now,” and “I’ve got too many other things to worry about to think about all those rules too.”

At times it seemed as if I were the only person my age with an appreciation for the church and what it represents. I began to wonder what makes some of us embrace the Seventh-day Adventist Church and others shun it. My generation appears to personify the expression “the young and the restless,” searching for something just out of reach.

I decided to get some facts from some of my classmates, to try to understand both sides of the issue. Some have a God-given joy that I admire and sometimes envy. Some have had a less than satisfactory experience in church and with those who claim to be Christians. I posed a few questions to a class of 25 students, and their responses really spoke to me. I asked about both positive and negative experiences with the church, as well as what they would do to make Adventism appeal to more young people.

The negative experiences gave a voice to some interesting sentiments. Five of the students commented from their classmate, to try to understand both sides of the issue. Some have a God-given joy that I admire and sometimes envy. Some have had a less than satisfactory experience in church and with those who claim to be Christians. I posed a few questions to a class of 25 students, and their responses really spoke to me. I asked about both positive and negative experiences with the church, as well as what they would do to make Adventism appeal to more young people.

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I, for one, am grateful for the clear trend of focusing ever more clearly on Christ. Related to this is the shift from an emphasis on works as a means to salvation to a focus on grace as the foundation of our redemption. A study of Adventist history reveals that this shift did not happen overnight, and it did not come about without tension. And anyone who has analysed present-day Adventism knows that even now there are pockets in the church where legalism and righteousness by works continue to exact their spiritual toll. But, thank God, as Adventism has matured, it has become increasingly Christ-centered. If there's any place where Ellen White has played a truly prophetic role, it is here. Not all change is positive, but a total absence of change is the very worst that can happen. The world of the twenty-first century differs dramatically from life in the nineteenth or the mid-twentieth century. Fortunately, the church has changed as time has gone by. Seventh-day Adventists are not like the Amish, who have stopped the clock and refuse to look at the calendar. We have changed in what we believe, as our doctrinal positions crystallized. We have changed in the way we are organized, as the small Advent movement of our pioneers became a world church. We have changed in the way we “do” church. We have changed in the way we communicate our message. As some have noted, there doesn’t seem to be a real concern with being Christian anymore. That’s a scary thought. On the positive side, praises focused on relationships with individual churches—especially with pastors. A “friendly, caring” pastor who “shows true concern” is highly valued. The junior mentioned in the previous paragraph also explained, “My pastor is one of the most loving people I know.” Another individual appreciated how “the church family accepted me into the church and allowed me to love God in my own way.” Some mentioned that they appreciated the family-like atmosphere in their church and the lifelong support they’ve experienced. My final question: “What would you say to church leaders about what needs to be done to make Adventism appeal to young people?” The two big requests were for honesty and for leaders to lead by example. As Jamie, a junior music major, requested: “Live your lives so we want to follow. Show us God, not rules.” Chad thought a balance between the old and new would improve the situation. Kelly, a sophomore in education, suggested that we “forget all the politics and remember that we are here to serve and worship God.” So how does this information affect you? What do these views mean for Adventism? I believe these opinions need to be noted and acted on. I’m not advocating a major renovation of our church system to accommodate the desires of one generation. However, there needs to be a team effort in churches everywhere to include everyone—the old, the young, the professionals, the students—in creating a church that ministers to the needs that already exist. We need to be open and honest with each other, willing to listen and willing to imagine the possibilities. Most of all, we need to fix our focus on Jesus Christ and strive to follow in His footsteps. I began this piece with feelings of frustration. I felt alone in my dedication to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But I discovered that many of my peers have a vision of how things should be. They still believe in our church. I like the way Steve put it: “Adventism is cool because it appeals to the truth. If we can continue our search for truth, and in our personal spirituality I think love would be more prevalent and Jesus would be honored. Besides, if we have the best, would we want anything else? There’s safety in the truth.” My generation may be young, and we may be restless, but we still seek the truth.

Katie Torkelsen is a junior communication major at Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington.

expressed frustration with the lack of “considering change as a possibility.” Several had a problem with the way some church members tend to have a holier-than-thou attitude. Those who seem to think that obeying all the little rules is the way to God also failed to make it on anyone’s list of “highly appreciated people.” A statement that caught me slightly off guard came from a junior humanities major who observed that “there doesn’t seem to be a real concern with being Christian anymore.” That’s a scary thought. On the positive side, praises focused on relationships with individual churches—especially with pastors. A “friendly, caring” pastor who “shows true concern” is highly valued. The junior mentioned in the previous paragraph also explained, “My pastor is one of the most loving people I know.” Another individual appreciated how “the church family accepted me into the church and allowed me to love God in my own way.” Some mentioned that they appreciated the family-like atmosphere in their church and the lifelong support they’ve experienced. My final question: “What would you say to church leaders about what needs to be done to make Adventism appeal to young people?” The two big requests were for honesty and for leaders to lead by example. As Jamie, a junior music major, requested: “Live your lives so we want to follow. Show us God, not rules.” Chad thought a balance between the old and new would improve the situation. Kelly, a sophomore in education, suggested that we “forget all the politics and remember that we are here to serve and worship God.” So how does this information affect you? What do these views mean for Adventism? I believe these opinions need to be noted and acted on. I’m not advocating a major renovation of our church system to accommodate the desires of one generation. However, there needs to be a team effort in churches everywhere to include everyone—the old, the young, the professionals, the students—in creating a church that ministers to the needs that already exist. We need to be open and honest with each other, willing to listen and willing to imagine the possibilities. Most of all, we need to fix our focus on Jesus Christ and strive to follow in His footsteps. I began this piece with feelings of frustration. I felt alone in my dedication to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But I discovered that many of my peers have a vision of how things should be. They still believe in our church. I like the way Steve put it: “Adventism is cool because it appeals to the truth. If we can continue our search for truth, and in our personal spirituality I think love would be more prevalent and Jesus would be honored. Besides, if we have the best, would we want anything else? There’s safety in the truth.” My generation may be young, and we may be restless, but we still seek the truth.

