Coloring Outside the Lines

Adventist young adults—ministering in new mediums

Plus: eXcite98
A New Courage
My plaudits for Chris Blake’s “A New Courage” (Aug. 20 Cutting Edge Edition). It takes courage for an author to write this article and more courage for the Adventist Review to print it. In my 40 years of teaching and administration within the Adventist Church, I have faced with regularity the kind of pressures referred to. I learned early that it is imperative to take a position and not be swayed by those who like to snipe. Thank you, Chris, for the well-written article.

—Virgil Bartlett
Professor Emeritus
Andrews University

My question is How can I resist spiritual bullies without getting drawn into an argument and being distracted from my main mission, which is to praise God?

A good recent example is a tract being circulated that condemns contemporary Christian music. As it turns out, in our church of 150 only two little old ladies play the piano and organ. The church board is discussing whether it would be appropriate to hire a non-Adventist musician to play the organ. In contrast, we have six who play the trumpet, about 10 guitarists, a harmonica player, a violinist, a clarinetist, a percussionist who plays in the local orchestra, and a professional keyboarder/sound mixer.

I grant you that the professional plays the organ wonderfully, and we really enjoy it, but it no longer represents the music of the people. It isn’t us praising God in our own way, with our own talents that God gave us. It has become a spectator sport—dry formalism. Help!

—Ron Nielsen, M.D.
Brewster, Washington

While this article had some truth, I found it disappointing. Unwittingly, no doubt, spiritual bullying was disparaged by spiritual name-calling. Blake seemed to be imposing his taste on others, while condemning others who imposed their taste on him. While calling for those to stand up and be counted in defense of his view (“moderate,” of course), he decried those willing to stand up and be counted with other views. I’m sure he doesn’t want to bully these folks out of our churches.

It seems to me that Blake carried an old chip on his shoulder instead of forgiveness toward those he felt had wronged him. Anyone can feel bullied and write articles against the perceived bully. But I believe there is a better way. (See The Ministry of Healing, p. 487.)

—Phil Mills, M.D.
Wichita, Kansas

Coming Soon: Cutting Edge Meditations
If you’ve ever wanted to share a spiritual thought but haven’t had the time to write a full-length devotional, we have just the thing for you. Beginning in January, Cutting Edge Meditations will feature brief but deeply spiritual stories, insights, epiphanies, unanswered questions, even drawings and photos, from Adventists of all ages. (We continue to seek young voices.) You might say it’s the spiritual equivalent of our Adventist Life feature.

Send 30- to 300-word submissions, your phone number, and a photo of yourself (we can crop out other people, if necessary) to Cutting Edge Meditations, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.
weak our convictions must be regarding the commandments. If we can't embrace their doctrines, how can we embrace them as “prayer partners,” etc., any more than a Buddhist, unitarian, or person not holding to the whole Scripture? Doesn’t 2 Thessalonians 2:15 instruct us to stand firm to the traditions we were taught—these traditions being handed down from God? Can we team up with those who worship in vain, “teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (Mark 7:7)? I believe we can and should befriend those of other faiths. We can pray with them and for them, and set examples for them, but can we “partner up” with them, believing our prayers are being reinforced or magnified when they have nicely set aside the commandments of God? How can we lead by following?

—Don Icenogle, Pastor 
Spokane, Washington

It is refreshing to see strong statements endorsing cordial relationships with other-than-Adventist churches, even to jointly sponsoring a “prayer weekend.” Could Rydzewski’s suggestion that there might be a “remnant movement” in other churches be theologically correct? If so, how should we go about rethinking “our” concept of being “the” remnant?

—Jim Kaatz 
San Diego, California

I would consider Ella Rydzewski’s editorial a well-balanced position if Seventh-day Adventists had a clear understanding of their identity and mission. However, many Adventists come away from such meetings convinced that doctrinal differences are more a matter of religious culture than Bible truth.

—Michael Brazington 
Lincoln, Nebraska

The Heart of It All
I have appreciated and enjoyed articles by Andy Nash ever since he joined the Review. His August 20 editorial, “OK, Let’s Review,” touched me deeply. I guess reading “the old story” in everyday current verbiage hit home. I can’t wait to hear Jesus say to me, “You have no idea how much I’ve missed you.”

—Dorothy S. Luber 
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Not Appropriate
I enjoy the weekly Review very much, but David B. Smith’s “The House That Michael Built” (Aug. 20) seemed to be more a sports feature about Michael Jordan than anything else. I failed to see the analogy between the two “Michaels” the writer was trying to make. I’m not a sports fan, so unlike many people, I’m not too savvy on such things.

—Claireen Colclesser 
Elkhart, Indiana

Yancey’s Insights
I’d like to add a footnote to Ken Wade’s review of Philip Yancey’s What’s So Amazing About Grace? Be sure to read carefully pages 229-236, 240-251, and 259-260, wherein Yancey shares a remarkable insight into the drive by the Christian Right to legislate morality and the danger this poses. Homosexuality and abortion are the current targets, but it doesn’t take much imagination to know that keeping Sunday will be a future target. In pages 238 and 247-251 Yancey reveals a perfect understanding of church-state relations. You would almost think he has been reading The Great Controversy.

—Dan Guild 
Newbury Park, California

O N T H E C O V E R: A R T I S T A A R O N 
SOEPRAALO A N D O T H E R Y O U N G 
A D U L T S AT E X C I T E 9 8. P H O T O S B Y J I M 
C H R I S T I A N S O N.
Do You Hear What I Hear?

A sk a group of Adventists how they happened to join the church, and they'll gladly tell you what, for them, was the biggest obstacle to becoming one of God's last-day, commandment-keeping people.

It may be that they had to get the victory over tobacco, juggle their work schedules (or their jobs) to keep from working on Sabbath, cultivate a taste for soy-protein meat analogs, scrounge around for extra income to be able to send their kids to an Adventist school, lay aside their jewelry, or willingly return a tenth of their income to God's church for the support of its ministry to the world. (And there are surely others.)

Indeed, Seventh-day Adventists may have the highest standards for lifestyle and Christian behavior of any Christian denomination in the world. And that's a good thing.

But it could be a problem: after one has successfully met those obstacles and overcome them (mostly), he or she might mistakenly assume that the rest of the journey to the Promised Land is all downhill, that it requires no more growth or spiritual development, that all one has to do is "stay the course," and he or she will be ready to meet the Lord when He returns again.

But in fact the Christian life is a life of forward action. While we can (and should) praise God for how He's led us in the past, there's no substitute for a daily relationship with Him that motivates us to greater love, deeper sacrifice, and more willing service to Him and to our fellow citizens on Planet Earth.

Who hasn't seen individuals join the church who are so "on fire" for the Lord that you wonder whether the baptismal tank was seasoned with Tabasco sauce? Their enthusiasm is contagious. But often, instead of catching fire on the strength of their excitement, we "established" members stand back and say, "They'll cool off. Mustn't be too fanatical about these things."

But "fanatical" is a word we should use advisedly. If we allow Him, God will lead us in extraordinary ways. What else can explain Christians who, on their own, raise tens of thousands of dollars to work in foreign countries, learning the language, forgetting the comforts of home and family, motivated by a desire to take the gospel to those who know it not? How about successful businesspeople who sell their businesses so they can devote themselves to spreading the gospel full-time? Not to mention the many, many others who stretch themselves economically and spiritually for the sake of more faithfully reflecting God's love in their communities, however humble or obscure.

These are the people who go beyond mere obedience to commandments and standards and savor the daily adventure of a relationship with the living Christ. They spend time in His presence. They're awed by His majesty, overwhelmed by His mercy and grace, inspired by His love, and transformed by His Spirit. They claim the promise: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it!'" (Isa. 30:21, NIV).

Some people are frightened by that kind of intimacy; afraid to be infected with the power of the Spirit. Their daily devotional life consists of reading a 500-word essay and a 15-second prayer. In His presence they spend more time talking than listening. Their portfolios get larger; their clothes more fashionable; they have money for doodads, baubles, and knickknacks; but the difference between them and the world becomes less pronounced.

It's easy to get stuck in a rut where "good enough" is good enough; where we consider ourselves successful if we can maintain the status quo (never mind helping to push back the frontiers of God's kingdom).

Yet look again at the heroes who inhabit our favorite Bible stories—Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Rahab, Isaiah, Esther, Daniel, Mary, Saul of Tarsus. Their usefulness for God's kingdom increased exponentially when they decided to take a faith walk with the living God—following His lead, trusting His providence.

Being a Bible-quoting, Sabbath-keeping, vegetable-eating, tithe-paying Seventh-day Adventist at the end of the twentieth century is a good thing. But I often wonder if God wants more from us—from me.

So I keep listening.
To tell you the truth, I don’t enjoy pancakes. They’re spongy. They’re greasy. And they make me thirsty. But when I saw the sign advertising a free pancake breakfast during my freshman year at Walla Walla College, I knew I had to go. Free food, after all, is a rarity for hungry college students.

Pancake morning finally dawned. I shuffled across campus in my rubber-bottomed slippers and slouched into line at the last possible second.

“Syrup or fruit?” A familiar voice interrupted my thoughts, and I glanced up into the friendly face of W. G. Nelson, our college president.

“Uh, yeah. Fruit, thanks.”

He loaded my pancake high. Maybe the fruit would mask its flavor. As I eyed my breakfast, however, a sliver of my mind settled on one wild thought: My college president just served me breakfast! Suddenly my pancake took on a whole new meaning.

You see, I have a healthy respect for authority. So healthy, in fact, that I start perspiring in its presence.

