Adventists Unlimited
William Johnson’s “Adventists Unlimited” (Oct. 9) is a most inspiring statement championing excellence and greatness. This vision can motivate both young and not-so-young. Today I turned 62, but it is never too late to reach out to our maximum potential as per the Lord’s plan.

Thank you for a beautiful birthday gift.

—Hector Hammerly
Coquitlam, British Columbia

Youth and Communion Linens
I was flabbergasted when I read Calvin Rock’s reply to the question about whether or not 13- to 17-year-olds could remove Communion table linens. He should have answered, “Of course they can!” But he went on to write five paragraphs of hand-wringing cautions, noting that “many” adults would be “traumatized.”

Traumatized? I am traumatized by child abuse and urban violence, but I would use a word like “thrilled” to describe my reaction to young people assisting in the Communion service. God made no mistake when He gave visions to a 17-year-old. Could there be a heavier responsibility entrusted to anyone? Our concern should be to involve our youth when they are willing, not to split hairs about traditional roles.

—Kaarina Fordham
Austell, Georgia

A Different Perspective
In his “Viewed From a Different Perspective” (Oct. 9) James Coffin seems to send confusing signals, especially to our young people. Is he saying “Anything goes, just as long as you have a ‘close relationship’ with the Lord”? Or maybe he's saying, “Appearances don't really matter with Adventist Christians. Our simple, clean, natural lifestyle is a testimony before others (even our children) that is no longer important.” With all the worldliness that is creeping into the church, we don’t need articles like this.

Perhaps the words of Jesus in another situation apply: “This you should have done, and not left the other undone.”

—Gerald Cullum
Berkeley Springs, West Virginia
Adventist centers I was told of a mother who rises at 4:00 a.m. to pray each morning. Yet with her seeming life of devotion she finds that alcohol consumption is no barrier to faith and teaches her children to “drink in moderation.”

In creating guidelines for our lives, it is important that we each remember Isaiah 8:20. We have the law of God and the testimony that He has so graciously given us. By those standards we must conduct our lives. Feeling something is correct does not make it so.

—Paul B. Scott
Glendale, California

**NET ’98 and Diversity**


I attended a few of the NET ’96 meetings and found Mark Finley’s messages to be very inspiring. The visual aids, however, presented some concerns: many of the pictures seemed to be from the 1950s, with mainly White Americans.

I have friends whom I wanted to invite but did not, who would most certainly have wondered if they were indeed welcome to join the Adventist Church. Since we’re a worldwide church, I would suggest that (1) the visual aids used in NET ’98 show people of various ethnic backgrounds, and (2) Dwight Nelson and the task force discuss how youth and young adults of various ethnic backgrounds might also be rallied to participate in NET ’98 preparation and the series itself.

I would very much like to invite my Black non-Adventist friends to NET ’98. I just want them to know that we accept all people as Jesus did.

—Deirdre Robinson
Orlando, Florida

**Adventists and Lutherans**

Now that we have a clearer understanding of the Lutherans (see William Johnson’s “Adventists and Lutherans: Round Three,” Sept. 11), does that mean the door is open to shared mission work, joint operations, and accepting one another’s clergy? I hope not.

—Lee Cherry
Hagerstown, Maryland

No.—Editors.

**Clocks and Quail**

Thanks to R. H. Brown for his October 23 letter regarding pendulum clocks and quail hatching, discussed in my August 28 “A Potpourri of Praise.” I do not claim expertise in these areas and am dependent on what I consider reliable sources.

My information with regard to quail hatching came from David Attenborough’s *Trials of Life*: “So as the time of hatching approaches, all the eggs may not be equally ready. To put things right, the unborn chicks begin to signal to one another. If you put a doctor’s stethoscope to an egg at this time, you may hear clicks coming from within. The neighboring eggs can also hear them. If they have not yet reached the clicking state, the sound stimulates them to speed up development. That this is what happens can be demonstrated by playing a recording of the clicks to one batch of eggs and so inducing them to hatch well before others of the clutch that have been kept individually and in silence” (p. 23).


Also, the article was reviewed by a physiologist who has done advanced research at a well-known German institution.

—Lyndon K. McDowell
Scottsdale, Arizona

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“Behold, I come quickly…”

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

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The Spiritual Athlete

“Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7, 8, RSV).

You have the heart of an athlete,” said my doctor as he unhooked me from the treadmill. “The reading is identical with your last test 10 years ago.”

Of course, I was glad to get the news. At the same time I reminded myself how difficult it is for even the finest cardiologist to be sure of the condition of a client’s heart. I thought again of the old saw: the doctor tells the patient he is fine, but he drops dead in the parking lot.

No doubt the gene stream helped me: my mother lived into her 90s, my father to 80. But I have had a part too—I am one of those freaks who actually prefers walking to riding, who finds getting up and going for a run the most enjoyable way to start the day. I guess the investment in all those pairs of Nikes over the years is paying off.

But as much as I seek physical fitness and the joie de vivre it brings, I crave a greater boon—the heart of a spiritual athlete. The cry of my soul echoes the psalmist’s: “As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps. 42:1, 2, RSV).

I desire that I will always have a heart unclogged, open to the full surge of the Holy Spirit. The years tick by; my years mount up. I don’t want to grow sluggish, begin to take my Lord for granted, begin to coast, fall into the pride and complacency that often accompany success. The Master calls me to run. The race is set before me, the finishing tape is in sight, and the heroes of faith are cheering me on. And Jesus stands at the finish line: He ran this course; He finished it. Now He urges me onward and forward to the tape (Heb. 12:1, 2).

What I fear most is that I might take my eyes off Him. That is easy to do in the excitement of the race and the noise of the crowd; but the result can be disaster. One of the saddest scenarios I can think of is a minister who, after years of service, yields to momentary but gross stupidity and sacrifices his or her good name and calling. Give me the heart of a spiritual athlete that will not, cannot, deny its Lord.

I don’t think one gets the spiritual athlete’s heart just by good fortune. It certainly helps to have forebears who pass on the right genes. Timothy had the great advantage of both a mother and a grandmother who were strong in faith (see 2 Tim. 1:5). But Timothy had to fight the good fight himself—he could not rely on his spiritual heritage (1 Tim. 6:12). He needed to fan the flame of God’s gift that was in him (2 Tim. 1:6). Like Paul, he had a race to run and a crown to win (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

You don’t have to be a genius to find out how to keep physically fit, nor is Christianity rocket science. But because the way is so simple, we easily forget it: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Col. 2:6, 7, NIV).

“You are to give all—your heart, your will, your service—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements,” writes Ellen White, “and you must take all—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper—to give you power to obey. Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work” (Steps to Christ, p. 70).

We form habits, then habits form us. It’s easy for me now to get up and get out; and it becomes easy to pray and study the Bible if you keep doing it. Simple truths keep us fit. The big danger is in complacency, when the precious becomes routine and the fizz goes out of spiritual life.

I want to soar on eagle’s wings and keep soaring higher and higher toward the Son.

God says I can. “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:31, NIV).
I love Christmas, but like you, I'm put off by the crass commercialism that accompanies practically every aspect of the way society celebrates the holiday. So I can appreciate the billboards and bumper stickers that typically appear this time of year to protest: “Let’s Keep Christ in Christmas!”

The implication is that sinister forces are trying to secularize the religious nature of the holiday by “crossing out” Christ with the use of the word “Xmas.” While the effort to keep the connection between Christ and Christmas is laudable, the falseness of the original premise is laughable.

The Greek word for Christ is Christos (Χριστός). The transliteration of the first letter, X, is “ch” in English. And in fact, the letter X has been kind of shorthand for writing the word “Christ” since the beginning of the Christian Era. (When I attended the seminary, one of my classmates wrote X whenever the professor referred to Jesus. My friend’s class notes were filled with them.) So in fact, whenever you see the word “Xmas,” it isn’t trying to minimize the Christian connection; it’s simply using a smaller word to say the same thing.

This little debate is a symbol of the many times that well-meaning believers allow themselves to be sucked into defending something that makes little or no difference in terms of practical, real-life issues. And some Christians seem especially susceptible to meaningless, inconsequential debates, when they ought to be sharing the good news of a crucified, risen, and soon-to-return Saviour.

In fact, there are countless groups and individuals who have taken upon themselves the burden of purifying the church from all unorthodoxy (both real and imagined), with the idea that when the church is absolutely pure, Jesus will return to claim His people.