Katie Torkelsen is a junior communication major at Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington.
However, despite what some say, the past cannot be re-enacted. And too often the past is idealized by people who have only a vague knowledge of the actual facts. We can always learn from history, and we can hardly expect to understand the present if we have no inkling of the past.

Seventh-day Adventism has a fascinating history. It contains pages of human weakness and even error, but the underlying thread is one of vision and dynamism. All of the players were sinners, but many were true heroes of faith and inspiring leaders, often at enormous personal sacrifice.

How true are the well-known words of Ellen G. White: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history” (Life Sketches, p. 196).

Seventh-day Adventism is not only concerned with the past and the present. It looks toward the future. I confess that I’m not very interested in a precise timetable of last-day events. But I am interested in our eternal future.

The Adventist understanding of history and the great truth of the second coming of Christ provide a framework that gives meaning and hope. Therefore I love to sing that hymn that was first composed for the 1962 General Conference session: “We have this hope that burns within our hearts, hope in the coming of the Lord.”

These are, briefly, 10 reasons that I want to stay in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church is far from perfect. But after surveying my options, I must conclude that I have no viable alternative: However imperfect it may be, this is the community where I belong.

Reinder Bruinsma is secretary of the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He lives in St. Albans, England.
suspect that one of the elders in my local church is abusing his family. I don’t have any proof of this, but I have an uneasy feeling every time I am around this man and his children.

Where should I go with this?
You have brought up a very complicated issue. On the one hand, if you rush in and make unwarranted accusations, you stand the chance of bringing pain and humiliation to a potentially blameless party. On the other hand, if your suspicions are grounded in reality and you do not act, innocent children will continue to suffer.

The description of the children that you paint in your letter is consistent with the profile of abused persons. Their inability to assert themselves, their refusal to meet their father’s eyes, their fear when he is in the room tend to make one begin to question the nature of the relationship. In one study, children were asked to hold their right arms straight out, horizontal to their bodies. The questioner then left the room. When he returned several minutes later a few of the children were still holding their arms out straight, although they were obviously uncomfortable. These were the children who did not dare make a decision on their own, who feared the consequences should they “disobey”; who, in fact, came from abusive backgrounds.

While we as Christians believe that children ought to be taught obedience, there is an unhealthy line that can be crossed if a parent believes that all family members must think and act alike at all costs. A spouse or child who dares not voice an opinion, ask a question, suggest a preference, lives in fear of noncompliance. Such an atmosphere provides the context for emotional, physical, or verbal abuse.

While many of the surface signs that you have observed suggest the possibility that an unhealthy situation is occurring in the home of this man, I would advise you to move cautiously. The most important thing to do right now is to get to know this family as intimately as possible. Ask them to dinner. Invite the children to your home. Begin to open the circle of your family to include theirs.

Generally, when abuse is occurring, families begin to isolate themselves from others. Tight, restrictive lines are drawn around the perimeter of the home. Access both in and out of the small circle is highly restricted, as the abusing party fears losing control. A church body it is important that we begin to recognize “marginalized” families. While a particular family member may have a high profile within the church, such as elder, Sabbath school teacher, or even Pathfinder leader, the family as a unit may be “closed off” to others. This is the time to reach out, listen carefully, begin to draw out individual family members.

I am well acquainted with a number of individuals, now middle-aged, who grew up in “good Seventh-day Adventist homes,” with fathers who were well respected by the congregation, yet whose spirit of vindictiveness and abuse at home permanently scarred their offspring. The question that haunts these grown children, decades later, is “Why didn’t anybody do anything? Didn’t anyone in the congregation suspect anything at all?”

Again, you cannot afford to rush in and make ungrounded accusations. But neither can you afford to let the matter rest. I am convinced that if you make this family a matter of daily prayer, and continue to find ways to become closer and closer to the members, you will begin to approach deeper levels of understanding of the types of behavior occurring behind closed doors. If you begin to note things that cause you further concern, then it is time to bring the matter to the pastor and develop a plan for addressing the problem.

Thank you for writing this letter. You have taken the first step. You have refused to turn the other way in the face of something that makes you uneasy. Would that more church members would open their eyes.

Sandra Doran holds a doctoral degree in education and is an author and educator who lives in Massachusetts with her husband and two sons.
Winning the Race

BY THOMAS L. BROOKS

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24-27, NIV).