This attitude explains the sudden fear I felt when, mid-cheer during a Walla Walla Wolves hockey game, I turned around to see a long row of WWC faculty grinning behind me. Was it legal to yell in the presence of such power? I dutifully squelched my screams.

In today’s world young voices often fall silent in the presence of older ones. Although youth in the church find plenty to complain about, in private they seldom initiate discussions with their elders. Consequently, neither group fully understands the other’s viewpoint or concerns.

But there’s hope! Walla Walla College’s example makes a statement to both sides of the generation gap. Shared leadership can minimize frustration and disillusionment with any organization.

Breakfast with the president, a forgotten tradition from the 1970s, was reinitiated four years ago through the inspiration of student Lenden Webb. The tradition has kept Nelson in tune with student issues and concerns. Approximately once a month, between five and 15 students join the president for a private breakfast in a side room of WWC’s cafeteria.

“It’s worked well to get me in touch with students,” says Nelson. “We use it as a chance for them to talk about their experience at Walla Walla College.” During the meal Nelson asks two main questions: What should we do differently that would increase the quality of your experience? and What experiences here have been the most meaningful to you?

Students often share valuable ideas for change on campus. WWC’s new security phones are a direct result of student concerns discussed during breakfast with the president.

But student input doesn’t stop at the breakfast table. Students are voting members of most on-campus committees, from chapel committee to faculty senate, no less. “Walla Walla College has a tradition of student representation,” Nelson observes. And although input doesn’t always mean control, WWC’s student body has a notable chance to shape college policies and procedures.

What about initiative-taking in the real world? After graduation students begin their own lives—lives that may or may not include the church. While twentiesomething membership plummets and church leaders wring their hands, the impatient followers know the solution: “Let us (help you) lead!”

“Students who serve in an area where they really make an impact are the ones who come back and are active members [of the church],” says Nelson in a description of WWC’s successful student missionary program. “We need to be looking for ways to give people those kinds of real ministry opportunities.”

Student missionaries and Task Force workers have the opportunity to get their feet wet in “real ministry”—and they, along with other potential leaders, are eager to get wetter.

Input—real input—in the shaping of the church will keep this generation involved and our denomination alive. Without it, youth will inevitably find other causes to support.

Sarah Coleman is a junior at Walla Walla College. This editorial was written while she served a summer internship for the Adventist Review.
Our son Steven has been a student at Southern Adventist University for the past two years and makes his home-away-from-home at the men’s dormitory named Talge Hall. One day last year he received a telephone call from a telemarketer wishing to make a deal. At the end of her speech she said, “Now, I just need to verify your address. Is that Box 589, Taj Mahal?”
—Judy Miller, Seale, Alabama

**eXcerpts**

Memorable lines from eXcite98 general sessions (see page 16)

“We're all exactly the same: we all respond to love, and we're all afraid of rejection.”
—Khose Mthombeni, 23, Riverside, California, nursing student

“I thought, One of those is going to happen, but I hope not the other one.”
—Erin Miller, 29, Asheville, North Carolina, pastor, on being told in college that she'd make a good pastor if she were older and if she were a man

“I'm down to lites! I'm down to lites!”
—Alex Bryan, 28, Atlanta pastor, quoting an excited 18-year-old smoker rushing up to Bryan after church

“Are you in, or are you out?”
—Shasta Emery Burr, 21, eXcite coplanner

“eXcite98—big deal, a lot of excitement. Without confession and repentance, it's just a lot of excitement.”
—Byard Parks, 29, Colorado Springs pastor

“God has not changed. He's the same God, but He's dealing with our generation differently.”
—Jonathan Henderson, 22, Pacific Union College theology major

“We love you, and we need you. We must be willing to forgive each other.”
—José Rojas, North American Division youth director

“Our problem is that we've been too scared to go for broke. You aren't. You don't own property, and you don't own a motor home.”
—Dwight K. Nelson, Andrews University pastor and baby boomer, on the financial condition and transient nature of Gen Xers

“For the first time in history, a Gen Xer is going to speak to the whole world simultaneously.”
—Dwight K. Nelson, announcing that Shasta Burr, 21, would be cohosting NET ’98. (Two weeks later Bernie Anderson, 27, was invited to be the other cohost.)

“Those who don’t get over it will not be saved.”
—Robert Folkenberg, world church president, on racism among Adventists

“We need to have a variety of worship services... In India they basically don’t allow any instrument except drums.”
—Robert Folkenberg

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The Center Cannot Hold

Postmodernism’s impact on the way we think

BY STEVEN THOMPSON

REALITY ISN’T WHAT IT USED TO BE. I saw the signs of change for some time before I could read them. The drift in the clothing world was most readily apparent. Printed T-shirts bore what looked like familiar labels, but the words seemed empty of meaning. At first I thought the problem was with me: such clear, bold words must mean something. But I could not find it. Reluctantly I realized there was no meaning, at least not at the level of my search.

Lyrics to contemporary rock anthems, for 40 years the voice of protest and rebellion in Western culture, now seem to defy any attempt to categorize them as anti-war, anti-industrial, or even anti-parent. Words are frequently used as unexplained symbols. Sense does not necessarily flow in a linear direction.

The phenomenon of rock music videos and what some observers call an “MTV culture” underscores the apparent abandonment of what a previous generation might have termed “meaningful communication.” To uninitiated viewers these four- or five-minute clips appear to be all smoke, flashing lights, and vertigo-inducing changes of perspective. Both performer and camera are in constant motion. In the course of a single song the performer appears in half a dozen outfits and against the backdrop of as many different locations around the planet. Images of rusting industrial sites or decaying urban slums are preferred to natural surroundings.

Reality and illusion, sense and nonsense, beauty and ugliness, have merged, and we’re left wondering if they ever had a separate existence.

The new reality has spread beyond the ephemeral realms of dress and entertainment. Adults, middle-aged and older, are baffled by the blurring of the clear lines that used to separate things that they grew up knowing should be separated, including genders. In an earlier era clothing, hairstyles, and spheres of influence seemed differentiated between men and women, but far less so today. Baby boomer parents find themselves wondering how their teenagers can even recognize a member of the opposite sex at first glance!

Even such primary distinctions as life and death, and distinguishing between them, no longer achieve unanimity, even on the level of definitions. Heated debates rage over when a fetus gets a life and when an aged or terminally ill person loses it. Life and death are no longer defined by authoritative persons using educated common sense, but by consensus bodies such as courts and legislatures. In some cases even these primary human concepts have been deemed matters of opinion rather than matters of fact.

Even more sobering to baby boomers is the new reality about truth, which is no longer seen as “out there” to be acquired by research and study or handed down by God. Truth in this era is widely viewed as constructed by the community and selected by the individual cafeteria style. If I don’t like the truth offered by my community, I find another community whose truth suits me.

“Right” and “wrong” are not what they used to be. Instead of God “laying down the law” for all people at all times (and that reality being reflected in the legal systems that have been built on the Judeo-Christian heritage), right and wrong are now determined by communities. It is as if labels were printed out by each community, similar to the approving checkmarks...
that the Heart Foundation places on some margarine containers or the stern warnings printed on cigarette packs. These labels are then affixed to the activities and values that the community chooses, still leaving the individual the last word in the matter.

No longer does one ask “What is right?” Today the primary question is “What is right for me in this situation?” This new view of right and wrong (or is it wright and rong?) is echoed a thousand times in popular magazine articles that urge readers to “do what is right for them”—in choosing a hair color, in child-rearing, and even in the most intimate human relationships.

What has happened to reality? Twentieth-century reality mappers answer in a word—it has become postmodern.1 We must not fall into the trap of asking what the word means, because according to postmodern philosophy, meaning is not searched for as if it existed “out there.” Meaning is rather to be constructed from the otherwise-chaotic random bits of life. Postmodern people (“postmoderns”) do not look for any overall meaning or plan to which individual lives must adjust; they simply tell their stories and insist that we do
the same, because every person’s story is just as important, or unimportant, as every other person’s story.

In postmodern perspective, when enough of us share our individual stories, those stories somehow blend together to form the “big story,” a nebulous reality spun from words and perceptions. And that is all there is. There are no big stories “out there” in the universe that provide support and background to our little ones. It is like saying to an Adventist, “There is no great controversy, but only a lot of personal little controversies, which, when combined, merge to become the great controversy.”

Leading postmodernist thinker Jean-Francois Lyotard, who died on April 21 of this year, certainly disliked the big stories. He summed up the attitude of postmoderns toward the big stories in two points: first, they are unbelievable, and second, we should wage war on them.1

Why do postmoderns actively reject the big stories and encourage others to do the same? First, they believe that the big stories claim more than can really be known: there is a knowledge gap that is too big for faith to leap. Their second objection is that the big stories always lead to human cruelty. Oppression and violence, they say, invariably accompany all attempts to apply the big stories to communities.

“Look at the wasting of humanity done in the name of Communism and Nazism,” postmoderns say. “Even Christians have used the big stories for oppressive purposes, especially when church and state cooperated to manage society.” Some even find evidence for oppression in the Bible itself by those who are the very champions of the Bible story. They point out, for example, how the apostle Paul uses the big story of Creation and the Fall in persuading Timothy to silence women in his churches.1

Is society at large listening to the postmodern challenge to the big stories? The answer is a disturbing yes. Avid listeners have been recruited from among leaders of popular culture, including designers, filmmakers, musicians, and writers. These in turn pass on their questioning of the big stories to the consumers of their creative activities—millions of people just like us.

Higher education too has listened to and largely accepted the postmodern vision, especially in the fields of education, the humanities, and the social sciences. Graduates in these fields are encouraged to share in the task of liberating society from the big stories.