The people who waited for the Messiah (Greek: Christ) nearly 2,000 years ago actually believed that if God’s chosen people, as a nation, could observe one Sabbath (24 hours) flawlessly, the Messiah would come. Meanwhile, God had His own timetable: “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons [and daughters]” (Gal. 4:4, NIV).

The very ones who longed to welcome the Messiah were so caught up in philosophical and theological debates, so troubled by behavioral deficiencies (especially in others), that they were unable to recognize Him when He appeared.

As important as it is to see that the church is ready “for the wedding of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7, NIV), it’s at least as important that the rest of the world’s inhabitants have the opportunity to declare their allegiance between the powers of good and the forces of evil in the great struggle currently taking place between Christ and Satan.

That’s why I can’t understand why some groups and individuals spend so much time and energy “preaching to the converted.” If their message is so important, why isn’t it being taken to a larger audience, to those who have yet to be introduced to the One who is altogether lovely? If anything, Jesus’ first advent demonstrated that the gospel is not the private domain of any particular religious, ethnic, philosophical, or geographical group of people. The gospel of Jesus Christ is meant to embrace “every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev. 14:6, NIV).

Of course, we can’t take this message to the masses if we’re more concerned with winning theological arguments than simply spreading the good news about a God who loved us enough to be one of us, about a God whose greatest desire is to fulfill the prophecy: “Now the dwelling of God is with men [and women], and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Rev. 21:3, NIV).

Current events and prophetic biblical interpretations indicate that we are standing on the edge of eternity. Any understanding of biblical truth that doesn’t feature Jesus at its prominent center—in longhand or shorthand—isn’t worth mentioning.
**HERALD’S TRUMPET**

Happy holidays, kids! Herald the Review angel flew through blizzard conditions to join us this week, and guess what—Herald’s trumpet was lost along the way. Think you can find it somewhere in this magazine?

In our last contest (November NAD Edition) we received 55 entries. The three winners were Rebecca Robbins from Beckley, West Virginia; Danika Gallatin from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; and David and Nathan George from McDonald, Tennessee. Rebecca, Danika, David, and Nathan all received two books in one—Charlie Horse and Mrs. White’s Secret Sock, both by Paul B. Ricchiuti.

Where was Herald’s trumpet? On the Review and Herald Web site on page 28. Quite a coincidence, huh?

If you can find the trumpet this time, send a postcard telling us where to Herald’s Trumpet at the Give & Take address. The prize is an official Guide water bottle.

Have fun searching—and remember: Jesus is the reason for the season.

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**ADVENTIST LIFE**

Being retired, I visited my daughter and accompanied her to the Glen Innes church in Auckland, New Zealand.

There the church elder, Bruce Novely, welcomed the congregation and congratulated a 90-year-old on her birthday. He then remarked that some of us feel that we have had “too many birthdays.”

After the service, during potluck, I was approached by a small boy who was just learning to talk. Staring up at me, he asked, “Have you had too many birthdays?”

—Rex Robinson, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia

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**WHAT I LIKE ABOUT MY ADVENTIST SCHOOL**

Two Herald’s trumpets ago we invited our younger readers who attended Adventist schools to tell what they liked most about them. Here were some of their responses:

I attend Camelback-Thunderbird Elementary, and I have three favorite things about my school: my teacher, the swimming pool, and the principal.

—Megan Loney, Scottsdale, Arizona.

The thing that I like the most about our school is that it has good air conditioning. And I like the teachers.

—Christopher Perry, Los Banos, California.

I like being able to talk about God and pray in the classroom.

—Alex Munding, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

We attend Seroni Elementary School at home. “Seroni” is from C. S. Lewis’s space trilogy—they were the intellectual class. We earn play money for chores, attitude, and quality, which we can save and redeem for prizes. That’s our favorite!

—Andrew and Bradley Milne, Hanford, California.

What I like best about my school is the name Lisette Moutachy. This school was named after this lady, Lisette Moutachy, a very dedicated former Bible worker, teacher, and principal.

—Kevin Lake, Lamentin, Martinique.

I go to Three Angels Academy home school. Our mom says she named it after the three angels’ messages in Revelation and that there are three angels in our house—my older sister, younger brother, and me.

—Hope L. Smalley, Amoret, Missouri.

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**WE NEED YOU**

Send Give & Take submissions to Give & Take, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Fax: 301-680-6638; E-mail: 74532.2564@CompuServe.com. Please include phone number. Submissions will not be returned.
Baptized by Fire

I wasn’t even sure I believed in God. How could I go to the “mission field”?

BY JIWAN MOON

DOES GOD REALLY EXIST?

After three years of experience in youth ministry, and after growing up in an Adventist home (my father and grandfather are both Adventist pastors), I found myself sinking into the quicksand of doubt. Taught about Adventist Church standards and educated in the Adventist lifestyle, I had yet to experience Jesus on a personal level. My doubts multiplied until I wondered whether God existed; and if He did, whether He made a difference in anyone’s life.

Just finishing my senior year at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, I was studying religion, preparing to follow in my father’s and grandfather’s footsteps. But I was so disappointed by the apathy I saw in some of the churches I attended and how it was reflected in my own life that I vowed I would never go into the ministry. I’d explore some other options, maybe dentistry or law.

My Well-meaning Parents

My parents, concerned about the spiritual struggles I was having, applied for me to participate in a short-term missionary experience called Korean American Youth Adventist Missionary Movement (KAYAMM), based on spending three months as a missionary in a foreign country. When I heard what they had done, I was furious. I refused to go. “What can I possibly do in three months in a foreign country, where I have no clue about the local language and culture?” I asked them.

But they were insistent. OK, I said to myself, I’ll go to some country, enjoy a three-month vacation, come home, and take up where I left off.

Full of doubts and skepticism, I attended the orientation sessions. As I looked at the other kids who were there for training, I thought, How can they be missionaries? Many of them have just graduated from high school.

But soon my luggage and I were on our way to the Philippines. After a flight from Manila, my partner, Seong Hoon Jeon, and I spent two days on a boat, a half day crowded on a bus packed with people (and no air-conditioning), and a few more hours on a
jeepney. Motorcycles took us up a mountain trail that was impassable for cars. Our destination was a small village at the top of a mountain, Pag-Asa, in the Sarangani Islands of the southern Philippines.

This Is Reality

When Seong Hoon and I arrived, we were in shock. We didn't know what to think. The village was so primitive. The people were unbelievably poor. We were supposed to sleep on the floor of the elementary school. But ants scurried all over, and mosquitoes were everywhere. Scorpions found their way into our sleeping bags. Nothing prepared us for these kinds of conditions. We didn't know if we could survive a week, let alone three months.

I suppose that's when we realized that we wouldn't survive without God. During that first week Seong Hoon, just recently graduated from high school, read his Bible for hours at a time without stopping. "What's gotten into you?" I asked.

"I miss my mother," he replied. "This is the only way I can stop missing my family so much."

Life in that village wasn't easy. There was only one water pump. We used that water to drink, cook, bathe, and wash our clothes. The humidity was so oppressive that we were offended by our own body odor. We'd cool off by pouring well water over our heads. But by the time we got back to the school (carrying water containers for drinking and cooking), we were drenched in perspiration again, wishing we could take another shower.

During those first few days I often thought about quitting. Then I remembered some advice offered by one of my teachers at Southern Adventist University. When I was struggling with my spirituality, he said, "Pray to God, and show Him that you need Him."

I was trying to live without running water and without electricity; the only thing I could do was ask God for help to get me through it. When I surrendered my ego to Him, He began changing things.

Simple Gifts

The villagers came to us with many kinds of diseases—especially skin diseases. They don't have clean water, and often they used the same water to bathe their cattle and their children. The only medicine we had was a mild antibiotic lotion. We felt helpless.

We decided that if nothing else, we could pray for the children who were brought to us. The amazing thing was that every child we touched and prayed over was healed. We couldn't believe our eyes.

One evening some men brought a young man to us. Our translator told us that the men were bodyguards, that one of the men was the chief (or capitán) of a nearby village, and that the young man was his son. After they spoke, my translator told me that the young man had a stomach ulcer. They wanted us to do something.

The only medicine we had that was remotely connected to stomach problems was Pepto-Bismol. I knew Pepto-Bismol doesn't cure ulcers, and even if it did, an ulcer isn't cured with one dose. I didn't know what to do.

"You have to do something," our translator said anxiously. "They've come from the village across the river."

I did the only thing I could do. I told the man, "The only medicine we have is Pepto-Bismol. It's not for ulcers, but I'll give it to your son anyway. The only other thing we can do for your son is pray for him."