TAKE A MOMENT AND IMAGINE THAT you have set yourself a goal to run the 500 meters at the next Summer Olympics. Waking up, you start your training by having a hearty breakfast. Then, stretching out on your favorite recliner, you turn on the VCR and watch people run (hoping to get a few pointers). A few minutes go by, and you figure you have done enough for the day. You push yourself up out of your chair and wander into the kitchen for a quick snack (to build up your energy, of course). You then head back to your favorite recliner, kick back, and flip the channels on the TV to your favorite program. You say to yourself that tomorrow is soon enough to actually start running.

A year goes by with the same routine. Finally you are at the track, ready to run in the Olympic trials. You step up to the starting line. The starter fires the gun, and in a rush you jump up and charge down the track . . . for a step or two. You stop for a moment to get your breath back. You scream, “I’m going to win! I’m going to win!” You leap down the track . . . and trip. Frustrated, you get up and wander off.

Mumbling “Next time, next time,” you head over to the refreshment stand for a quick energy boost.

Sound ridiculous? I hope so. Yet I wonder how closely it parallels our Christian life. We grab our Bible, study books, yellow highlighter, and pen to do some studying in preparation for bringing the good news to others. Pausing for a moment, we turn on the VCR to watch someone give an evangelistic sermon (just to get a few pointers). A short time later we push ourselves up from our favorite recliner and head to the kitchen for a quick snack (to build up our energy, of course). Distracted, we tell ourselves that tomorrow will be soon enough to “get down to some serious studying.”

Somewhere down the line we have an opportunity to witness. We charge out of the blocks, find a person who listens to us as we quote a few favorite Bible verses. Our listener asks a question. Fumbling with the Bible, we quickly flip the flimsy pages, stumbling for just the right answer. The person chuckles and walks away. Frustrated, we mumble “Next time, next time,” as we sit down and turn on another favorite TV episode.

Paul tells us in the verses above to “run in such a way as to get the prize.” He is not speaking of some halfhearted effort just to run in the race, but of an agonizing, intense, purposeful struggle to win the race. Before we can run, though, we must know in which race we are going to run. In other words, what is our goal? Simply put, our goal is pleasing God. No matter where we go, no matter what we do, we have one goal . . . pleasing God.

What will our prize be? There is only one prize. That prize is eternal life . . . the crown that will last forever. To win
this prize we must work tirelessly.
Listed here are three ways to accomplish this. First, we pray constantly. All we have to do is ask and God will give us the guidance and help we need (Matt. 7:7, 8).

Next, we study tirelessly. How can we learn anything God has said to us if we have not studied His Word (Dan. 10:12; 1 Cor. 2:13; John 7:16, 17)?

Finally, we worship tirelessly. Worship allows us to keep our eyes on our goal of pleasing God (Heb. 12:28).

Paul makes the point that we cannot just tell others to do these things, we must do them ourselves. We must get out there and run the race, not just watch the race through a pair of $50 binoculars while shouting words of encouragement and advice to those who are running.

Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8 that he won the race. Are you going to win the race? Are you ready to go charging down the track with your arms pumping, your legs beating the ground, and your lungs screaming for air? Do not put off your training any longer. Do it now.

On your mark . . .
Get set. . .
Go!
Does your family take family vacations? My family tries to take one every summer. Sometimes we go with another family. It’s more fun for the kids because they have someone to play with and it’s easier on the grown-ups because they can share the work.

People aren’t the only creatures who take vacations. Canada geese take a long family vacation every year, and goose families often vacation together. They take their trip in the fall, and some of them usually travel right over our house. For several weeks every fall the sky is filled with the sight of their trademark V formations and the sounds of their honking as they head south for the winter. Sometimes the V’s are small, with only five or six geese traveling together. But usually the V’s are larger. The larger V’s are made of two or more families traveling together.

Canada geese make the long trip south together so they can share the load. All that flying is hard work, but geese know it’s easier if they do it together. The goose who flies at the front of the V formation has to work the hardest because it has to break the air. But the geese farther back in the V get uplift off the wings of the birds in front of them. It’s an easier ride back there. So the geese take turns with the hard part. When the bird in the lead position gets tired it falls back into the formation, and another goose moves up to take its place. By working together like this, geese can go much farther without stopping than they could if they flew alone.

And all that honking? The geese at the back of the V honk to encourage the ones up front to keep up their speed. It’s as if they’re saying, “Keep it up! You’re doing a good job! And we’re here to help you out when you need it!”

There’s another way Canada geese help each other on the long trip south. If a bird gets sick or hurt, two other geese will fly with it to the ground to help and protect it. They will not leave until the goose is either well enough to fly again, or until it dies.

The Bible tells those of us in God’s family to help each other, too. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2, NIV). Take turns with the hard part. Work together so that you can go farther. Encourage each other. Help and protect each other. And not just when you’re on vacation.