History for postmoderns is no longer understood as the stories of the great men and women who lived to produce systems under which sensible people expected to live, but the stories of ordinary persons whose tales are just as valuable, especially if they include an escape from the tyranny of living under domination of a big story. Students of psychology and sociology are now encouraged to assist their future clients, not by helping them live up to big-story-inspired ideals, but by liberating them from all such external expectations so they can instead develop into “true persons.”

Only in the scientific community is there significant skepticism of postmodern claims. Scientists cannot do their work apart from the acceptance of the scientific version of the big stories—the grand theories describing how the universe functions. Nonetheless, there is increasing evidence that in such fields as physics and astronomy, many scientists have been listening, however reluctantly, to postmodern ideas. Some have begun to develop their own version of freedom from former scientific big stories, under the rubric of a new paradigm called “chaos theory.”

What is the future of the postmodern view? How long will it survive, and how deeply will our society fall under its influence?

Like other cultural theories that win the allegiance of creative and educated leaders in society, postmodern ideas are likely to enjoy increasing influence for some time yet. Critics abound, however, who point to two major faults in the postmodern perspective. While postmoderns brand all big stories, including the biblical story of redemption as oppressive and destructive, and cite sad episodes supporting this view, challengers point out that they overlook evidence for the liberating, life-affirming impact of biblical faith on the lives of millions of people. Not only has the biblical worldview provided a lifting of the individual’s horizons of meaning, but biblical faith, from its beginning, has challenged widespread social evils, such as poverty, slavery, and child exposure. It has inspired many of the developments that have made modern health care and the relief of illness and suffering what they are in Western society, and has laid the foundation for universal education.

Can we have the big stories without the oppression? Postmoderns answer no, but have they overlooked some evidence? What about Corrie ten Boom’s family, or Oskar Schindler, or the thousands of lesser-known men and women who rejected the all-pervading Nazi big story and put their own lives at risk to shelter members of a condemned race? This is evidence that followers of big stories can exercise judgment and resist the oppressing tendencies that can accompany the living out of a big story.

Where does the tendency to oppression belong? Is it located in the big story or in the human heart? Most of us would say that in order to answer this question, we need to observe a community that has been liberated from any big story and watch for the tendency to oppress others disappear. No evidence has yet been found that doing away with the
big story removes the human tendency to violence and oppression that is rooted deeply in fallen human nature.

The second major weakness of the postmodern rejection of the big story is its shaky assumption that people can live without one. No convincing evidence has been presented that civilized people function without a big story. The existence, from the earliest period of written human records, of competing accounts of the creation of this world and its inhabitants indicates that such stories are of fundamental importance. When people reject one big story, they replace it with another, rather than simply learning to do without. From a simple anthropological viewpoint, it seems that we need a big story to help us make sense of life, and when deprived of the true one, we will make up a substitute.

How should the Adventist Christian respond to the postmodern rejection of the big story?

Most popular movements derive some energy from the fact that they make a valid point, even though they contain fatal flaws. It is certainly true that individuals can become lost and feel insignificant when their society focuses exclusively on the big story and neglects the individual’s story.

More than almost any other Christian denomination, Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized the biblical big story. We refer to ourselves as “people of the Book,” and our very name incorporates the entire sweep of this earth’s history from Creation to Christ’s return. Much of our motivation for mission has been generated by our quiet confidence in the truthfulness and usefulness of our big story.

Has this led to an overemphasis on the wider story at the expense of our individual stories? Has our determination to tell the “old, old story” of unseen things above distracted us from also telling our personal story of clearly seen things below? We could learn a lesson from Fanny J. Crosby, who taught us to sing:

“This is my story,
This is my song,

Praising my Savior all the day long.” (Italics supplied.)

Has disembodied doctrine displaced personal testimony? I suspect so.

As Jesus reminded us centuries ago: “These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

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3 1 Tim. 2:12-14.

4 Matt. 23:23.

Steven Thompson is a professor of theology at Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.
In the war of words, the right weapons make all the difference.

BY CANDACE GRAVES DE VORE

He caught my attention when he first entered the classroom. His awkward gait and blotchy skin could not detract from the handsome face. And when Jeff smiled at me, I was immediately drawn to him as one with whom I hoped to become better acquainted.

Ready, Aim . . .

My sophomore year of college I decided to go to a new school and meet new people. I chose a school where I knew virtually no one. It began as a lonely year, and seeking out new friendships became a necessary hobby. As I entered each classroom I would look around and find someone who looked as lonely as I was and try to strike up an acquaintance. That was easy enough: there were plenty who looked like they could use a friend.

Jeff seemed an easy target, suffering from a disease that affected his walk and the color of his hair and skin. But it soon became evident that he wasn’t lonely; he was a loner. Oh, he was friendly enough—in fact, he was always giving an encouraging word to those around him—but he didn’t seem to need companionship, as I did.

In a conversation with my parents Jeff’s name came up, as well as my desire to get to know him. My mother surprised me when she told me I had a distant cousin who fit his description. After exchanging all the important details with her, I went to class eager to tell Jeff that we were family. He was unbelieving until I named his parents and told him I knew about his older brother, who had died years earlier.

Finally he began to open up, and we forged a successful although tentative friendship. Jeff shared with me that, like his brother, he too suffered from a type of adrenoleukodystrophy and had only a few years to live. Jeff had dedicated his life to sharing Christ’s love with others. His special and unshakable relationship with his Lord was unmistakable.

Mount Up

Not long afterward Jeff took me home to spend the weekend with him and his family. I was thrilled at the prospect of meeting relatives I knew nothing about, and even more thrilled at the idea of spending an entire weekend with this precious person.

I watched as Jeff struggled to drive his pickup—his feet moving haltingly between the gas pedal and the brake as he struggled with uncooperative legs. He insisted that his daily routine go on as usual, although the effort required to do even the smallest tasks was phenomenal.

During the trip Jeff and I passed the time making small talk and sharing more about our families. We were driving down the highway when a beige Volkswagen bug drove past us on Jeff’s side of the road. There were three college-age girls in the car, and the young woman in the passenger seat covered her face with one hand and made an obscene gesture with the other. We couldn’t believe it. We couldn’t remember seeing the car before, and we certainly hadn’t done anything to deserve this display.

Were they making fun of Jeff’s appearance, as some of the kids at college had done? The very thought infuriated me, and my anger spilled out: “How could they? Oh, it makes me so mad!”
Jeff looked at me calmly and then got a mischievous grin on his face. “Quick, get a piece of paper out of my notebook.”

“What for?” I asked.

“I want you to write something on it for the girls to read.”

Now, that was more like it. Finally Jeff was going to stand up for himself. After all, he had to be angry, if for nothing else than for the hand fate had dealt him.

“Write ‘Jesus Loves You’ on the paper.”

“You’ve got to be kidding.”

“Just do it, please? You’ll see,” he promised.

I did what Jeff asked as he sped to catch up with the VW. He drove even with them and held the paper up to his window until I assured him that the girls had seen and read the message.

A few minutes later the car passed us, and Jeff and I read the message the three young women held up to their window: “Yeah, but does He love you?”

Jeff’s smile grew wider, and he asked me to write more. “Absolutely! And He loves you, too,” was his confident reply.

The game continued as we drove down the highway. For 30 minutes his red pickup and the beige VW would pass each other and slow down as the messages were passed back and forth.

The girls had the last say, as we came to their exit first. “Bye, and thanks,” said their sign. “It was great talking with you.” Then they waved and smiled at us as they drove down the off ramp.

To the Victor Go the Spoils

When faced with situations that are taxing and people who are difficult to deal with, I think about Jeff. And I marvel at what a faithful servant he was. Not once did he put himself first. And I have to ask myself: What is my goal in my relationships with others? Is it to restore them to Christ? If Christ is my example, then every word I speak should bring healing and hope. Christ’s words brought life—His very presence banished death. Yet I often find that my words cut and destroy rather than heal and restore.

Throughout the Scriptures there are examples of persons who spoke as Christ would speak: Joseph, who had the right and the authority to condemn and destroy his brothers, spoke words of forgiveness and love (Gen. 45:1-15); Moses, who understood that the people he led through the wilderness were uncommitted and deceitful, pleaded with God on their behalf and even offered to give his own salvation in place of those who followed him so reluctantly (Ex. 32:32); Stephen, while being stoned to death, asked God to forgive his accusers (Acts 7:60); and Paul, the one who held the murderers’ garments while the stones flew, later wrote volumes of encouragement to the fledgling Christians in Asia Minor.

Jeff’s words did the same. I’m thankful that I was able to spend time with Jeff. He taught me an important lesson, a lesson about words—healing words—prompted by a love for Christ, words “like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11, NIV).

Jeff’s voice has been silenced by death, but I look forward to seeing him again—soon. I want to stand next to him on the sea of glass as he throws his crown at Jesus’ feet, and experience the excitement of sharing more words with Jeff—words of praise for a victorious God.

I can imagine Jeff’s smile now.

Candace Graves DeVore lives in Dayton, Tennessee, where she supports her husband’s youth ministry and helps raise their two children, Michelle and Elisa.
Compelled, even encouraged, to employ their gifts outside traditional airspace, Adventist young adults are creating parallel ministries.

Is this a good thing?

BY ANDY NASH

Last October, in an article titled “Ready to Rumble,” I surveyed the state of Adventist young adults in North America. I told how while young adults who came in a fairly traditional package had found acceptance— even official responsibility— in the organized church, thousands of nontraditional young adults, feeling unwanted, continue to drift away or bob aimlessly on the edges. This is the promised sequel to that article.

It has become iconic— a polite but intense exchange repeated throughout the nineties.