I could tell that the man was reluctant, but he allowed us to continue.

"Lord," I prayed, "we don't have medicine for this young man, but please heal him."

After the prayer, I promised the captain I would visit him again with better medicine. Two days later we went to see the captain. "Where is your son?" we asked. "We hope our medicine didn't cause any problems."

"My son is in the cornfield," said the man with a big smile on his face. "He's fine. Thank you very much."

I couldn't believe my ears. What had we done? I knew it had been God's power that had healed the boy. When we saw God working through us, we were changed. We no longer feared anything. We crossed rivers to teach the Bible. We spent hours climbing one mountain just to visit one family. We prayed with them, and gave them what we could.

The Next Step

After days of visiting throughout the area, we decided to hold a series of
evangelistic meetings. We went to different villages and told everyone about the meetings. We went to the Southern Mindanao Mission and borrowed an electrical generator. We were ready to tell the people more about God. We were excited to tell them that God would bring more happiness into their lives.

But we didn't count on one thing: the weather.

On most days it rained at least twice a day. The day our meetings were to begin, it rained the whole afternoon. We began to worry. The meeting was supposed to begin at 6:30 p.m. At 6:00 some of the people came to see if the meetings would take place. We might have to postpone our meetings, I thought to myself. Then I thought, No, this cannot happen. This meeting cannot be postponed. We have only a few days to tell these people about our Saviour. There's no reason God would not want us to have this meeting.

Then I said to the people, “God wants us to have these meetings, and Satan is trying to discourage us. Let's pray.” Six of us began to pray. When it was my turn, I said, “Lord, we know that the rain will stop, but we need at least 15 minutes to set up our generator. Please let the rain stop before 6:15.”

After we said amen, the rain fell more furiously, as if to mock us. The others looked at me. “Let's get ready for the meeting,” I told them.

At exactly 6:13 the rain stopped. We thanked God for His miracle. God's working among us excited us. During the two weeks of the meetings the weather was never a problem. And at the end of the meetings more than 50 people decided to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour. On the last Sabbath of the meetings eight of them were baptized.

**The Sprint to the Finish**

We were all thankful and excited about the results of the meetings. Seong Hoon and I wondered whether we would do anything else for the villagers before we returned to the United States.

We had less than two weeks before we were to return home. The only money we had was for food and transportation for the trip home. But we looked at each other and knew exactly what we wanted to do. We decided to build a church.

We went to the nearest town and got an estimate of how much it would cost to build a church. We didn't have enough money for a building, but we could at least buy some cement. We made an urgent call to the KAYAMM center in the United States: “Please send us $200. We need it to build a church!”

We went to the Southern Mindanao Mission. We met the president and begged for a cash advance until the money arrived from the U.S. The leaders of the mission gave us enough money to lay the foundation. Seong Hoon and I said to each other jokingly, “Let's not worry about food; there are bananas and
coconuts to eat. If we lose some weight, we’ll gain it back when we get home.”

I’d never built anything in my life. I don’t remember ever holding a shovel in my hand. I had no idea that we needed gravel to lay a foundation. I didn’t know we needed sand. I thought we’d just put cement on the ground and a foundation would appear.

We didn’t have money for sand and gravel. Someone suggested that we get them from the riverbank. The river was more than a mile away. We spent an entire day digging and collecting sand and gravel. Our hands were covered with blisters. When the blisters broke, our hands were covered with blood. We wrapped our hands with our clothes and continued working. Exhausted, we didn’t stop to think about how tired we were; we just thought about how we were going to build a church so people could come and worship.

We sometimes put the sand and gravel in containers we carried on our shoulders. Sometimes we carried it on the back of a cow. It was going so slowly.

The captain of the village had a truck, and we decided to ask him if we could carry the sand and gravel in his truck just once. After he thought about it, he said we could. We were thrilled.

We drove across the river and started loading the sand and gravel into the truck. We didn’t even stop to eat. All we could think about was that we were going to worship together in the church we were building with our own hands.

After the truck was loaded, we watched it move slowly into the river. Suddenly we realized something was wrong. The truck wasn’t moving. The driver told us that the load was too heavy. We tried everything to get the truck rolling again, but every effort failed. After a couple hours the driver said, “It’s no use; it has to be unloaded.” We tried it on the back of a cow. It was going so slowly.

“Have you ever noticed that small hill right next to where you want to build the church?” he asked. “A long time ago someone started building a house right where you’re building the church. He wasn’t able to continue, but he left a truckload of sand and gravel.

“Go look under the thick grass,” he urged us. “You’ll find what you need.”

Was he serious? There was only one way to find out.

Sure enough, we found a small hill right next to the construction site. We started digging, and we found exactly what we were looking for. God had already provided what we needed.

That Sabbath we worshiped in the new church. Seong Hoon and I had tears in our eyes as we hugged each other and thought of the many blessings God had given us as we dedicated ourselves to Him.

A Radical Way to Witness

But more important than the mercies we experienced were the tokens of God’s love we were able to share with the people we worked with.

One day we were treating the skin diseases of some of the children. I used Q-tips to apply the medicine to avoid contamination.

Seong Hoon applied the medicine with his bare hand. “Are you crazy?” I asked him. “Do you want to carry that disease back with you?”

“Brother,” he said seriously, “I don’t know their language; I don’t know their culture; I have no means of communicating with them. The only way I can tell them about Christ’s love is to reach out and touch them.”

He was right. The only way we could show how much God cares for them was by our actions. And it was our personal encounter with Christ that made the difference in our lives. I had underestimated the power of God.

This mission experience changed my life. God was merciful, and He gave me a chance to know Christ personally. I realized the happiness of bringing people to God, and I committed myself to serving the Lord in the ministry—no matter what the future holds. And my ministry is more powerful than ever because I know who I’m talking about.

I learned three things in my mission experience. First, if we ask God to show Himself to us, not only will He show Himself to us, but He will teach us our need of Him. Second, if we crucify ourselves, He will use us as instruments to do His will in others and change us inside and out. And third, never underestimate the power of God.

This is my personal testimony: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

Jiwan Moon is a student at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He is also active in the Korean American Youth Adventist Missionary Movement (KAYAMM).
Held Hostage!

A story of deliverance, forgiveness, and transformation.
BY RONDA DYER

Ronda Dyer nurses at Adventist Health/Home Care Services of Hanford Community Medical Center, a job that allows her to get well acquainted with her clients. Many times when she meets a new patient she’ll be asked, “Why does your name seem familiar to me?”

Ronda smiles, remembering the remarkable deliverance she and her family experienced one Christmas.

“You’ve probably seen my name in the newspaper,” she says, mentioning that it was her family that was held hostage one terrifying night in December. “This experience is a wonderful tool for sharing with people about the love of God,” Ronda says. “I’ve written it to witness to God’s protection—and changed lives.”

A FEW YEARS AGO my husband and I read a story of God’s miraculous provision of housing, and we prayed for His guidance as we looked for the right place to buy.

Then we learned of a house in the country—near Corcoran, a small town in California’s Central Valley—and God made it available. We’d just completed the paperwork to purchase our “miracle house,” and we were moving our first load of belongings. At 10:00 p.m. we pulled up to our new home, parked the pickup in the carport, and started into the house with our sleeping children, Dacia, 7, and Ashley, 4.

Suddenly two huge men appeared, pushing and shoving us and saying, “You’ve got to get us out of here fast!” They were dripping wet, and we knew right away that they were escapees from the Corcoran State Prison, across the canal from our new house. We were 10 miles from town—and assistance—and the men stood between us and the house.

“Here, take the keys to our pickup,” offered my husband, Ken.

They refused. “You’d just call the cops. You’re going to take us home.”

The men pushed us into the pickup. One squeezed into the cab with our family; the other hopped into the back. Ken was ordered to drive. We looked furtively at our captors. We didn’t see any weapons, but we both knew there were knives in our packing boxes. “We want to be home for Christmas,” one of them said. “Head south to Los Angeles.”

As we drove in oppressive silence, both Ken and I started to pray—for our own spiritual condition, for our children, for these escaped convicts. I remembered the saying “In every adversity lies the seed of equal or greater benefit.” But I thought, What
good will come out of this adversity.

The children slept. When they finally awoke and started asking questions, we began singing praise songs, including songs we didn’t really know. Ken said the voices were not our own—it must have been an angel choir.

Finally one of the men interrupted. “Are you Christians?” he asked. When we responded in the affirmative, he asserted, “I’m a Christian. I’m not a bad person.”