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**Family Time**

- With your family’s help, make a list of 10 ways that your church family works together or helps each other.
- Ask the adults in your family to tell you of a time that another member of God’s family helped them in a special way. How did that make them feel?
- Read a Bible story about a member of God’s family who didn’t want anyone to know it: Luke 22:54-62. How do you think Peter felt about his actions? How do you think Jesus felt? Have you ever been afraid to admit you were a member of God’s family? Why?
- Think about someone in your church family who might need help or encouragement in a special way. What can your family do to help that person?
The planting of a Seventh-day Adventist Messianic synagogue in the Broward/Dade County area of south Florida has been accomplished during the first year of a three-year initiative for Jewish evangelism in the Florida Conference. About 400 persons recently gathered at the South Broward church in Hollywood, Florida, for a “spiritual groundbreaking and dedication.”

The South Broward church was chosen to begin reaching Florida’s Jewish community. Three fourths of Florida’s 1 million-plus Jews live in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. The church name has already changed to reflect its mission. This happened while South Broward pastor Michael Curzon and Pastor Mordecai DuShey, both Jewish, were driving to Orlando one afternoon. The Holy Spirit impressed each man to pray several times during the trip. Suddenly both began to speak about the name change of South Broward—one completing the words of the other. There it was—Temple of the Advent Hope, a Seventh-day Adventist Congregation.

NEW DEDICATION: Elders and members pray to claim the property for the service of the Lord.

That very name is a mission statement of the coming of the Lord. DuShey is the Florida Conference Jewish evangelism coordinator who is working with the pastors and members in south Florida, St. Petersburg, and Orlando. “What we’re doing here in Florida concerning the Jewish Outreach transcends Florida,” says DuShey. “It extends to every conference, every union conference, and every nation throughout the Adventist denomination. As my namesake of old, Mordecai, looked to Esther to save the Jews of old, I look to the Seventh-day Adventist Church to become a latter-day Esther in a saving interaction with our Saviour to reach the Jews of today.”

Dedication Weekend

On Friday evening, October 2, 1998, members and guests gathered to dedicate their building and themselves to the new mission. People hurried into the small sanctuary claiming their seats. The ushering in of the Sabbath filled the sanctuary with songs of praise and worship. All the seats were filled; many had to sit in the overflow room.

MESSIAH HAS COME: Fred Liebovitz, 87, previously held back his commitment to the Messiah. He had wrestled with the differences between the Christian Messiah and the Jewish Messiah. Did he have to become a Christian before he could accept the Hebrew Messiah? Would he have to stop being Jewish? After studying with Pastor Mordecai DuShey, he realized that he is simply a Jew who found his Hebrew Messiah, no different from Saul (Paul), Kefa (Peter), or Mattiyahu (Matthew).

“I am surprised that the church still lets you keep your Hebrew name, Mordecai,” remarked Liebovitz. He felt the church was very Jewish (because of the Sabbath and the sanctuary) and wanted to make that commitment and worship on the Sabbath, as an Adventist. Pictured second from right is member Robert Lee, who has faithfully brought Liebovitz to church each week.
Four Jewish men led out in praise and worship of the Creator Yeshua—Jesus’ Hebrew name. Some wore their kippa, a small skullcap worn by men as a mark of reverence and a reminder that each one is an ambassador of Adonai (Lord).

One of the four men was Rabbi Lenny Libman (right). Months before, the Lord used a newspaper article to bring Libman to the Temple of the Advent Hope. He then attended the NeXt Millennium Seminar (NET ’98) and was baptized by pastors Curzon and DuShey. The news of this baptism and the outreach of the Temple of the Advent Hope was carried around the globe as NeXt Millennium speaker Dwight Nelson read the faxed message to the audience.

A policeman for seven years, Libman believed so strongly in the Hebrew Messiah of his forebears that he had already become a Messianic rabbi. He had been studying and learning about the sanctuary and was led to the Temple of the Advent Hope because of Adventists’ belief in the Sabbath and the sanctuary message.

“God has opened a door. Unbeknownst to me, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a mission to reach the Jewish people with the gospel message. It is a ‘God-incidence’ that I am here,” says Libman. “I find that the message is very Jewish and very scriptural, right out of the Hebrew Scriptures, and it is this that led me to become a part of this work and part of this church.”

DuShey opened the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition and shared the vision of the Temple of the Advent Hope. Then Clifford Goldstein, a Jew and former editor of Liberty magazine, shared his dramatic and unique conversion story. A child of the sixties and seventies, he unashamedly heckled Christians in public. After Goldstein crisscrossed Europe, lived in an Israeli kibbutz, his life changed after he observed the lives of two dedicated Christians. He accepted Yeshua as his Saviour and today uses his talents as a writer and editor for the church.

The Dedication
A large white tent stretched over the property adjacent to the current building marked where the new temple will be built. The Temple of the Advent Hope will house an 800-to-1,000-seat sanctuary with state-of-the-art media capabilities, church offices, the Jewish Outreach office, classrooms, fellowship hall, kitchen, music rooms, elders’ room, and nursery. Future projects include the Shalom Learning Center, Shalom Health Center, and the Clinton Hicks Memorial Fitness Center. The late Clinton Hicks was head elder and a spiritual leader who was supportive of the Jewish work.

The dedication day was a high day, full of awe, emotion, love, and baptisms. Rabbi Lenny Libman, his wife, and family were surrounded by the church elders and conference leadership and prayed over for protection and direction. Dedicatory prayers ascended for the temple and the Jewish ministry. And there were baptisms—two Jewish men, Fred Liebovitz and Ben-Hayil Yellen; a newly married couple, Dwight and Dee Nelson; and Curzon’s daughter, Miriam. Other Jewish believers committed themselves to study the Word.