In this case, world church president Robert S. Folkenberg stood before 1,000-plus young adults August 7. “It’s time,” he said, “for the young people in the first world to take ownership of this church.”

The opening statement brought instant and loud applause— even a few whistles— from the eXcite98 crowd gathered in Riverside, California (see p. 16).

But as he’s done in the years following his “If we give [the youth] a piece of the pie, they will stay for dinner” speech at the 1990 General Conference session in Indianapolis, Folkenberg steered his listeners away from the idea that the real pie amounted to posts within the church structure.

“When I talk about taking ownership of the church,” he said, “I’m not talking about that which seems to fill our vision, that which is relatively irrelevant— structure, policies, budgets, and the oft-maligned bureaucracy. The answer to hastening the Lord’s coming and finishing the work on earth does not lie in some mystical, magical formula voted by some existential all-knowing, all-wise committee. It lies in the vision and the energy of our young adults.”

Referring to young adults in regions outside of North America, where the church is growing rapidly, Folkenberg said, “They’re not worried about who’s sitting on the church board or conference committees. They’re too busy raising up new churches.”

It was a major theme of the morning session— a 90-minute town hall Folkenberg graciously agreed to attend (and to which North American Division president Alan McClure should have also been invited).

When one young adult shared her frustration with static church services, Folkenberg nodded sympathetically. “Stick with it— set up a different one,” he replied, adding wryly that for some Adventists it’s “easier to give up belief in the Second Coming, the sanctuary, and the state of the dead than to change the order of the church service.”

When another asked about involving more young adults at the General Conference level, Folkenberg said he supported the concept, but added, “The problem is that that has only token influence on the place that matters most [the local congregation]. You can’t vote the mind-set out of existence at the congregational level. What you can do is organize yourself into an initiative.”

When another spoke of young adults eager to participate in broadcast ministries styled differently than It Is Written and 3ABN, Folkenberg counseled them to prayerfully start their own.

Starting Their Own

And that’s exactly what many young adults are doing.

Generally speaking, while gifted Adventists in other areas (such as south Mexico, where young members dominate administrative posts) are being handed the reins within the system, those in North America, either by choice or out of frustration, are creating their own ministries. Sometimes these ministries are loosely affiliated with the church; other times they’re separate. Put them together, and a parallel church is slowly forming.

Consider, for example:

**The Great Controversy** musical. The latest in a series of artsy endeavors by young adults, The Great Controversy (a
musical by Bryan Musson, Sheron Petrie, and Gregory Johnson) found 50 young adults sharing, in a fresh visual way, the longstanding Adventist doctrine with more than 1,500 people at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles August 16, 22, and 23. Paying $21 to $36 a ticket, most of those attending the performance didn’t realize that this was a religious production, says publicist Deedra Brown. “They were able to see the controversy between Jesus and Satan,” she says. “People around me were crying as Mary sang to Jesus hanging on the cross.”

But over the months Controversy was being developed, says Musson, it received a “mixture of support and nonsupport” from Adventists. Some were concerned about Satan being portrayed in theater. A dventist layperson Charles Hartie, president of the Christian Entertainment Center, was primary sponsor.

Musson suggests that an “unspoken tension” between lay workers and the official church is especially prominent among artists. “I think any honest artist feels it,” he says. “The church doesn’t offer many avenues for the talents given us.” A Department of Arts, says Musson, would help.

Meanwhile, as administrative assistant for the North American Division Church Resources Consortium, Brown says her employers gave her “total support” in her role with Controversy. Brown’s contacts with the Southern California Conference African-American Adventist Youth Department even resulted in the division’s PlusLine selling tickets. Still, Brown wishes the church would “actively seek out” new ideas and talent rather than waiting to be approached. “I wish that the two could get together—I hate the separation,” she says. “Nontraditional ministry is the way we’re going to catch those outside the church. Projects like The Great Controversy are orphan children. This is an orphan child, and someone needs to pick it up. We have these upshoots coming up in unconventional ways, and they have to scramble for their own funding.”

Do Your Own Thing?
An excerpt from an Adventist young adult online discussion

Allan Martin: What are all of you finding in your own ministries? Is real young adult ministry having to happen outside of Adventism?

Sherlyn Pang: Being outside of the church gives us credibility with our generation, specifically borderline Adventists.

Gary Manzella: One of the things that I have heard from young adults in my work with them and the rest of the church is that they are tired of sitting in the pews. Church is basically run by the older white heads, and they are mostly overlooked in the process. I’ve run into problems integrating young adults into an existing system of organization, especially where the old folk just don’t want to give up access to their church.

Willard James: I am finding them hungry for spiritual life!

Allan Martin: Any words of advice for church leaders/ministers trying to reach young adults?

Sherlyn Pang: Empower young adults and encourage them to make Christianity their own.

Willard James: Yes.

Dave Jeffre: Create a safe environment in which people can be real without condemnation.
**eXcite98: A Time to Heal**

**Planners announce conneXions99, April 15-17**

**BY ANDY NASH**

*We are frightened of stained-glass walls*
*But through beauty that cuts when it falls*
*We’ve seen You*
*And we want to see so much more . . .*

—Rusty Perez, 29 and blind, performing the eXcite98 theme song, “Be a Light”

Lingering onstage at the close of eXcite98, a conference by and for Adventist young adults, coplanner Shasta Burr was approached by a non-Adventist student from the University of California at Berkeley. After thanking Burr and Jennifer Tyner for the conference, the student, who had learned of Seventh-day Adventists just two months before, said, “I felt the Holy Spirit moving at this event, and I’ve decided that I’m going to study Adventist beliefs. If this is what Adventism can be, I want to be part of it.”

Here’s what Berkeley guy—and others—were part of August 6 to 9 at La Sierra University:

**Community.**

From the clank of skateboards against church pews to starched shirts and striped ties, eXcite98 welcomed—embraced—young adults of all backgrounds, all appearances. More than 1,000 young adults (at least half from outside California) registered for the conference; several hundred more rolled in for Sabbath only.

Learning. Woven between nine general sessions were a choice of 40-plus workshops, ranging from “Drama Ministry” to “Reaching Out on a Secular Campus” to “Being Married and Staying Married, Kids and All.” Prayer groups, Bible studies, and community outreach also peppered the weekend.

Worship. Though participation in praise singing was minimal (many people didn’t seem to know the songs), three simultaneous concerts—helpfully labeled “mild,” “hot,” and “spicy”—kept almost everyone somewhere on campus Sabbath afternoon. Artists ranging from Jason Henry (mild) to Patty Cabrera (hot) to Big Face Grace (spicy) offered varying onramps to the same Saviour.

Revival. By Saturday night’s tripleheader—Dwight Nelson, Jonathan Henderson, and José Rojas—an atmosphere of desperation had given way to hope. “So many people want to work for the church now,” said Tyner after the conference. “We never expected this kind of response.”

Burr says that eXcite98 taught her a lot about trusting God. “It was very humbling to hear people tell us that we should aim smaller or postpone it for another summer or wait until we could find a huge donor,” she says. “God showed me through eXcite98 that He will never call us to something we can’t do. Without permission or a single penny, we decided to go in faith, and He blessed it. He really did.”

**conneXions99 Coming to D.C.**

In the same spirit of spontaneity—they still don’t have any money—Burr and Tyner have announced plans for conneXions99, a “next level” conference designed especially for Adventist young adult leaders, to be held April 15-17 at the world church headquarters, just north of Washington, D.C. Early plans for conneXions99 include:

- Messages and music from Adventist young adults.
- Focused young adult discussion/strategy groups.
- The formation of a young adult ministry network.
- A wide choice of breakout sessions Friday morning with various General Conference and North American Division departmental leaders.
- An opportunity to interview for jobs/internships at the world headquarters.
- An all-day Sabbath worship celebration at a site to be named.

Then next July, say Burr and Tyner, eXcite99 (a rally comparable to eXcite98) will be held in Chicago.

For more information on these events, stay tuned to the Adventist Review and the eXcite website: http://www.excite98.net.
Scanner magazine.
While this new quarterly is sponsored by the Young Adult Program at Glendale City (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church, its primary mission is to create and read by graduate students and young professionals who aren’t reading official church magazines, says Reni Dupertuis, managing editor and associate pastor at Glendale. “We didn’t think there was anything out there that these young adults would be interested in,” says Dupertuis. “Scanner is their opportunity for a voice.”

Articles ranging from “Pushing the Envelope: A New Generation Approaches Tithing” to “A dventists and Social Responsibility” to “Faith Naughty by Nature” bring an edge and honesty that most church publications won’t attempt.

Still, some of Scanner’s features—such as its glowing review of Good Will H uting, a movie plagued by abuses of God’s name—leave one wondering just how edgy the publication strives to be.

Other ministries. A nd there are more: from collegian/young adult worship services held outside church walls; to Face It!, a movable young adult conference functioning much like a camp meeting revival; to Boise’s KT SY, a Top 10 Christian radio station eager to spawn like-minded stations; young A dventists are carving out nontraditional ministries. Some, such as filmmaker Derrick Louw, who’s currently donating his time and talents to the creation of A dventist commercials (they’re going to be excellent), are eager to contribute to the organized church. Others have chosen to minister well outside A dventist airspace.

Why It’s Good
I believe that this trend toward parallel ministries has some positive aspects.

1. Excitement. Nothing matches the thrill of starting a new ministry from scratch. Unfettered by the “way it’s always been done” mentality, the ministry’s creators are free to follow the Lord wherever He leads. And the quintessential lack of funding can actually improve the ministry’s effectiveness; young adults become even more dependent on the Lord. Just ask James and Ellen W hite.