“I know you’re not a bad person,” I replied. “God made you, just as He made me. And He’ll forgive your sins, just as He forgave mine. In God’s eyes sins are all the same, and He’ll forgive every one of them.”

At that moment Ken and I saw a miracle. The man relaxed for the first time. He apologized for his profane language and started telling us something about his life. He even showed us some of his family pictures.

A Way Out

We were almost out of gas, and we had no money with us. The man next to Ken said, “Stop here and I’ll make a telephone call to make arrangements to be picked up.” Contact failed. Both men started asking people for money to buy gas. They finally got $3, which enabled us to head for Bakersfield. I suggested we stop at a truck stop. “No,” replied one of the men. “Truckers aren’t cool. You guys are cool.”

Ken thought that if we could get to a busy thoroughfare in Bakersfield we’d have a better chance of getting help, so he kept reinforcing the need for fuel, and the men kept begging for gas money.

Finally, at one stop, I asked for permission to take the kids to a restaurant ladies’ room. One of the men said we could go, and he followed us into the restaurant. However, once inside the women’s restroom, I locked the double lock. I told the kids, “We’re safe until the police come.”

Soon I heard a knock on the wall, Ken signaling me from the men’s restroom, where he was safely locked in also.

“Tell them that Jesus loves them.
And we want to see them in heaven someday.”

We huddled in the restrooms while the manager tried to close the restaurant. Our captors said they couldn’t leave because they were waiting for their “friends” in the restrooms. Finally the manager realized something was amiss.

When the manager started asking questions, the men took off running. An employee called 911.

Soon the police arrived and rescued us from the restrooms. While we were being questioned, the police radio dispatcher announced that the suspects had been apprehended. We were able to breathe a little easier on our way to police headquarters.

To Be Continued

Over the next few days we repeated our story to the police, our relatives, our church family, and prison officials. We accepted every opportunity to share our story of God’s protection and tell how those rough men had responded to the gospel message.

Weeks later the district attorney called and said that if we wished, we could attend the sentencing hearing. We prayed about it and decided to go and take the opportunity to speak, if it was offered. We asked our children what they would like to say to those two men who’d held us captive for most of a night.

Imagine how thrilled we were when the kids responded, “Tell them that Jesus loves them and that God will forgive them. And we want to see them in heaven someday.”

Ours was the first case of the day. The courtroom was packed. As the suspects came in, they didn’t look nearly as tough as they had in December. When it was our time to speak, Ken read, “‘Judge not, that you be not judged’” (Matt. 7:1, RSV). “‘Forgive, and you will be forgiven’” (Luke 6:37, RSV). Then he said, “God told us to forgive them.” Turning to the convicted men, he concluded, “I do forgive you.”

Both convicts also asked to address the court, although they were told it wouldn’t affect their sentences. They apologized for their actions. One said, “If there was anything I could do to change what happened, I would. I never really knew God before, but now I know Him personally. I want to be a productive member of society, not only when I get out of prison but also while I’m there.”

After the hearing the defense attorney approached Ken and me and said, “My clients wanted me to tell you that everything they said in the courtroom was true and not said simply for the benefit of the court. They especially wanted you two to know that.”

Our prayers had been answered. The men were changed! Now I know from personal experience that God can indeed bring good out of any adversity.

The Dyers continue to pray regularly for the men who held them hostage. Both men are incarcerated in maximum security, and the Dyers are not allowed to visit them.

However, friends who work at the prison update Ronda and Ken from time to time. “From what we hear, these men are continuing in the Christian walk,” Ronda says.

This story first appeared in volume 2 of the booklet Uncle Frank’s Bedtime Stories, published by Adventist Health, Roseville, California, 1997. Used with permission.

Ronda Dyer works at Adventist Health/Home Care Services of Hanford Community Medical Center.
Do you ever rub your hands together when they are cold? Does it help warm them up? Do you know why? Yes, friction.

There are many things that get warm (and even very hot) when they are rubbed together. Rub two sticks together as hard as you can for about a half minute, and they will feel warm. Rub a piece of wood with sandpaper. Rub two pieces of metal together. Rub your foot on the carpet. This rubbing causes friction.

The objects get hot because of their rough surfaces. Your hands probably don’t look rough. But they are rough enough so that when they move against each other, the roughness slows down the movement. You have to work hard to move them. This work turns into heat. That is called friction.

Friction can cause trouble with machinery. When the metal pieces of an engine slide over each other, they can get so hot that they can stick together. That’s why engines need oil. The oil covers the surfaces of the moving pieces of the engine so that they slide over each other smoothly. Then they don’t get hot.

Put lotion on your hands. Rub soap over one of the sticks. Put a little cooking oil on the metal. Now when you rub them together they won’t get hot.

Friction has another meaning, too. Sometimes we say there is friction between two people. That means they are having trouble getting along. They rub each other the wrong way.

What should you do if there is friction between you and another person? The Bible has a good idea: “A gentle answer will calm a person’s anger. But an unkind answer will cause more anger” (Proverbs 15:1, ICB).

If you keep quarreling and arguing, the friction will only get worse. Tempers will get hotter. You need some “oil” to smooth things over. A gentle answer is just the thing to cool things down.

That’s easy to say but hard to do. When someone is yelling at you, it is very hard not to yell back. You’ll need help.

Jesus will help you. He’ll help smooth out your rough edges. He’ll give you the “oil” that you need. He’ll help you keep cool. Jesus will help you find a gentle answer.
JAMES MORGAN ONCE CREDITED
Abraham Lincoln with saying that God must
love the common people because He makes so
many of them.
Most of us do not belong to the brilliant
company of the gifted ones. Our place seems far removed
from the shining circle of those whom Browning somewhere
calls “the distinguished souls.” We do not fit into the select
category of the talented. Challenged by no great oppor-
tunity, called to no “work of noble note,” we seem circum-
scribed by objectionable circumstances. And however much
we may dislike or resent it, we soon come to feel our own
commonplaceness. Not for us the place of pr
ominance or
power; not for us any shining deeds; not for us—
“The applause of listening senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o’er a smiling land,
And read our history in a nation’s eyes.”  
We are just ordinary folk filling insignificant places,
doing insignificant things—commonplace people whose
lives are set to fulfil nothing greater than “the trivial
round, the common task.” As we read the Master’s parable
of the talents, we come to feel that our fellowship is with
the one-talent man.
The feeling of belonging to the commonplace is not,
however, without its perils—among them the following:
1. Moral Cowardice. In Jesus’ parable of the talents
(Matt. 25:14-28), it was the one-talent man who said, “I was
afraid.” He was the one who preferred to let his portion lie
unused, to wrap it up in a napkin and hide it in the earth,
rather than hazard it in some challenging venture.
And that is often the attitude of people who feel that
they are condemned to an inescapable mediocrity. They’re
afraid to dare; afraid to match their paltry resources with the
challenge before them; afraid to reveal how little they pos-
sess, how poor their equipment really is.
Back of the plea of impotence, back of the confession of
inability, is often a lack of courage to stand in our lot and
perform with fidelity whatever comes within the scope of
our powers. And nobody cuts a more pitiable figure in life
than those who shirk some waiting opportunity of usefulness
out of a fear that they lack unusual talents, or even the aver-
age gifts of ordinary people.
In this they forget that “our duty,” as Henri-Frédéric
Amiel says, “is to be useful, not according to our desires, but
according to our powers.” They forget that where gifts are
concerned, what is not used God repossesses. In the final
analysis, it is the coward’s way, and no explanation or excuse
is sufficient to change that verdict.
2. Self-depreciation. The disappointing realization that
our ultimate place in life is in the crowded ranks of those
who are indiscriminately classified as “commonplace people”
can lead to self-depreciation. We count for so little, we say to
ourselves. Our voices carry so little weight, our influence is so negligible, our resources so few, our contribution to the progress and well-being of the world so paltry. Our influence and talent cannot possibly count for much and surely will not be missed.

So what’s the use of trying? Let those who are more capable and better equipped—the favored ones, the children of genius, the brilliant and the gifted, the people with two or more talents—let them run the affairs of the church, let them do its work, let them accept its heroic challenges, let them meet its large demands. As we reason this way, a sort of moral indifference steals over us. And abandoning ourselves to self-pity or yielding to brooding despair, we bury our talent in the earth. Tragically, while we are “waiting for some great work, life passes away, its purposes unfulfilled, its work unaccomplished.”

3. Petulance. Afflicted with a chronic sense of commonplaceness, we can become bitter and cynical, surrendering to insurgent moods and cursing the cause of what we perceive as the glaring inequalities of life. We come to resent the inequitable distribution of gifts and feel that we have been dealt with unjustly.