Curzon and DuShey are delighted to see the ministry move forward dynamically, and they watch eagerly to see what the Lord will do next.
Arizona Legislature Passes Religious Freedom Restoration Act

O n May 19 Arizona governor Jane Hull signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act into law, marking another success for the diverse religious coalition that supports this legislation. Arizona becomes the most recent of several states to pass such a law in its latest legislative session.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act is designed to protect citizens from government interference in the free exercise of religion. It seeks to provide protection for the religious rights of citizens as defined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This legislation was sent to the state level after being struck down by Congress in 1997.

With fees starting at approximately $30, maybe the Alibi Agency will attract business. Quizzed on the ethics of such an operation, the businessman said he was just making an honest buck by providing such a service.

But it’s a sad reflection on the way we are. People ready to cheat and lie, and to betray the most intimate of personal relationships; a society that sees nothing wrong with adultery as long as you don’t get caught and have a good alibi, whether bought or not; an age that sees morals as a temporary convenience—useful at times, but not particularly necessary.

A society of a time that approaches that predicted: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, ... boastful, proud, abusive, ... without love, ... slanderous, without self-control, ... not lovers of the good, treacherous, ... conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:1-4, NIV). Rather, it should be that “we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception,” following the counsel, “Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind” (2 Cor. 4:2; 1 Peter 2:1, NIV).

Who needs alibis?

North American Student Dies at Newbold College

T he students and faculty at Newbold College in Bracknell, Berkshire, England, are stunned by the tragic death of a North American student. On June 5 Tammy Allen, a business student, was involved in an accident on the campus that resulted in a fatal fall.

Allen, 22, apparently fell awkwardly while climbing up the side of the women’s residence. College staff and an ambulance were immediately called.

Suffering from severe head injuries, Allen was taken by ambulance to the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading and then to Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, where she underwent surgery. A liver surgery was put on a life-support machine. Allen died on Sunday, June 6. Her parents, Charles and Kaye Allen, were at her bedside.

“The Newbold community is in shock at this unexpected
Adventist World Radio

Dear friends at AWR: “I’ve found myself drawn to AWR broadcasts because I feel you give messages of love and hope and provide stories that are uplifting, interesting, and expressed in a kind and concerned way.”—Ian, Australia.

“You have a friendly voice. My family and I often listen to your programs. They have taught us many things and are rich and meaningful. Moreover, your speakers use very good Chinese.”—Wai Eun, China.

“I am a new convert. I am not very well acquainted with God’s teachings. But as I have listened to God’s Word on your station I have been greatly blessed.”—Liu Chan, China.

Too Hot for Children

While you may find a hot bath relaxing, young children should be bathed in warm water, not hot. Scalds are the leading cause of accidental death in the home for children under age 4. Infant skin is thinner and more fragile than an adult’s, so it can burn at temperatures that may feel comfortable to adults. Proper safety precautions include setting your water heater’s thermostat to no more than 125˚F and testing infants’ bathwater by moving your forearm through it. The recommended bathwater temperature for babies is about 100˚F.—University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

The Eyes Need It

If you have diabetes, have an eye examination every year. About half of the 16 million Americans with the disease develop diabetic retinopathy, which can lead to early blindness. Early treatment can usually prevent serious vision loss.—Johns Hopkins Health Letter.

“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.
Death of a Saleswoman

God doesn’t force square pegs into round holes.

BY JENNIFER GILL FORDHAM

The following is one of some 17 additional articles (beyond the top three winners) accepted in our 1998 AnchorPoints Essay Contest for younger writers. We run it here under Theology.—Editors.

I AM NO SALESWOMAN. I HATE SELLING things. When I was a child, my most dreaded part of the year was when my church school—or children’s choir, or any other Christian nonprofit organization—began its annual fund-raising drive. Whether it was popcorn or first-aid kits, chocolate candy or fruit, I hated the idea of calling friends, neighbors, and sometimes even strangers to coerce them into supporting my meager project.

A Sudden Sinking Feeling

Even as an adult, I quiver when someone asks me to host a Tupperware party or an Amway party or anything that involves selling. And it’s not just that I hate selling things; I’m also no good at it. I don’t know if my customers can read all over my face that I don’t like what I’m doing. I don’t know if I’m convincing enough to make my product really seem necessary. I don’t know what it is that keeps me from being a successful salesperson. But I do know that I am no saleswoman!

So imagine my utter dismay when I was sitting in my college prayer meeting one Wednesday night. I was young and eager, I loved the Lord with all of my heart, and I couldn’t wait to be used by Him in a mighty way.

But this particular prayer meeting featured the literature evangelists. Boy, were they on fire! They all seemed to have glowing faces as if they had just been on the mountaintop with God Himself.

Oh, how I wanted what they had! Oh, how I wanted God to use me to build up the church, too! But suddenly my spirits were crushed when I heard the words I dreaded: “If you love the Lord, if you want to experience what we have, if you want to be used by God in a mighty way, then sign up to spend the summer selling books and magazines.”