Further, as Folkenberg points out, a fresh initiative—such as eXcite98—launched outside the traditional structure will turn all kinds of heads, often effecting more change than anything attempted within the structure.

2. Targeting. In some cases it makes sense to start a ministry targeting, in a laser beam fashion, a particular group. For example, here in the Washington, D.C., area, several of us A dventist young adults noticed that proportionately few of our peers were attending the area’s 74—yes, 74—A dventist churches. So in January we started a monthly contemporary service/social called Friday Hope that we hoped would function as an onramp back to church. (Since some of us worked at the world church headquarters, we were able to hold the event rent-free in the main auditorium.)

A s attendance at Friday H ope grew to 225-plus, we saw more and more young adults showing up at local churches the next morning. O ur publicity director, Lori F utter, also invited—by mail, then a follow-up phone call—the 74 area churches to submit a paragraph describing their church and its ministries, which we would print and distribute along with directions at Friday H ope. To our disappointment, just seven churches responded.

3. Sensitivity. A railing that “it’s a terrible thing to force anyone to go against their conscience.” A dventist author and seminary professor Jon Pau l i e n says it’s unfair to “wrench a church away from those who have given decades of faithful service to it.”

I agree. Rather than change an existing ministry—a worship service, a radio-broadcast, a publication—that’s highly meaningful to a significant number of people, young adults (or any change group) should instead begin their ministry in a venue that the “existing group” can comfortably avoid.

Why It’s Bad
A t the same time, however, the trend toward parallel ministries has some strongly negative aspects, including but not limited to:

1. Diminished denominational giving. It’s no secret that the North American Division is concerned about the giving patterns of the next generation. “[W]e are a church,” reads a recent division report, “that runs the risk of losing the confidence and finan-
Young Adults and the Adventist World Headquarters

Plans being laid for increased involvement

BY ANDY NASH

Slightly more than 24 percent of employees in the General Conference and North American Division are 35 and under, says Ruth Parish, director of Human Resource Services for the General Conference. And several of the building’s 50-plus departments consistently offer summer internships (an excellent way for young adults to get noticed).

Formerly with Adventist Risk Management, Parish says that she has “fond memories” of the active internship program ARM used to have. “It was great because we brought young people in and rotated them throughout the organization,” she says.

Parish supports the building-wide internship program some are attempting to create at the General Conference and suggests that young adults could choose one of two tracks: (1) working with just one department (i.e., Legal, Communications, Adventist Review) for several weeks, or (2) working with a different department each week.

“We’d be very interested in having a summer intern,” says Tom Neslund, associate director in the Health and Temperance Department. “The challenge will be to find a budget for the program.”

If you’re a young adult interested in interning or working at the world headquarters, e-mail your name, contact information, and area of interest to 74532.2564@compuserve.com or fax to 301-680-6638.

HOPE FOR ALL AGES: The General Conference Communication Department has one of the best age blends at the Adventist world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. “The blend is intentional,” says Ray Dabrowski, director. “Young minds bring the fresh ideas and realism that we need. Departments that don’t have this are disadvantaged.” Pictured here are (seated from left to right) Wendy Schull, part-time news assistant; Lynn Caldwell, public relations director; (standing) Ralph Blodgett, Adventists Online Forum sysop; Lori Futcher, public relations assistant; Alberto Valenzuela, associate director; Lynn Friday, administrative secretary; Ray Dabrowski, director; Nancy Newball-Rivera, graphic designer/visitors’ center coordinator; and Jonathan Gallagher, news director. (Inset: Dixil Rodriguez, assistant to the news director.)

Young adults are hearing is “Don’t count on jobs or committee seats in the organized church, but keep sending your money there.” A some Tennessee young adult put it, “It feels like taxation without representation.”

2. Fragmenting. Truth be told, many young adults would prefer to minister from within the church they’ve lived in and loved. They don’t want to operate on a separate track. They crave opportunities to work with adults who will support and nurture them, who will take them under their wing. Of the young adult leaders I know personally, I can’t think of any who haven’t benefited from a mentoring relationship with an older Adventist. For Gary Krause, it was Jim Coffin. For Alex Bryan, it was Gordon Bietz. For Al lan Martin, it was Lewis Hendershot. For Celeste Ryan, it was Monte Sahlin, José Rojas, and “a host of others.”

A blanket admonition to “start your own” ministries is to strain the chains that link the generations. Further, to discourage young adults from existing jobs and seats on the basis that these jobs and seats are “relatively irrelevant” not only begs the question “Then why do we have them?” but underestimates an intergeneration dynamic that might actually attain relevance.

3. Duplication. We have enough parallel ministries the way it is.

The Tide Is Turning

Last summer I attended a West Coast camp meeting in which 5,000-plus people packed the adult auditorium while a couple dozen dotted the young adult building. In a Friday night discussion the faithful few told me how an “easy 90 percent” of their peers were no longer attending church. “What would keep more of them in?” I asked, recognizing that evil and a very real apathy would always claim a portion.

In one form or another, they all said the same thing: “Being trusted with jobs and responsibility.”

True, many young adults will and should create their own jobs and responsibility. But someone also has to fill existing jobs and responsibility in a rapidly changing world—a world that fresh college graduates often know better than we do. In the early 1970s a 29-year-old conference president named Robert S. Folkenberg and his youthful peers breathed life and growth into Inter-Ameri ca. The same can happen in North America today.

The good news is, the tide seems to be turning. While just 22 percent of 25- to 27-year-olds currently hold some type of church office or volunteer role—a significant decrease from
First World Phenom
Why I Have Hope for the North American Division

BY A. ALLAN MARTIN

This decade I’ve heard church leadership suggest that only in developing countries are we seeing a spiritual movement of young adults in the Adventist Church. But as I surveyed the La Sierra University church sanctuary, which was packed all day of eXcite98 Sabbath, as I enjoyed the concluding preaching service that went until 10:00 p.m., as we heard reports of young adults preaching in pulpits across the division, and as I joined hundreds of young adults filling the aisles and forming prayer groups to close eXcite98, I would have to disagree.

The Holy Spirit is no respecter of worlds. eXcite98 is only the most recent fruit of a young adult spiritual movement emerging over the past several years in the North American Division. I remember the enthusiasm with which my peers came to the president’s kitchen cabinet meetings, commissioned by Elder Folkenberg, in the early nineties. They came with ideas and passion, making personal investments toward growing the church. And although many of these young adults came away from the kitchen cabinet with a “pat-on-the-head” feeling, it was a rite of passage for young people and the church, signaling that young adults were not content to be given a slice of “pie.” We wanted to do some baking of our own.

Throughout the middle nineties I, along with other young adults, was asked to serve on a variety of committees trying to do things the representative way. Youth Evangelism Taskforce, Marketing and Materials Committee, NET ‘98 Young Adult Task Group, and Church Resource Consortium’s Young Adult Definition Group were among the many focus and input groups I gave time and effort to. Although I have high respect for the process of committee work, I have seen many of my peers come away frustrated with the results. Although church leaders said that they wanted our input, it seemed that they wanted our endorsement or agreement more than anything else. I have had my own frustrations, but nothing hurt as much as seeing my own frustrations, but nothing hurt as much as seeing

affirmation and ultimately for our church. While some in the church continue to disown us and dismiss us as first world spiritual casualties, you see us as the “promised generation.”

Now get ready for a first world phenomenon. While some in the church continue to try unsuccessfully to define us as Generation X, watch as our generation now defines the church and defines our world... for Christ.

A. Allan Martin, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and cofounder of dre•am VISION ministries, a parachurch agency dedicated to empowering and nurturing young people in Christian lifestyle and leadership. Visit dre•am VISION website at http://www.tagnet.org/dvm.

A nd so this year, rather than appealing to older generations, I appeal to my own:

Don’t give up. Things are changing—not quickly enough, but they’re changing. Help bring these many ministries—these many ministers— together. Help this movement move again.

Finally, don’t let this cycle repeat itself. Mentor the next generation, the millennials, now. Take them under your wing—then watch them fly.
Last Friday afternoon I was visiting with an elderly patient at Adventist Health/St. Helena Hospital (SHH),” recalls David Park, senior theology major at Pacific Union College (PUC). “As he was sharing his private thoughts, he began to cry. I felt a little awkward at first, because it was the first time I’d been with a male patient who was crying.”

Park, participating in a special student chaplaincy practicum offered by PUC and SHH, reflects on the experience. “No one had visited that patient for three days. I think he started to unload on me because he hadn’t had anyone to talk to. To him that visit was vitally important.”

After his conversation with Park, nurses reported that he climbed out of bed and for the first time started walking down the hall—an important step toward healing. For Park it was a landmark experience, because he realized just how important a chaplain’s visit can be.

Began With “Macedonian Call”

This chaplaincy program—perhaps the first of its kind for undergraduates at an Adventist college—began with what John McVay, associate professor of biblical studies and chair of the Religion Department at PUC, describes as a “Macedonian call” from Queen of the Valley Hospital (QVH) in Napa, California.

“In the fall of 1996 I got a telephone call from Rev. Denise Tittle, newly appointed chaplain at QVH, who was recruiting community volunteers to do chaplaincy work. She wondered if PUC theology and religion majors would like to get involved.”

Soon both Napa Valley hospitals—one Seventh-day Adventist, one Catholic—joined with PUC in this adventure in ministry. Eighteen months later student chaplains, hospital chaplains, and PUC faculty agree that the program is a win-win situation.

During the 1997-1998 school year three theology majors completed their practicum at SHH. “One bonus for us was that two of them are bilingual, filling a special need we have for Spanish-speaking chaplains,” says Judy Crabb, spiritual services team leader at SHH and the hospital’s program coordinator.