Why were we not given five talents? We surely had it in us to make as good a showing with them as the more favored ones to whom they were given. Even two talents might have been received with good grace and with some degree of gratitude. Not that we should have been quite satisfied with them, but they would have counted for something, and undoubtedly we should have achieved something worthwhile with them.

But one talent! What can we hope to do with it? It dooms us to perpetual mediocrity. Think how much needs to be done in the church—big things, great enterprises, vast concerns waiting to be carried through. Why were we denied a chance at them? Surely we merited a larger platform and were worthy of better things.

And so we nurse our grievance, develop a grudge against life, and like Achilles in his tent, retire to sulk.

But we are not wise when we suffer ourselves to become discouraged or resentful, attitudes that ultimately prevent us from investing ourselves in usefulness and service. And how are we sure that God has not done the best for us and by us? What if He bestows His gifts according to our several abilities and rewards us according to our use of them?

We draw lines between what we designate as great and small; we talk about the significant and the insignificant. But what if God ignores these human distinctions? Aren’t His thoughts different from ours? Aren’t His ways beyond us? What if all service ranks the same with God?

What’s the remedy for the malady we’ve been discussing? Consider the following:

The first thing to remember is that however commonplace and inconspicuous our life and gifts, they have a
place in the divine will and purpose. Ellen White reminds us that “success is not the result of chance or of destiny; it is [rather] the outworking of God’s own providence, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and persevering effort.”

It was written concerning John the Baptist: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John” (John 1:6). Those sentiments are true of every one of us. It’s an honor that God puts upon every child of humanity; a personal identity and distinction we may all claim. In other words, you may substitute your own name (or your neighbor’s) for John’s, and it would not alter the intrinsic truth.

None of us is here by chance; neither are we here to please ourselves. In the divine intention nobody else can exactly fill your place or do your work. “However small your talent, God has a place for it. That one talent, wisely used, will accomplish its appointed work.” The person who comes to see this will never fling away their courage, nor will they indulge in petulance or sulkiness. In the words of Henry Van Dyke, they will sing:

“Let me but do my work from day to day
In field or forest, at the desk or loom,
In roaring marketplace or tranquil room;
Let me but find it in my heart to say,
When vagrant wishes beckon me astray,
'This is my work; my blessing, not my doom;
Of all who live, I am the one by whom,
This work can best be done in the right way.'”

**Second**, we need to remember the following: we may not be great in ourselves, nor rise to the height of great achievements. Nevertheless, by faithfully performing our duty, we may help to create the atmosphere and furnish the environment out of which greatness can spring.

For as James Anthony Froude says:

“No single mind in single contact with the facts of nature could have created a Pallas, a Madonna, or a Lear.”

Many a humble worker faithfully doing their work have thus built better than they knew.

**Third**, we need to remember that we are not competent to judge accurately in little duties, we are to work on the plan of addition, and God will work for us on the plan of multiplication.

**Fourth**, it is well to remember that diligence, enthusiasm, and consecration can make something of commonplace gifts. Is not this one of the surprises of life—to see ordinary people with the slenderest of resources and poorest of equipment accomplishing things that seemed utterly beyond the range of their powers?

And the secret is just this—that without wasting time in complaint or self-pity or in quarreling with life, they accepted their lot and proceeded to develop the little they had with energy and fidelity, putting to shame many blessed with greater native endowments.

Yes, ordinary people have always done extraordinary things, and unpromising lives have been made to yield the rich fruits of noble character and splendid service.

When all is said, the use to which we put our one talent will determine whether we deserve something better or not. Our lives may be set in obscure and lowly places, our lot may be very ordinary and commonplace, and it may be we shall never attain to fame and greatness. But we may so live that in the end we may hear the Master say: “Well done . . .; thou hast been faithful.”

Not infrequently, that which at first seemed hardly worthy of passing notice eventually succeeds in capturing the attention of the ages.

from our present standpoint the possible value or permanence of our work. What we consider to be trivial and inconceivable often turns out to be of first-rate importance. Not infrequently, that which at first seemed hardly worthy of passing notice eventually succeeds in capturing the attention of the ages. And people once confined to the ranks of mediocrity have come in time to occupy the seats of the mighty.

Time has a way of revising and even reversing popular judgment, reaching back across the years to rescue many a name from obscurity and set it shining on the honor roll of greatness. It has passed over many a spectacular deed to lift up some inconspicuous thing and invest it with a permanence entirely out of proportion to its apparent insignificance.

That is God’s way. “By faithfulness

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1 Thomas Gray, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.”
2 Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 360.
3 Ibid., p. 353.
4 Ibid., p. 360.
5 Ibid.

Rex D. Edwards is the director of ministerial continuing education in the Ministerial Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.
Our church has had a succession of pastors who rarely preach about prophecies, even the Second Coming. I feel I could as well be in a Baptist, Methodist, or any other kind of church on Sabbaths. I understand that times have changed, but aren’t we supposed to be upholding truth instead of miscellaneous ideas and events that do not bring out our distinctive Adventist views?

There are Adventist pulpits from which our distinctives are little heard. That is tragic, since we are established as a people for the very purpose of proclaiming God’s special word for contemporary society.

But then, what constitutes present truth for one era is not the same for another. For Noah it involved the Flood; for John the Baptist, the coming Messiah; for the Apostolic church, baptism in the name of the risen Lord; for William Miller, the hour of judgment and the immediate end of time.

Ellen White spoke of present truth as follows: “But such subjects as the sanctuary, in connection with the 2300 days, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, are perfectly calculated to explain the past Advent movement and show what our present position is, establish the faith of the doubting, and give certainty to the glorious future. These, I have frequently seen, were the principal subjects on which the messengers should dwell” (Early Writings, p. 63).

Have time and circumstances moved us beyond these distinctions? I think not. True, our methodology for presentation must reflect modern cognitions and technology, but the content of present truth, outlined above, remains the same.

Please note that it’s not only the use of nongospel topics that Ellen White discourages; it’s the constant preaching of even lesser biblical truths. This is emphasized in her words: “There are many precious truths contained in the Word of God, but it is ‘present truth’ that the flock needs now” (ibid.).

If, as some Seventh-day Adventists believe, Christ was born without our natural inclinations to evil, how do they explain Hebrews 2:16-18 and other scriptures that indicate that Jesus’ status on earth allows Him to speak from our position as struggling overcomers? Is it not morally and ethically unacceptable for Him to claim our feelings before the Father when in fact He never truly experienced them?

I would respond as follows: a. Christ came into our world as the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:22, 45), not as the second us. b. He began His spiritual journey where Adam began his, as Ellen G. White says in the following statement: “Christ is called the second Adam. In purity and holiness, connected with God and beloved by God, He began where the first Adam began. Willingly He passed over the ground where Adam fell, and redeemed Adam’s failure” (Youth’s Instructor, June 21, 1898). c. Although Christ did not have our evil propensities, experiencing our situation in a body that had our physical infirmities provided Him accurate knowledge of our fleshly struggles.

This comment from Ellen White has often been used to make this point: “As soon as Christ entered the wilderness of temptation, His visage changed. . . . The weight of the sins of the world was pressing His soul, and His countenance expressed unutterable sorrow, a depth of anguish that fallen man had never realized. He felt the overwhelming tide of woe that deluged the world. He realized the strength of indulged appetite and of unholy passion that controlled the world, which had brought upon man inexpressible suffering” (Selected Messages, book 1, p. 271).

The interpretation is that after 40 days of fasting, Christ’s body was wracked by cravings of appetite that impacted His system with the same intensity as do our addictive lusts.

We do not have the final word on this or any other aspect of the mystery of the Incarnation. However, I find the position above consistent with Scripture and morally appealing.
JAKARTA, INDONESIA: A breakaway organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Indonesia has returned to the parent church after nearly 50 years.

The organization, legally registered as Gerga Masehi Advent Hari Ketujuh Conference, Indonesia, was formed in 1949 because of a dispute with the Indonesian mission over national leadership. According to the president of the conference, Dr. Cheppy Yusuf, Adventists in the wake of the struggle for national independence became frustrated over the church’s reluctance to nationalize its leadership. Some 52 churches in north Sulawesi and 70 churches in Java and Sumatra joined the breakaway conference, he said.

The conference later split over its own leadership. Some members returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church; others joined Adventist reform groups.