I thought to myself, Spend the summer selling magazines? Surely you jest. I remember walking out of that prayer meeting disheartened. I felt terrible. They were implying that this was the only method to serve God, and I didn’t sign up. I had actually turned God down. How could I do something like that to God? I was sure God was disappointed in me. All that He had done for me—and I couldn’t sell magazines!

Then I Saw the Light

Then one day I read a passage of Scripture that literally changed my life. I found these verses in 1 Corinthians 12, starting with verse 4: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. . . .” To one there is given
through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" (NIV).

I felt that God was saying to me, “Jenny, I’ve given you a special gift. I didn’t give you the gift of being a literature evangelist. I gave you another gift, and I expect you to use it to edify My body.”

I also loved my creative communications gift. This involved telling about God’s love in a creative way. I could use this gift by being Adventist Youth Society leader, writing and acting in plays, memorizing and reciting poetry, leading out in prayer groups, preaching sermons, writing articles, and by any other creative way of spreading the gospel.

God had given me gifts that I actually liked using! I had thought that in order to serve the Lord, you had to be unhappy. I’d thought you had to do things you dreaded—things that would put a frown on your face, a drag on your feet. But I’ve noticed that people who are working for the Lord through their spiritual gifts are the happiest people in the world.

Do you know that person with the gift of hospitality, who seems to never get tired of cooking big meals and having guests over every week? Do you know that person who seems to have been born a Sabbath school teacher? Or what about that person who is the first one serving in the soup kitchen every Sunday morning? These people are happily ministering through their spiritual gifts.

That is why those literature evangelists were on fire that Wednesday night. They too were ministering through their spiritual gifts. And they knew the joy that came from serving the Lord in the way the Lord designed for them.

When We Force Others

But there is a problem. The problem comes when people who are happily ministering through their spiritual gifts try to force others to serve God in
the same manner as they do. It seems as though some people who sense a calling to minister through their spiritual gifts believe, strangely, that their gift is the end-all to ministry. And some of these people put guilt trips on those not using gifts that are identical to their own. These people are simply not applying the Word of God. First Corinthians 12:29-31 asks, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts” (NIV).

It would be totally ridiculous for a body to have all feet and no hands, but this is what we are trying to create when we force people to work through cookie-cutter spiritual gifts that are not their own.

Although this approach is unbiblical, we must admit that those who fall into this trap often have good intentions. What they see today in our churches are a lot of pew warmers calling themselves members of the body of Christ but doing nothing to edify the body. This is not what God intended either. God says in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (NIV). God has given each one of us a spiritual gift, and He never intended for us to sit down and let that person who is doing everything continue to do everything. We are each to use our spiritual gifts.

It’s a Serious Issue
The devil tries by any means necessary to keep us from using our spiritual gifts. He knows how effective the body of Christ can be when every part is working together. He knows that his kingdom will not succeed if Christ’s body is working properly. And he knows that if he can get you to sit back and do nothing for the body, you’ll soon cease to feel a part of the body. And when you don’t feel a part, you will not see any reason to be a part. First Peter 4:10 says, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others” (NIV).

A youth minister once said that this generation of young people is doing nothing. They just hop from one church to another without any real commitment.

I don’t know why this is happening, but perhaps the young people of today feel the way I felt that prayer meeting night. Maybe they too need to be taught that God has given them a special gift, one that they probably already enjoy. Perhaps they feel that their gifts are inadequate, and they need to be encouraged and built up (see 1 Thess. 5:11). Or maybe this has more to do with the body itself. Perhaps the church needs to realize that there is room in our body for another foot, another arm—even if they are a little inexperienced. Perhaps the body needs to realize that circumstances and situations have changed, and that God has given special gifts to address these changes (computer programmers, videographers, and Christian musicians). We should not require our young people to conform to patterns that are not representative of this day and age.

Whatever the reason for this lack of commitment, the Bible does give us a prescription. The Bible admonishes us in Ephesians 4:11-16 to use our spiritual gifts so that the body of Christ may be built up. It also clearly states that the result of using spiritual gifts will be that we “will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (verse 14, NIV). Using our spiritual gifts puts us on the direct path of reaching “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God” and becoming “mature, attaining to the full measure of the fullness of Christ” (verse 13, NIV).

I still know without a shadow of a doubt that I am no saleswoman, and I’ve quit trying to be one. And knowing this has changed my ministry from drudgery to joy.

Jennifer Gill Fordham is a public school teacher in the Benton Harbor (Michigan) school district.

I had thought that in order to serve the Lord, you had to be unhappy.
Wanted: Laborers—Skilled and Unskilled

I spent the first two weeks of May helping to renovate a building that is the new home of the Toronto West Seventh-day Adventist Church. Mixing mortar, laying bricks, taping drywall, painting, laying carpet is far removed from what I do on a daily basis. It’s touch and go when I drive a nail, but I can hold the two-by-four for Brother Senior, the carpenter. I can’t lay the brick, but I can mix the mortar.

The members wanted changes to the sanctuary of the new church—a parents’ room, larger capacity, a reconfigured rostrum, more light in the sanctuary, and an even longer wish list. Several pledged their financial and physical support. The renovation was a go. In two weeks we would do the work and leave the wish list for later. The time spent with fellow unskilled laborers and construction trades people whose work I’ve grown to love and respect re-taught me some old lessons and a few new ones.