Three-Part Program

Although the practicum is flexible and students can elect to earn from one to three academic credits (depending on the individual course contract each student signs), the basic program consists of three parts. The initial stage is training—10 hours of lectures and group interaction offered on two consecutive Sundays. Next the students begin clinical work, at first under the supervision of a hospital chaplain, then solo, for at least eight weeks.

The final component involves continuing education. Every other week students participate in a conference with Religion Department faculty and chaplain supervisors. During the first hour McVay and Myron Widmer, director of the ministerial studies program at PUC, complete their work with the students. For the final hour students review with hospital chaplains specific difficult situations they have encountered.

Marlene Arguelles, also involved with local English and Spanish churches, prison ministries, and home visits of the elderly, quickly realized that chaplaincy is “seed sowing.” Unlike other ministries in which she works with the same people week after week, she seldom sees hospital patients more than once and does not know what happens to those she visits with.

Bilingual Benefits

Arguelles worked as a student chaplain at SHH throughout the 1997-1998 school year and did visitation in three areas: the medical/surgical floor, the transitional-care unit (for longer-term patients), and the mental health unit. She especially enjoyed visiting patients in the mental health unit, sometimes spending an hour or more with a single patient or group of patients.

Arguelles has discovered that some patients feel more comfortable with a female chaplain; more frequently she was appreciated because she is equally fluent in Spanish and English. “It’s hard for Hispanic people to believe there’s a woman chaplain,” she says.

PUC is physically isolated atop Howell Mountain, and McVay is quick to point out the advantages of getting students off “this hilltop.” Chaplaincy
Public Officials Promote Concerns at Adventist World Headquarters

In recent weeks several public officials have visited the Adventist Church's world headquarters to raise awareness for various initiatives.

On September 14 the Singing Senators, four United States senators who sing Southern gospel music, gave a concert to a packed house at the General Conference to promote the proposed U.S. Dream Academy headed by Adventist pastor Wintley Phipps.

Republican senators John Ashcroft, Missouri; Larry Craig, Idaho; James Jeffords, Vermont; and Senate majority leader Trent Lott, Mississippi, have sung at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., on NBC's Today show, and for the Republican National Convention. The group donates its performance time to numerous charitable causes, such as the U.S. Dream Academy, based in Columbia, Maryland.

Founded by Wintley Phipps, an associate director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, the Dream Academy will aim to equip the children of prisoners and at-risk youth with the life skills necessary to fulfill their potential.

Still in the planning stage, the academy will provide youth with an online, faith-based tutorial and remedial curriculum, and Christian mentors. With the help of several educational foundations, the virtual school will operate across North America in churches, hospitals, and community centers.

Parris N. Glendening met with General Conference officials at the world headquarters and commended the church for its health and education programs.

"I am passionate about education," said Glendening,
Hurricane Pope John Paul II

BY ALEX BRYAN, PASTOR, ATLANTA, GEORGIA

In Adventist circles much attention has been raised about recent comments by Pope John Paul II regarding increased attention to Sunday observance (and the supposed threat to Saturday observance). I've read many Adventist e-mail messages on the subject, received mailings from Adventist Church administrators, and listened to many Adventist members discuss it.

In sum, the pope’s encyclical—while clearly relevant to our Adventist message—seems to have raised great alarm among Adventists themselves. I’ve been trying to figure out why.

Should it change my behavior in some way? Should I really “get with it now” and start making friends and sharing my faith with unchurched people? Should I start studying my Bible? Should I start asking for forgiveness more often? Should I change my diet? Should I start spending my money differently? Should I give increased priority to my church? Should I begin rebuilding broken relationships? Should I pray more?

I hope the answer to all of these questions is an emphatic no. If I need a “Sunday letter” from the pope as my motivation to be a fully devoted follower of Christ, I’m in serious trouble. If a hurricane’s coming, the important thing is the longstanding foundation of my house—not a last-minute paint job.

Although we have an important end-time message to share with others, we must be careful not to allow current events to drive our personal spirituality. Giving inordinate attention to the latest headline serves will only get Adventists wound up about predicting and projecting end-time scenarios and dates—a very “disappointing practice,” as our history so painfully records. What matters most is my relationship, my life, and my spiritual direction today.

If a storm’s coming, let it come. In the meantime there’s a lot of kingdom building to do.

NEWS BREAK

Looters Damage ADRA Compound in Albania

During a riot on September 14, masked gunmen looted the Adventist Development and Relief Agency warehouse in Tirana, Albania, for the second time this year. Although the compound is back in the hands of ADRA personnel, it appears there is significant damage.

“The armed men entered the center and held a gun to the guard’s head, then broke down the doors to all of the warehouse units,” reports Sean Robinson, director of ADRA/Africa. “The police arrived several times, but each time the men escaped, and returned after the police left.”

In January 1998 a six-hour Special Forces police operation, with support from the national and local governments, succeeded in transferring 15 squatter families from the compound to other accommodations. This became necessary when all other efforts failed to move the settlers from ADRA’s land.

Adventist Colleges and Universities Rank High in Best Colleges Report

Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions ranked high in the latest U.S. News and World Report America’s Best Colleges guidebook. The publication ranks colleges and universities throughout the United States.

Pacific Union College in California ranked sixth in the top tier of liberal arts colleges in the Western region, and Walla Walla College in Washington ranked in the top tier of universities in the same region. Atlantic Union College in Massachusetts and Southern Adventist University in Tennessee were ranked in the second tier of liberal arts colleges for the Northern and Southern regions, respectively.

Other Adventist institutions also ranked high in their regions and specialties. Andrews University in Michigan was
Commitment to Gambling Addicts Commended

Press reports that the Australian Medical Association (AMA) is to raise awareness and the referral needs of problem gamblers were recently commended by the Adventist Church.

According to a report in the Sydney Morning Herald on August 19, the AMA is planning seminars to teach its 3,000 members how to spot and treat those suffering from symptoms associated with gambling problems. Symptoms can include hypertension, headaches, ulcers, alcohol and drug dependence, irritability, and anxiety and depression, according to the AMA.

“Since the opening of large casinos in Australia there has been a significant increase in the number of addiction cases,” says Ray Coombe, South Pacific Division communication director. “The AMA is to be commended for taking steps to address this problem in a professional way. While this addiction needs to be treated from a medical and psychological perspective, we as Christians believe that it can be conquered only with help from a higher power, and that spiritual counseling can be a valuable assistance.”

High Level of Danger

Planning to climb a ladder? Make sure the ladder is on level ground and someone holds the ladder while you’re on it. Boston-area physicians questioned people who were treated for injuries suffered from falling from a ladder. A majority said they fell because the ladder was positioned on uneven or slippery ground, wasn’t resting securely against the building, or was too upright.—Health News/Massachusetts Medical Society.

Sunwise Eyes

Sunglasses protect your eyes against ultraviolet light damage. While uniform regulations don’t exist, most sunglasses have a label stating their protective ability. Look for glasses that block 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B light. Snug wraparound styles offer the most protection. Color and darkness of lenses have nothing to do with ability to block UV light. UV protection comes from a chemical coating on the lens surface. Even clear lenses can provide ultraviolet protection.—American Academy of Ophthalmology.

—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.

Recognized as having one of the highest diversity ratings and one of the most international student bodies, and also for having one of the smallest class sizes.

“Such external endorsement of the success of Adventist education is always welcome,” said Humberto Rasi, General Conference education director. “As a church, we are committed to excellence, and it’s gratifying to see this ideal being recognized in practice by the high rankings our colleges have achieved. Our educational institutions seek to perform well academically; however, our primary goal is to provide quality education in a Christian setting.”—Adventist News Network.

Review Readers Doing It Again

One personal check at a time. Adventist Review readers are building a storehouse of free one-year subscriptions for the thousands of NET '98 attendees expected to join the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The checks come in response to editor William G. Johnson’s September North American Division Edition announcement that each $25 donation would send a subscription to a new member’s home (see “Let’s Do It—The $25 Club”). Some readers are contributing as much as $1,000.

“This is a faith venture,” says Johnson. “We’d like every new member to receive the weekly magazine. It will help keep them in the family. But that will mean we need to raise more than $100,000.”

Readers wishing to help should make out a check to the Adventist Review, mark it “$25 Club,” and mail to: Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. All gifts are tax-deductible for United States income tax purposes; gifts of $100 and above will merit a receipt from the General Conference Treasury.

News Notes

✔ Alfredo Garcia-Marenko, Inter-American Division youth and family life director, was recently elected associate youth director for the General Conference. Garcia replaces Richard Barron, who became pastor of the Georgetown Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bermuda.

What’s Upcoming

Oct. 17 Spirit of Prophecy Day
Oct. 31 Children’s Sabbath
Nov. 7-14 Week of Prayer
Nov. 21 Ingathering Begins
Your Baby and the Power of Human Touch

Infants need cuddling and soothing. Christ set the example.

BY GERALD COLVIN

ANY MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS NOW believe there is a physical basis linking stressed-out babies to personality disorders in adulthood. What does this mean for you as a parent of an infant today? It means that making your baby endure disappointments without comfort increases his or her susceptibility to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and personality problems.

The idea that babies need physical contact certainly is nothing new. That is why we no longer swaddle them in tight blankets and leave them to cry for hours. However, researchers are starting to find evidence of actual physical changes in the brain caused by stress in infancy.

Sleeping in total isolation may be very stressful for an infant. We can see this because such separation often leads to prolonged crying. The stress hormone cortisol is much higher in crying babies, and this constant stimulation by cortisol in infancy can cause physical changes in the brain.¹ Chronic bombardment by the stress hormone can make babies more prone to the effects of stress to all illnesses, including mental illness, and to problematic recovery. These changes are real and lasting. Maybe this is the reason parents in most other cultures have infants sleep with them.