Yusuf, who studied at the Adventist University of Indonesia, near Bandung, formerly served as a member of the West Java Mission committee and also on the West Indonesia Union Mission committee. Yusuf became president of the conference in 1988 and said he worked from the outset for union of the conference with the mission. “After I became leader, I asked the Lord to give the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen members 100 percent in the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist faith, the Spirit of Prophecy, and tithe,” he said.

Yusuf described a long process of overcoming resistance from members of both the mission and the conference. In this process current West Indonesia Union Mission president Alex Hendriks played a key role over the past 15 years, working first with the former conference president and then with Yusuf.

In April 1993 Hendriks visited churches of the conference, which led to tearful scenes. Leaders of the mission and the conference signed a memorandum of understanding on May 10, 1993, stating that they held the same faith and would seek to operate closely and to understand each other better with view to finally uniting under the General Conference.

The reunion was formalized on November 19, 1997, at a ceremony in Manado at which the minister of religions for the nation of Indonesia was present. All properties of the conference have been transferred to the mission.

Yusuf says he plans to step down from any leadership role and serve only as a volunteer preacher. “I believe God called me as a bridge,” he told me.

Ministerial Council in Indonesia

My interview with Dr. Yusuf, conducted at the suggestion of Pastor Hendriks and in his presence, was a high point of my visit to Indonesia, which came in connection with a ministerial council arranged by the General Conference Ministerial Association.

Some 600 ministers from both the West and East Indonesia union missions gathered at the Indonesian Adventist University outside Bandung on the island of Java. Plans for the council included provision for the pastors’ wives also to be invited, so more than 1,200 people were in attendance.

I was impressed by what I saw of the progress of the work in Indonesia. Although this is a Muslim nation, Adventists now number more than 150,000.

Indonesia is a colorful, far-flung archipelago. Its 13,000 islands stretch over 3,000 miles with remarkably diverse peoples. I caught a glimpse of the vibrancy of this land of volcanoes, spices, lush fruits, and beautiful costumes as, on the opening night of the council, pastors and wives from each mission and conference marched together.

A second impression: the Indonesians build big and well. The West Indonesia Union Mission office complex rises to five stories and houses offices, an auditorium for
2,000 people, a language school, an Adventist Book Center, and so on. And the sanctuary at Indonesia University, where the opening meeting convened, would do any Adventist campus proud anywhere in the world.

Evangelism runs strong here. Each year faculty of Indonesia University join with union officers in public outreach. This year university president R. A. Hutagaol led a campaign in Kalimantan, where 37 were baptized, including a Baptist minister.

The university has 1,200 students, with capacity for 2,000. Students include Roman Catholics, Buddhists, and Muslims; school policy keeps the student body at 80 percent Adventist.

By far the most popular area of study is business, with 70 percent of the students enrolled. Many graduates find work in the highly industrialized, expanding capital of Jakarta, with the result that the Jakarta Conference is bringing great financial strength to the church in Indonesia.

The Adventist hospital in Bandung has been officially declared as the best private hospital in Indonesia. The 200-bed facility, located on a prime site in the city, enjoys a 90 percent occupancy rate. It is about to commence building a seven-story facility.

Hospital president Dr. J. Tombokan left government employ to connect with Bandung Adventist Hospital. He described how three years ago the hospital came from Thailand, Singapore, and the Malay Peninsula, and, reflecting the smaller size of the Adventist Church in these countries, numbers totaled only about 120.

Nevertheless, the church is growing in this area, especially in Thailand. This Buddhist nation is now home to more than 10,000 Adventists.

In Indonesia everything was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with translation into English only as needed to accommodate the needs of the guests from abroad. In Thailand, however, English was the lingua franca for the council, with total translation into Thai.

The structure of the Adventist work in this region is in the midst of major changes: the center of gravity is moving from Singapore to Thailand.

For many years Singapore has been the hub of Adventist activity. The headquarters of the Asia Pacific (formerly Far Eastern) Division was located there, at 800 Thomson Road; likewise Youngberg Adventist Hospital and Southeast Asia Union College. But the times are a-changing: the former division has now become two—the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, with headquarters in Seoul, Korea; and the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, with offices in Manila, in the Philippines. Adventists no longer own the 800 Thomson Road property—the offices are gone, as is the old Far Eastern Academy. So is Youngberg Hospital, and the college will be next to go—the government of Singapore is appropriating its land.

In a short time Singapore has gone from the hub to the periphery, and members and workers are trying to adjust.

Adventists already have a four-year college at Muak Lek in Thailand. Already it has more than 200 students; it has ample land for growth. The plan is that with the impending closure of SEAUC, Mission College will expand to serve the entire union.

The health message is strong in Thailand also. For many years Bangkok Adventist Hospital has been an acclaimed facility in Asia; now Adventists have a conditioning center on land close by Mission College.

I was in Thailand for hardly one week, but fell in love with it—its beauty of water and flower and rock, and its gentle, gracious, hospitable people, whose eyes are open to the loveliness all around them.

It was in Thailand that I heard a story that will long stay with me. For obvious reasons, I cannot share the name of the pastor or the place where the story happened, but he shared with his fellow workers his feelings as he assumed leadership of a congregation where just three weeks earlier the pastor had been murdered in the church. Would the assailant, who had not been apprehended, strike again? He related how he led his little flock in a pledge to be faithful, no matter what the price. And over the past 18 months the membership has increased from 35 to 180! Growth—growth in Southeast Asia and around the world.

But let’s never forget—growth doesn’t come easy. Sometimes the price is life itself.

WINNER: The Bandung Adventist Hospital, directed by Dr. J. Tombokan (right), was officially pronounced the best private hospital in Indonesia.
When Religion Kills

BY JONATHAN GALLAGHER, NEWS DIRECTOR, GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

In the name of God, terrorist gunmen open fire on defenseless visitors outside a famous tourist site.

Seventy-five thousand civilians are killed in an ongoing terrorist campaign backed by religious fundamentalists.

Thousands die in a 25-year “armed struggle” between two rival religious communities, each with terrorist factions.

Terrorism: the modern-day curse that aims to cripple the enemy by killing bystanders. The perverse philosophy that murders and maims and destroys not the one you’re fighting, but others whose deaths will make the headlines.

And strangely, so much terrorism is in the name of God. As if my killing of an innocent passerby will persuade others of the legitimacy of my religious cause. Whether it’s tourists in Egypt or subway travelers in Japan or farmers in Algeria or refugees in Bosnia or neighbors in Northern Ireland, the unconscious message to the world is the same: too much religion kills.

Which is maybe one reason the latest survey from the Netherlands reveals that only a minority believe in God. Why only 10 percent of Swedes think God really exists. Why churches in England see their numbers fall, year after year. For what kind of God allows—endorses, even—the destruction of the innocent?

Yes, there are other reasons. Yes, blaming God may be just an excuse. Yes, secularism and materialism and apathy are major factors. But to believe, even for a moment, in a God who uses force and demands submissive obedience is to accept the demonic counterfeit of the divine. “Force,” wrote Ellen White, “is the last resort of every false religion.”

Which is why Jesus came. To destroy a false image of God that was, and is, so commonly believed. To show, by His everyday actions, a God who never forces, but who pleads, who invites, who loves.


Missionary Murdered in Rwanda

Seventh-day Adventist missionary Ranjan Kulasekere was murdered on the front steps of his home in Rwanda on November 4.

Kulasekere, a Sri Lankan national, worked as a dentist in the church’s clinic in Kigali, Rwanda’s capital. He was shot when he confronted intruders in his home around midnight, according to his neighbor Gerald Vyhmeister, also a missionary.

Despite his wound, Kulasekere followed the intruders and was attacked again. “He was shot in the head and in the heart, and also slashed with a machete,” reports Vyhmeister.

Kulasekere had been evacuated from Rwanda previously during the genocidal killings of 1994 that left more than 500,000 dead. However, he chose to return as soon as possible to continue his work. His body was flown to Sri Lanka, where he was buried on November 9.

“Ranjan’s dedication to helping the needy was an example of excellence,” said Athal Tolhurst, General Conference undersecretary. “The church has lost a great ambassador, and the people of Rwanda, a true friend. We sympathize with his wife and two sons, and wish them an awareness of God’s special love at this time.”—Adventist News Network.

Newbold President Shares Her Vision

Newbold College needs to be proactive in claiming its place as a key institution in the Trans-European Division, said Andrea Luxton, Newbold’s first woman president.

Speaking at her inauguration ceremony on September 25, Luxton said, “To take that role we need to be fully involved in helping forge the direction of the church in this part of the world [Western Europe]. This may well mean finding new creative ways of being more actively involved in the education of pastors and laity in other geographical areas of the division.”