Not everybody who has an opinion knows what he or she is talking about.

The parents’ room is “too big,” “too small.” “How could you choose that color carpet?” “I wouldn’t be caught dead in a room that shade of purple.” “We need a balcony.” “Put in ceramic tiles. Kill the carpet.” “Why don’t you guys remove those steel beams; they’ll block people’s view?”

Things are often more complex than they appear.

Conversely, there is a pattern to seeming chaos.

From its outward, stuccoed appearance, the low-hanging ceiling seems like any other at a church. There are air-conditioning vents and recessed spotlights that most people walk past without even noticing.

But to rip aside the facade is to expose an upside down that is something else. Wires, duct work, and cables course their way overhead like the roots of a huge tree. The intricate connections and a confusing array of wires belie the order and symmetry one sees when the ceiling is finished. Poor work, patched and hidden away from view, is eventually uncovered.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover,” I recall my father saying. “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart,” I remember from Samuel’s mission to find a king.

But for all the chaos I saw, Brother Linton, who headed up the renovation, saw clear patterns. With him as guide, I was soon pointing out satellite cables, microphone cables, heating ducts, telephone wires, and electrical cables to others.

Many skills are needed to renovate buildings. Ditto for repairing people.

The architect and engineer provide the plans, while carpenters, sheet metal workers, masons, and electricians carry out the work. An unskilled laborer like me wouldn’t dream of moving an electrical panel or putting up a crucial brick wall. The sheet metal worker moves the duct work around, but stays away from the electrical panel.

When it comes to building a kingdom that is designed for broken people in need of renovation and repair, we sometimes forget to apply the same principles. Preachers are not necessarily good planners or organizers. If a layperson has that skill, he or she should be given that task. Why should that be a problem? The work of reaching people and introducing them to the kingdom of heaven is a multifaceted one. It takes a multitude of spiritual gifts to construct the kingdom of God.

The work is done by the energetic few.

There are people who are willing but not able; they buoy the spirits but can’t do the work. Others are able but not willing, discouraging those who are doing the work. And then there are the energetic few who are both willing and able. These are a blessing from the Lord.

As I watched scores of members turn out day and night to sweep, vacuum, carry bricks, cook, pack away, and do the skilled work with a sense of purpose and commitment, it became clear that men and women, dedicated to do God’s work, are an unstoppable force. It matters not whether the tool is a pen or a hammer. God calls all of us to be workers for his kingdom.

Royson James is a columnist for the Toronto Star.
The Book of Remembrance

The Holy Spirit uses a little girl’s faith and a pastor’s heart to capture a wayward grandma.
First Met Grandma Mabel when I was a little girl. She sat me on her lap, and we took a liking to each other instantly. I didn’t know then about all the “horrible” things she had done.

Grandma Mabel gave birth to her children on the tiny island in Florida where I grew up. Every night she read Our Little Friend to her four boys before tucking them into bed in the big two-story house that her husband had built overlooking the water.

But life turned sour for Mabel when her youngest son, my father, was 2 years old. She turned her back on her family and the church. She changed her name, lived with many men, and moved to New York City, hoping for a more exciting life.

When I was young, my father contacted Grandma Mabel and told her that he had purchased a home for her on our small island so that she could once again be part of the family. That’s when I met Grandma Mabel for the first time.

One Sabbath morning several years later the pastor of our church announced he was placing a book on the altar in which we could write our prayer requests. After the service I approached the altar. I fingered the beautiful red book with gold lettering. How my heart longed for Grandma Mabel to come to church with us! I knelt down in front of the altar and with childish handwriting wrote the words “Grandma Mabel.”

Evangelist Fordyce Detamore came to town a few months later. To this world-renowned speaker, holding meetings in a little Florida town was considered only a “small crusade.” But Detamore’s strength was working with backsliders. Our family had no reason to believe that anything would get Grandma Mabel to come to church with us! I turned in her name. O. H. Bentzinger, Detamore’s associate, visited Grandma. In his gentle and compassionate way he listened to Mabel and kindly invited her back to Jesus. God answered a little girl’s prayer; Grandma Mabel started attending the evangelistic meetings.

During one of Pastor Detamore’s altar calls, Grandma whispered to my father, “I must do it . . . now!” Her walk down the aisle brought tears of joy to her eyes, as well as to the eyes of a little girl and her family who never gave up on Grandma.

Many years have passed since that happy day. Grandma Mabel died unexpectedly just a little while after I was married more than 20 years ago. She never got to hold my children on her lap or tell them about how God’s love brought her back to His family. But I’ve made sure they know about a little red prayer book placed on the altar in our small white church. There, along with all the other names, is a childish scrawl, with the words “Grandma Mabel.”

Gloria Bentzinger is an associate director of the It Is Written Evangelistic Association. She lives in Key Largo, Florida.
Pioneers Bring Hope

Below is a letter from Tim Mattox, who oversees the work of Global Mission pioneers in Cambodia. He shares some of the blessings and challenges the pioneers encounter as they work to share the gospel in that country.