In the Western Hemisphere, however, we have prided ourselves that we are rearing our children to be self-sufficient and to face danger alone. Yet growing up as they have, the children of the West too often do not have the emotional resources to seek comfort and consoling, and their experience becomes unbearable.

Other cultures teach infants to stay close by and to look to others for emotional and physical support. Babies may even fall asleep touching their parents, and they are often carried about while in constant tactile connection with a parent or some family member. Such consistent support keeps the cortisol levels down and appears to help the cortical structures in the brain develop better. Illnesses such as PTSD and phobias, on the rise in industrialized countries such as the United States, barely exist in more primitive societies.²

Researchers, including Dr. Michael Commons of the Harvard Medical School, plan more tests, such as PET scans, which can show blood flow in the brain and indicate what structures in the brain are most active. But in the meantime, they urge parents to think carefully about how they treat their infants. Babies should be soothed and cuddled and kissed. These findings may even be suggesting that children in day care should be able to draw reassurance and comfort in touching each other during naptime.

The Touch-Therapy Remedy

A more passive form of touch therapy utilizes the over-the-shoulder baby holder. Evaluators argue that it provides contact pressure, motion, pleasure, warmth, security, and sound similar to the womb that the newborn’s nervous system requires—everything important for combating stress in the infant. Vestibular (or auditory) input has a direct effect on the system for arousal in the nervous system. As a consequence of this most important connection between motion and the reticular system, the movements of the caregiver’s body can help the baby maintain that nice, quiet, alert state for learning and allow the baby to drift.
into sleep when necessary. A baby who is carried about (or worn) for prolonged periods during the day tends to be in either the quiet alert state or in a light or deep sleep, but seldom in a state of distress.

In other quarters there is a move afoot to help parents learn interactive communication through loving touch. Most of these programs stress that loving touch is vital not only for well babies and babies with special needs, but for the caregivers too. Proponents of infant massage claim that the benefits include (a) longer and sounder sleep (for all concerned); (b) enhancement of neurological development; (c) promotion of "healthy touching"; and (d) relief of discomfort from teething, gas, colic, and emotional stress.

In short, massaging your baby may be seen as a tactile translation of love, security, and physical comfort—a veritable touch of life from you to your baby. A nd though each set of newly "converted" parents will use the same strokes as have thousands of parents before them, each new parent will massage his or her baby as no one else can.

Additional Research Support

An age-old myth is that premature babies are too fragile to be touched by their caregivers or parents. More than a few obstetricians can remember peering through plexiglass bassinets at tiny babies while warning their parents not to touch them. But like old bathwater, such unfounded beliefs are being thrown right out the window.

A study by the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami Medical School demonstrates a clear advantage to regular massage therapy. In this study 40 premature infants were given three 15-minute massages daily for 10 days. The massaged infants gained 47 percent more weight than the isolated babies, even though the caloric intake was identical in the two groups. On the Brazelton scale the treated infants exhibited more mature orientation and motor habituation. Finally, the treated babies were released six days earlier, yielding a hospital cost savings per infant of $3,000.

Hormones that assist in food absorption were shown to be secreted at an increased rate in the massaged infants. The levels of gastrin and insulin were both higher in the massaged group, explaining the weight gain. Massage, given with light pressure, apparently stimulates the vagal nerve activity in the brain, thus lowering stress hormones and placing the infant in a general state of comfort. A nd in a time when cost seems to be of greater importance to many managed-care companies than quality of care, such providers should find special interest in the fact that massage can dramatically lower hospitalization costs.

With the mounting evidence of the benefits of massage therapy for infants, professionals everywhere are finding it harder than ever to continue ignoring its advantages.

In Summary

So what's in a touch? How are we to interpret the restorative and insulating powers of massage and body contact for the human infant? Perhaps power manifested in human touch has as much to do with the receptor mechanisms (sensitivity, need, etc.) within the receiver as in any magic intrinsic to the hands-that-touch; nevertheless, such "touching" power was definitely present in the Son of God.

Remember? Jesus had just descended from the mountain from a night of prayer in order to be more accessible to the multitudes. With the undulating plain stretching peacefully toward the horizon, His disciples, almost as palace guards, sought to hold back the pressing multitude out of Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, all there to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. "And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all" (Luke 6:19).

2 Ibid.

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I’d Believed.

So Why Did Nothing Happen?

My concept of God as a vending machine had exploded in my face.

BY DON KEELE, JR.

IF YOU LET DAD die, God, I’ll quit the ministry,” I muttered to myself as I sped down Interstate 205 toward my parents’ house in Portland, Oregon.

To this point my life had been one of pleasant memories, successful youth ministry, and happy times with my family. To be sure, we had our moments, but now, suddenly, I was faced with one of the
most difficult situations of my life. We had watched as a rather large lump under dad’s right arm had turned into an ugly, oozing, bleeding, ulcerous tumor that was approximately seven to nine inches across. The diagnosis: melanoma, the worst form of skin cancer. The prognosis: three to six months.

We prayed. We wept. We encouraged others to pray with us. Thousands from all across the United States—even across the world—prayed that Dad would be healed. I felt sure that healing would happen. If it had to do with the amount of prayers or the sincerity of prayer, then Dad should have been healed. If it had to do with faith and seeking the Lord, then Dad should have been healed. But he wasn’t. He died.

I Tried Everything

A few Sundays before Dad died, he could not stand up without two or three people helping him out of bed. I had spent the greater portion of the night praying. I really wanted God to work a miracle. I had read the stories in the Gospels of all the people whom Jesus healed. I had read the stories in Acts 5:15, 16 in which Peter was walking through crowds and people were clamoring to put their sick in his shadow as he passed, and they were healed. I had read stories (Acts 19:11, 12) of Paul walking through crowds of people who were passing their handkerchiefs and aprons over to him so that he might touch them and send them back. And the passage declares that all of them were healed.

Then there were the proclamations of Jesus. “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matt. 21:22, NIV). “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7, NIV). “The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 15:16, NIV).

I had believed. I had asked. I didn’t doubt that God could do it. I had prayed hard and long that night. Yet somehow I was still like the disciples in the garden. Somewhere along the line I had fallen asleep.

Now doubt plagued me. Would my sleeping preclude my miracle? Never mind that I had averaged only three to four hours of sleep per night for the previous three weeks as I sat by the bedside of my dying father. Never mind that I was driving 40 minutes one way to go home at least once during each 24-hour period to see my family, usually for only an hour or two. This particular night I had decided that I would keep a prayer vigil and pray all night. Yet I found myself waking up on the floor of my study at 4:00 a.m., loathing the weakness of my humanity. “Lord, I believe!” I cried. “Help my unbelief!”

Bewildered and Embarrassed

About 6:00 I felt an impression to go to my dad and say to him, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and be healed.” And so now I sped down Interstate 205, wrestling with myself and with God. The struggle raged. Inwardly I said, “If I go and do this thing, and nothing happens, I’ll be really embarrassed. How would that look for a pastor? But if I don’t, that could be the very thing that saves him.”

I thought of Naaman’s servant saying, “If he had asked you to do a big thing, wouldn’t you have done it?” I wrestled. I prayed. And then the thought came, “If you let Dad die, God, I’ll quit the ministry. The turmoil continued to rage for most of the trip down. As I turned into Dad’s neighborhood, a peace overtook me, and I was resolute that God wanted me to go in and pray and ask Him to raise Dad up. I was confident that God would do that.

I entered the room. No one was with Dad at the time, so I told him that I felt impressed that we should pray for his healing once again, only this time I felt that God was calling on us to demonstrate our faith in Him by action. Dad said, “I think you are right. I appreciate that about you . . . always being a man of faith.”

I prayed. Hard. And then I said, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I say to you, get up and be healed.” Without hesitation, holding on to my hand, dad swung his feet off the bed and began to stand feebly. About halfway up he gathered strength from somewhere and straightened all the way up. We both stood there holding on to each other for a magical moment, wondering if indeed the healing was happening, and then he said, “Help me lie back down. God may heal me in stages.” I helped him back into bed, and then he said, “Thanks for your faith. Thanks for your love that would prompt you to pray for me. And don’t worry. God will heal me. Now or then.”

I left the room bewildered and embarrassed. Angry with God for asking me to do that. Angry with myself for possibly misreading His cues. A ngry because it felt as if the devil was just taunting me.

Throwing my faith in my face as...
totally preposterous. Was it a lack of faith? Was I acting on what I believed God wanted me to do? Why would God have me do something that He wasn’t going to answer?

I don’t think Dad ever mentioned it again, and I wondered if he was embarrassed by it. He didn’t seem to be. The thing that got me was that his trust was immediate. He was willing to try whatever means were available because he loved us and he loved life so much. And he truly believed that God was going to heal him. So I don’t think he was embarrassed, even though I was.

How I See It Now

After much thought, here is what I think the point must be. (Or at least some thoughts that can be drawn from the whole experience.)

First, I think that God may have been testing me to see if I would trust Him no matter what. I had thought that if Dad died, I would leave the ministry. What use would it be to serve a God who didn’t answer prayers? Why minister to the goodness of a God who wasn’t so good? I think God’s point was to say, no matter what happens, I will still be in control, and you don’t have to worry. I will take care of your dad. And I will take care of you. So do you believe Me or not?