ADRA Helps Drought Victims in Papua New Guinea

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is working with several humanitarian agencies to bring relief to victims of the worst drought in Papua New Guinea in the past 100 years.
Test Your Global Mission IQ

1. Turkmenistan, Tajikistan—such names symbolize mysterious places and vigorous, independent peoples! In one of the "stans" where Global Mission work prospers live 200,000 Koreans. The Korean Union Conference sends trained workers there to help with public meetings and studies. This Islamic republic is within the Central Asia Conference and is surrounded by other nations whose names end in "-stan." It is—

   A. Uzbekistan  C. Kazakhstan
   B. Pakistan      D. Afghanistan

2. Where personal witnessing is not possible, Global Mission uses radio. The Adventist Media Center—Middle East leases time from an Armenian station, broadcasting 1½ hours every day. About 240 letters arrive monthly, and 112 new correspondence school students signed up after the 1996 launching of the Voice of Hope Radio Club. The Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations also assists. Name five countries of the Middle East Union Mission.

   A. Near Easter Island; South Peru Mission.
   B. South of Java; Western Australian Conference.
   C. East of Madagascar; Reunion Conference.
   D. In the North Pacific; Guam-Micronesia Mission.

Answers

1. A. Uzbekistan. Its 80 percent Muslim population is 23.2 million.
2. The Middle East Union (of the Trans-European Division) consists of Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
3. B. South of Jakarta, Java, Indonesia. Administered from Australia, it is part of the Western Australian Conference with headquarters in Perth, more than 1,500 miles away.

—Compiled by Don Yost, General Conference Global Mission Office.

NEWS BREAK

ADRA volunteers are supplying drinking water to 4,000 persons and are working with the Red Cross to distribute food, clothing, and blankets, says Beth Schaefer, ADRA spokesperson.

Russian Government Honors Adventists

Twenty-two Russian Adventists are among the thousands of citizens honored by Russian president Boris Yeltsin for working toward “interconfessional peace in Moscow.”

In a brief ceremony at the Euro-Asia Division (ESD) office on October 14, three representatives from Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov’s office presented certificates and medals to the honorees (pictured above) and gave warm remarks about the Adventist Church. Adventist leaders gave Mayor Luzhkov a copy of the Conflict of the Ages Series, by Ellen White.

“It’s a great blessing to see the government honoring religious organizations and believers,” says Victor Krushenitsky, ESD religious liberty director.

The awards were given in conjunction with Moscow’s 850th anniversary.

News Notes

✔ Cassandra Nesmith, publicist for the Review and Herald Publishing Association, authored the feature story on the publishing house’s open house and sale, which appeared in the November 20 Adventist Review.

The open house was the first ever held at its current location in Hagerstown, Maryland.

What’s Upcoming

Dec. 13 Special Offering to Build Churches in Russia
Dec. 27 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering for projects in Northern Asia-Pacific Division and Middle East Union
T'S APRIL 12, 1997, 5:15 P.M., AND 24-YEAR-OLD Eric Hippolito has just been gunned down at a coin-operated laundry in Humboldt Park, Chicago. His killer, according to an eyewitness, is "a young dark-skinned man who hit the victim over the head with a gun, ripped a gold chain from his neck, and [then] shot him before fleeing in a green two-door Nissan Sentra with a loud muffler."

More than three months go by. Then suddenly 23-year-old Edward Lara, a Seventh-day Adventist and a full-time employee of the Home Health Education Service (HHES), is arrested and charged with murder. How did it all happen?

Edward had come to Chicago from the Dominican Republic two months prior to the April killing. He first realized something was amiss when sometime following the murder he was approached by a man angrily accusing him of the crime and threatening to report him to the police. As he was later to learn, this "eyewitness" to the killing made good on his threats, giving police the license plate number of Edward's gray two-door Nissan Sentra (which also happened to have a loud muffler). Later he would identify Edward in a police photo lineup.

Meanwhile, Edward, having no idea what the whole thing was about, soon forgot all about it. And time passed.

On July 20, however, two detectives confronted him, claiming they were investigating a car accident in which, supposedly, he was a witness. Asked to accompany them to a Chicago police station, Edward was subjected to intense interrogation, but finally allowed to go.

Again, because he'd made it clear he knew nothing of the alleged car accident, Edward soon forgot about the inconvenience and continued with preparations for his wedding to Edith Morales, scheduled for July 27.

But when he returned home late at night on July 24, he found a message from the police on his answering machine. Would he come in again for some additional questions?

Puzzled, he left his home for a second visit to the police station. Why did they insist on questioning him about an accident he knew nothing about?

This time, however, the detectives would question him about a murder committed more than three months earlier, and Edward—naïve, frank, transparent in his total innocence—would respond openly to their interrogation (which continued past 3:00 a.m.). In all that time he was not informed of his rights, nor was he advised to secure a lawyer. Moreover, he had no idea of his interrogators' ulterior motives.

The questioning resumed the next morning and continued throughout that day (Friday)—until about 11:00 p.m. Finally informed that a witness had linked him to the laundry crime months earlier, he was put under arrest and charged with murder.
charged with armed robbery and murder in the first degree. With bond set at $350,000, Edward was transferred to a maximum-security prison. An unbelievable and completely unexpected development, it threw Edward and his family into a nightmare and brought plans for his wedding to an abrupt halt. With no financial resources for a lawyer, Edward had no idea where to turn for help.

As it happened, April 12 (the day of the killing) was a Sabbath, and at the time of the incident Edward was not only attending the youth service at the Cicero Hispanic Adventist Church—more than 10 miles away from the scene of the crime—but also serving as the leader of one of the program’s discussion groups. The meeting ran from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., and more than 30 of its attendees were willing to vouch for him.

His brother, Rafael Ayala, and several church leaders immediately came forward, not only in his verbal defense but also to seek effective ways to help resolve the crisis. Eugenio Jorge (Edward’s immediate work supervisor at HHES) and Pastor Hugo Gambetta (Hispanic coordinator for the Lake Region Conference area) were among the first to link forces in an attempt to prove Edward’s innocence and obtain his release. They were joined by many others—both individuals and groups. Among them were Edward’s fellow workers from HHES and leaders from the Illinois and Lake Region conferences and the Lake Union.

In addition, people and organizations from the community, both religious and nonreligious, rose up in support. They included MEDA, a Chicago-based group serving the community and the special interests of immigrants; the Institute of Latin-American Studies at the University of Illinois; and Dominican, a Chicago-based entity made up of former citizens of the Dominican Republic.

All these groups and individuals became actively involved, gave their support—writing letters, helping to raise bail money, and rallying in Edward’s favor at the time of his preliminary hearing.

August 16 became a special day of prayer among all the Hispanic churches of the Lake Union. And many other Spanish- and English-speaking churches, as well as brothers and sisters around the world (made aware of the situation through the CompuServe Adventist forum), also joined in prayer on Edward’s behalf.

The services of Attorney James Reilley proved crucial to the speedy resolution of the case. The media also played a critical role, giving extensive coverage to the case as it developed.

Edward’s 29 days of confinement ended at 2:55 p.m. Thursday, August 21. After a long, tearful hug with his fiancée, he appeared serene and composed, with only words of gratitude and happiness to share with the media people and all the friends who had gathered to witness his release. He had no complaints against the authorities, he explained. “To feel angry would go against my religious beliefs,” he said in halting English. “God says to forgive your enemies.”

Edward added, moreover, that he’d been deeply moved by the plight of other prisoners and that he believed this tragedy had happened to him because God had a mission for him to fulfill, helping other inmates to know God better. “God made me see the world from a different side,” he told the Chicago Tribune.

The evening following Edward’s release, a happy church family gathered to celebrate his freedom with songs of praise and testimonies of God’s guidance and care. The media was also present, and Edward shared how he’d been able to minister to a number of people inside the prison, people who might otherwise never have been reached. He told that he’d raised up a small “church” inside the jail, with the group now meeting regularly to study the Bible and to pray. Several inmates, he said, have requested Bible study guides.

* From a Chicago Tribune story following the incident.

Luis Leonor is vice president of the Lake Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

**Postscript:** Edward and Edith were married on Monday, September 1, and are determined to make good of the unfortunate experience that put their happy day on hold for some 33 days. “Right now,” says Edward, “my only plan is to continue serving God and doing the ministry to which He called me—serving the community with greater zeal and fervor. Only now I have an additional responsibility which the Lord has placed upon my shoulders. Edith and I discussed this after I was freed. We both want to dedicate part of our lives and time to work with a prison ministry. I will not forget these friends now that I am out.”
Waiting—Loss or Gain?