Dear Prayer Warriors:

Last Sabbath I visited Global Mission pioneers Sokar and Hober. They have a group of 12 adults and quite a number of children. Praise God for these humble people seeking a knowledge of the living God.

Sadly, one of the 12 adults died last night after being run over by a truck. This morning Sokar came to ask if I could help with the funeral. The young man who had died was only 19 years old. He had been attending a church of a different denomination until just three weeks ago, when he began studying with Sokar. Recently he had spent a good share of time thinking about God. Then yesterday afternoon he had borrowed a motorbike and pulled out into the road straight in front of a 12-wheeler truck. He died in the hospital a few hours later. Before he died he asked his family to give him a Christian funeral and have a cross erected. Praise God that his family consented to this. (The greatest fear that Khmers have about becoming Christian is the unknown of what will happen at their funeral. They believe that if the funeral is not done right, the next life won’t be good.)

The whole program was given to us to organize. This was a funeral conducted in the traditional Khmer way without having the spirit and Buddha worship. Before the body was taken from the house, I presented a short talk on salvation. The hastily prepared coffin was then carried to a field at the back of the house, where the cremation was to take place. There I presented an even shorter talk on the state of the dead and the resurrection. During the cremation a long song service was held (the Christian equivalent to having the Buddhist monks chant).

More than 100 people were present. Christian friends from several Sundaykeeping churches also attended.

While it is sad that this young man died, we praise God that through Jesus’ death and resurrection he will also be resurrected. We also praise God for the opportunity to share the gospel message with so many people who had not heard it before. Please pray that God will help the family and friends of this young man to see that they have nothing to fear when they trust Jesus, and that they will accept Him into their hearts.

Love, Tim

STATISTICS ON CAMBODIA
Population: 11,164,000
Seventh-day Adventist Church members: 2,011
Congregations: 68
Global Mission pioneers: 28

HAPPY FOR SHADE: Global Mission pioneers in Cambodia meet under primitive covering until the group becomes large enough to build a temporary shelter out of natural materials, or until funds are raised to erect a permanent church structure. Photo by Pen Narith.
It’s All a Matter of Direction

Put your future in the Lord’s hands.” “Let go and let God.” “Give Jesus the wheel.” One would think these catchy phrases that have become standard vocabulary for me could easily be put into practice—especially in light of all the amazing things God has done for me. He mysteriously opened doors last month that He had firmly closed; repaired relationships that seemed irreconcilable a year ago; reminded me of divine intervention altering the course of my young life and paving the way for a future filled with possibilities. It’s all there. Irrefutable proof. God consistently demonstrates His love, His power, and His willingness to lead. Remembering how He wraps me in His love and makes me a part of His master plan feels as natural as taking a breath.

Yet I catch myself plunging ahead on my own when facing a challenge or a crisis. Whether a household appliance is on the blink or my career is in limbo, trust goes on sabbatical, and I independently rush to find the solution—with my methods and in my timing. It’s a lonely road, even for a control freak, and when I turn around I remember that a Higher Power could have shown me a better way. This ongoing struggle led me to conclude that it’s easy to see God working when I look back on my life but nearly impossible for me to trust Him when I look ahead.

Imagine my surprise when His still small voice found enough of a pause in my futuristic frenzy to enlighten me. My defeated deduction about my faith was actually His latest revelation. Days spent planning and organizing and nights of wrestling with the unknown were focused in the wrong direction. Looking forward is not what He asks me to do. He gently reminds me to look up.

A friend telephoned me today to share good news. For the first time in years of struggling with addiction, this fellow believer has taken a critical step in ending a destructive habit. I am ashamed to say that before the phone rang, I had determined that my heavenly Father’s will for my future was to sever ties with my friend. Enough is enough, I had said to myself. People are responsible for their own choices. I can’t help, and I’m tired of disappointment and rejection.

Surely God wants me to make new friends who will value my friendship and enrich my life . . .

What clarity retrospect brings! My sensible, well-thought-out plan of action wasn’t God’s ideal for me at all. By focusing my attention where I assumed God wanted my relationships to be in the coming months, I missed an opportunity to get down on my knees and pour out my heart to the One who truly knows what is best for me. In planning ahead, I forgot to seek first the kingdom of God.

I wonder if Ellen White discovered the same principle by trial and error or if she simply let God’s wisdom flow through her when she penned these thoughts: “If we take counsel with our doubts and fears, or try to solve everything that we cannot see clearly, before we have faith, perplexities will only increase and deepen. But if we come to God, feeling helpless and dependent, as we really are, and in humble, trusting faith make known our wants to Him whose knowledge is infinite, who sees everything in creation, and who governs everything by His will and word, He can and will attend to our cry, and will let light shine into our hearts.”

I believe the Almighty does expect us to be responsible stewards with our time and resources. He never asks us to excuse or support behaviors in others or in ourselves that don’t reflect His purpose. But I’d offer that it troubles Him to see us wasting precious minutes predicting the future or how we think He will work in it. He plainly asks that we turn our eyes, and our forward-thinking minds, up to Him. There we find the understanding, the answers, the desires of our hearts. It’s all a matter of direction.

“I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven” (Ps. 123:1, NIV).

* Steps to Christ, pp. 96, 97.

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