Second, I would have regretted never trying it if I had kept silent and dad had died. I could truly say that I had tried everything and could rest knowing that God had another plan. If I had never experienced that, I might never have forgiven myself, and so I think God gave me the urge to go ahead and try what I’d read in the Bible. I think God wanted me to see that the power does not lie in our magic words or performances, but in Him alone. I had figured that if those (“magic”) words worked in the Bible, they just might work now. And what if they were the words to save my dad? But such was not the case.

God is not moved by our magic words. He is moved by our heart. He isn’t interested in our notions. What He wants is to be loved freely. With no strings attached. And He risks being misunderstood and spurned rather than performing to my tune. The love He wants me to share with Him is not a love based on manipulation or insecurity. It is a love based on a deep abiding trust. And the question comes back: Do I trust Him no matter what? If I trust Him only when things are going my way, then I have a conditional love. If I trust Him only when He responds to my magic words, then I have reduced Him to a vending machine God—put in the right amount, say the magic words, and out will pop your desired outcome. That’s not a relationship. It’s manipulation.

When I say to God “Do this and I will love You” or “Don’t do this and I will not love You,” I am basing my relationship on my own immature desire to manipulate Him to get what I want. God has never worked that way. Not even when it would have saved Jesus’ life. Herod wanted Jesus to perform a miracle in exchange for Jesus’ freedom. Jesus didn’t comply, because He wanted our love to spring from a genuine response to His own, not from a selfish gain.

A Deeper Trust

And so I am finding a deeper relationship with God, even though Dad died. Even though healing didn’t occur the way I wanted. Why? Because I can’t blame God for all of the misery. We chose it. We sinned, not God. But He commanded His love toward us in this, that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Love wants only a genuine response. So love stretched out His arms and died. To show us He loved us. To show us that though the devil has made death a fearful thing, we need not fear it. To show us that He understands even the worst of what happens to us, and yet has promised us a better day. And because of that promise, I still have something to share in the ministry. Because of that love, I’ll stay in the ministry until that day when all will be made right. That day when we will see why things didn’t work out here. That day when we’ll experience joy instead of tears. That day when Dad will come to life again.

Don Keele, Jr., is the youth pastor of the Meadow G lade Seventh-day A dentist Church in Battle Ground, Washington.
A student of mine was struggling with incredible pain; she had been sexually abused as a child, yet she still had to face the relative who had abused her. Though her life was unraveling and she recognized she needed help, she shunned counseling. Or rather she made appointments with a counselor and never kept them. Watching her slide lower and lower, I felt powerless, because she would not honestly confront her problem and help herself.

One day as she was leaving class, I called her to the front and handed her a note with the simple message "John 5:6." The scene portrayed in this verse involves Jesus and a man who had been ill for 38 years. "When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be healed?'" 1

The next class I sensed that she was different. After class she approached my desk and said with a glowing peace, "You'll never know how much that note meant to me."

The key to healing for all of us is courageous honesty, an attribute easier eulogized than lived out. We swim in an ocean of lies. We roll onto shore, and a million grains give way. Politicians, construction workers, bank clerks, and stay-at-home parents shamelessly pervert the truth. 2 Television comedies follow their stock formula: sticky predicament . . . lie . . . big laugh. We don't have to open our mouths to lie; a mere arched eyebrow, a pause, a slight nod, can communicate volumes of bad information. "The cruelest lies," Robert Louis Stevenson reflects, "are often told in silence."

Truth is often painful to look in the face. I witnessed this in my father's U.S. history high school classroom when I visited one day and noticed a sophomore tapping her pencil on sheet after sheet of paper for the entire period. A fellow classmate had told Dad what she was doing. He told me that he had been attempting to impress upon students the immensity of the number 1 billion, because people tend to talk about billions of dollars in a fairly offhanded way. So he promised that anyone who made a billion marks during the semester would receive an automatic A.

He had asked the class to make marks as fast as they could for one minute, then count the total and calculate how long it would take them, working at a comparable rate for 12 hours each day, seven days a week, to reach 1 billion. (A constant rate of three marks per second, or 129,600 marks per day, would require 7,716 days—about 21 years.)

"So why is she still doing it?" I asked.

Dad shook his head sadly. "She told me it's because she wants an A in this class." He held up a fistful of papers covered with marks. "I've showed her the math, and proved that she can never make it, but she keeps tapping her days away."

Confronted with the truth, many people react fearfully and illogically. One definition of a fanatic is someone who, once the error of their ways has been clearly demonstrated, redoubles their efforts in the same direction. The bold successes of Alcoholics Anonymous and spinoff 12-step groups are predicated on honesty—with the participants themselves, with other people, and with "a higher power." What changes the groups? Total honesty.

The truth is elevating; the truth is humbling. The truth is stratospheric; the truth is earthbound. A nothing less than truth results in wrecked lives.

Unless our sincere quest is toward total honesty, we will wander in forests of deceptions, shunning valuable help and endlessly tapping on meaningless papers. If twisting the truth, even for a good cause, appears to be an acceptable option, our spiritual compass will be continually spinning. God laments, "They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me. . . . Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, says the Lord." 3

Jesus, heal us. Make us a people of unyielding integrity. Help me, no matter what I face, to be honest.

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1 From the Revised Standard Version.
2 Some have been lying here for more than 38 years.
3 Jer. 9:3-6, RSV.

Chris Blake teaches students at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska. Honest.
My 16-year-old son is a four-seasons athlete. That means he will play anytime, anywhere, any chance he gets, no matter what the weather. I am his number one fan and an occasional participant in team sports. So when someone presented the concept of the pastor as “coach” and the members as “players on a team” to illustrate the teaching of “the priesthood of all believers” and “every member a minister,” I could understand the metaphor.

The coaches (pastors) get their scouts and recruiters (nominating committee) together to find suitable players for their team. With a list of positions—such as pitcher, first base, outfield (elder, deacon, Sabbath school teachers)—the committee looks for individual star players to fill the roster for the coming year. They cannot offer $1 million contracts, signing bonuses, or other incentives to get a likely candidate under contract. The recruiters may have to use more subtle psychological techniques, such as appealing to pride, guilt, or sympathy (“No one else will do it”), to get the players to join the team and commit to a year of service.

As a youth I remember the agony of standing in the grass on the edge of the ball field, waiting for the coach or sandlot captain to choose a team. The biggest kids and best hitters were chosen first, while the rest of us waited in suspense. In one sense I dreaded the thought of being chosen. What if they put me in a position, such as shortstop, where I would probably make an error? Worse yet, I could be chosen last, or not make the cut at all.

When called by the nominating committee, I’ve had similar feelings. Either I was asked to serve in a position I didn’t think I could fill, or I felt as if I was “last pick” (they must really have been desperate if they were asking me). At other times I felt as if I wanted to play but was kept out of the game because I didn’t have a degree or the specialized skill to work for the Lord. Many of my years as a church member have been spent on the bench or in the bleachers.

The good news is that the church is not a sports team; it is God’s team. Whether we have felt left out, or were the last pick (not quite good enough to be a starter) or a little short for the pros, there is an alternative to the competitive, selective, or coercive approach to athletics and Christianity. It’s called “gifts-based ministry.”

The problem is not our lack of talent or skill, for Christ explained that “unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability” (Matt. 25:15). Every person has at least one talent. The problem is the job description. The lists of spiritual gifts such as those found in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 may seem to exclude a diversity of gifts (1 Cor. 12:4). These lists were not, however, meant to be exhaustive. Unlimited or infinite describes the number of gifts that can be given by the unlimited and infinite Holy Spirit.

We treat Christianity as if it were a baseball team with nine positions for nine players when the true model is more like the Guinness Book of Records: not only are there great athletes in team sports, but there are also record holders in jumping rope, feats of endurance, and even some things you never ever thought of. Likewise, in Hebrews 11 there is a list of men and women who got their names in God’s book of records by doing different—even strange—things by faith.

Since we have a gift or gifts, and the possibilities for using our gifts are unlimited, then why don’t we get into the game? Some of us have been sitting on the bench for too long. It’s time to create opportunities for every gift to be exercised and for every member to have a position on God’s team. Let’s do what we are called and equipped to do, and get our names in God’s book of records.

* For a more detailed treatment of gifts-based ministry, see Revolution: in the Church, by Russell Burrill, currently the director of the North American Division Evangelism Institute, connected with Andrews University.

Tom Kohls is a freelance writer living in Brunswick, Maine.
Look at the words on this page. Now look at the left side of this column. All of the words line up except the first line of each paragraph (it is indented so you can tell that it is a new paragraph). When lines of words are set evenly like this, we say they are “flush left.”

Now look at this paragraph. Does it look a little different from the others? The words in this paragraph line up on the right side as well. The lines in this paragraph are flush left and flush right. When the words are spaced so that the lines come out even at both edges, we say that the margins are justified.

With a computer it is easy to justify your margins. All I have to do on my computer is highlight the text, then click on a certain square at the top of the screen. Instantly the words jump around and put in new spaces so that the lines are equal in length.

With justified margins, when you look up and down the page, the words line up with the edges of the paper. When you look across the page from left to right, the words are spaced to make the lines come out even.

The word “justify” is in the Bible, too. People become justified when they choose to follow Jesus and become a child of God. Satan says, “These people are sinners.” Jesus says, “I paid for their sins.” God says it comes out even.

You aren’t justified by being good. You aren’t justified by obeying all the rules. You aren’t justified because of who you are. You are justified because of who God is. God loves you. He wants to be with you.

In Bible times, when people talked about peace, they didn’t just mean a time of no war. Peace also meant a time when people had everything they needed. Peace meant being full, satisfied, happy.

The Bible says, “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1, NIV). When we are justified, we are at peace with God. Our lives are full. The future is lined up. It all comes out even. Like the lines of a paragraph with justified margins.