Maybe we miss the joy of the present because we’re so anxious about the future.

BY JOYCE RIGSBY

ANY DIFFERENT FEELINGS accompany waiting. There is the excitement of waiting to open Christmas gifts, the apprehension of waiting for the report of a biopsy, the frustration of waiting in line, the fluctuation of hope and despair in terminal illness.

Most of us are waiting for something. George is waiting for heart surgery this week; Donna is waiting for her wedding in four months; Alma is waiting for her house to sell; Mother, 95 and a victim of cancer, is waiting to die.

“Life is all about waiting,” says my son, Bob.

“Waiting until I get bigger, then go to school, finish school, get married, find a job, succeed in my job, have children, and they grow up and go to school . . .”

It was Christmas Eve. My aunt Ethel waited for her husband to return home. A gentle but steady snow assured a white Christmas, and my aunt’s heart sang as she waited while making final preparations for the following day.

She waited and watched—all night—for a husband who never returned. The next morning police found him in a nearby town, dead from natural causes. Waiting, begun in joy, had ended in sorrow.

Years later I waited for the birth of a grandchild. It was a glorious April. My overdue daughter and I took long walks—the trees were a delicate green, and daffodils were blooming—yet we were wishing away those moments.

When Kati was born, the impatient wait ended in joy.

We need to ask if we experience waiting as loss or gain. Do you miss the joy of the present because you’re so eager to taste future joys?

Waiting as Loss

Time spent waiting is viewed as a predominantly negative experience by many people. In a limited survey I conducted,
the most used adverb is “impatiently.”

Waiting patiently and productively is not a skill well learned by most in today’s “instant” climate. There’s instant pudding and potatoes, instant sex, and instant credit, with little opportunity to learn the delay of gratification. Many reach adulthood expecting everything on a “right now” basis. This unwillingness to wait can eventually mean overspending to the point of bankruptcy.

Waiting is a negative experience if viewed as an endurance test, something that is standing between me and what I really want. Often we have no control over whether or not we wait or the length of time we wait.

How we wait, though, is under our control.

Is it any wonder that in his long wait for an heir Abraham decided the Lord needed his help? If he had waited for the Lord, the course of history would have been much different.

### Waiting as Gain

Waiting is closely related to our faith, both in God and our fellow believers. The Bible has many examples—Sarai, Rebekah, and Rachel each had difficulty conceiving. The time of waiting to become pregnant in that culture was loaded with embarrassment and even shame. Think of the long years Joseph waited in prison, knowing he was innocent of the charge against him. And placing a 3-month-old baby in an ark of bulrushes and waiting for the outcome must have been difficult. But the results always fulfilled God’s ultimate will.

Shirley, my daughter, suggests that “waiting has two extremes—very shallow and very deep.” She believes that by nature people tend to stew a lot over the “little waitings.” But for some who are called upon to deal with a “huge waiting,” a life-changing moment comes, and suddenly they catch a glimpse of the arena of bigger “waiting,” and their lives are never the same. “From that time on their perspective is in a new waiting mode,” she says.

### How to Wait

How can I move from the frustrations of “little waitings” to a new mode of waiting in which I can see the bigger arena of life? Here are some suggestions:

Go prepared to wait. The CEO, doctor, or plane may be delayed. Carrying reading material may make all the difference to your mode of waiting. Those who carry laptops are never at a loss for something to do during waiting time. Waiting is often the hardest when you have nothing to do.

Relax during the wait. Try sitting quietly with closed eyes. Treat random thoughts as clouds passing overhead. Breathe slowly and naturally while repeating a focus word or phrase silently as you inhale and exhale. Alternately tensing and relaxing muscles help reduce tension.

Pray while you wait. My son Bob suggests, “Those times of waiting—what if they were used as signals: to become quiet, to present your life anew to God, to reach out, to pray?” In this context he sees waiting as an unexpected chance to commune with the Creator of the universe. “Time spent thus waiting would fly,” he says, “and leave one wishing the wait was longer.”

Practice God’s presence while you wait. Listen for God’s voice. Isaiah promised our strength would be renewed if we wait on the Lord (see Isa. 40:31).

### A Waiting Church

More than 60 years ago, when I was a child growing up in South Africa, my mother gave Bible studies to a woman who was bedridden. Mrs. G accepted the Lord and longed for Him to come. “Do you think Christ will come in five years?” she asked. “Or maybe 10! Could it be as long as 20?”

If she were alive today, I’d read her this text: “Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient! They will not be overdue a single day!”

( Hab. 2:3, TLB).

But I’m not sure how convincing I’d sound, because I have a problem with waiting patiently. Ever since my husband, Bob, died, I’ve been “ready for Jesus to come” in the sense that waiting seems more difficult. But the valley of suffering can be a vale of soul growing.

Christ’s admonition to “occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13) is good advice for all times and all people. This does not mean to accumulate as large a bank account as possible. It does not mean to increase possessions and build bigger houses. Nor does it mean to exert power in an effort to manipulate or control others.

“Occupy till I come” does mean to share God’s love and blessings with others while waiting for His coming. Eternity will verify the gain.

Joyce Rigsby is a freelance writer who lives in Hanford, California.
Is it true that the New Testament teaches that some individuals are predestined for salvation and others for eternal perdition?

The question of predestination has been discussed for centuries in the Christian church. Its discussion raises such issues as human freedom, God’s sovereignty, and the relationship between those two. Some commentators, in order to preserve human freedom, limit God’s sovereignty in some form. Others make a special effort to emphasize God’s sovereignty and thereby sacrifice human freedom. And still others attempt to preserve both through intricate theological argumentation.

I suggest that we begin with a study of the word “predestination.” Since most of the argumentation is based on passages found in the New Testament, I will limit my comments to them.

The noun “predestination” isn’t used in the New Testament. What we find is the verb “predestine” (Greek, proorizo, “decide upon beforehand”). An examination of the six verses in which the verb is used reveals the following.

1. God’s act of predestination and eternity: The divine decision is said to have taken place “before the ages” (1 Cor. 2:7). This expression probably designates the time before the creation of the world. The implication is that in the divine decision God wasn’t influenced by any of His creatures, because it was made before they existed. The emphasis is on divine freedom.

2. God’s predestination and His divine plan: Whatever God predetermines isn’t the result of an accidental decision; He had a plan, and those events formed part of it. Ephesians 1:11 states that what happened took place “according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will.” This purpose or plan was conceived in the divine mind, was willed by Him, and was worked out in history according to that will. The foundation and motivating force of the plan is God’s love (verse 5). This indicates that the plan was intended to be for the benefit of His creatures.

3. God’s predestination and Christ: What Jesus experienced in the hands of Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel was what God’s hand and “plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:28). Notice that God didn’t predetermine the evil actions of God’s enemies, but the suffering of His Son in their hands. God doesn’t have to move people to do evil, because it’s natural for sinners to practice evil. Yet He uses even their evil to further His plan of salvation.

Romans 8:29 seems to suggest that Jesus was also predestined by God to be “the first-born among many brethren.” The incarnation of the Son of God is part of the divine plan configured in eternity. He was going to be one of us and in the process was going to make us His brothers and sisters.

4. God’s predestination and believers: There are certain specific things that God predetermined for His people. He established that His wisdom, revealed in the person of Christ, be “for our glorification” (1 Cor. 2:7). This isn’t something that God perhaps will do for us, but rather something that He has determined to do for us. We will be glorified through Christ.

God has also predestined us to be adopted as His children only through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). This is a nonnegotiable for God. He acted one-sidedly creating a way for our adoption to the heavenly family before we existed. In addition, the plan includes God’s intention to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). This is His plan for those who love Him. Our Lord’s predestined plan is to transform us.

5. God predetermined everything related to salvation: With respect to the salvation of His people God didn’t leave anything to chance. Predestination, based on His foreknowledge, once put into effect reaches us as a call for salvation. The acceptance of the call leads to justification and to our final glorification at the Second Coming (verse 30). There is no power on earth that can alter God’s plan for us except our rejection of it.

Predestination is a good word. The use of the verb indicates that it designates God’s unalterable plan for the salvation of His people through the incarnation and death of our Saviour. It knows only one positive use, and thus we can’t construct with this verb a doctrine of double predestination.

* Bible references in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.
They Still Go

The following persons and families left their homes during July, August, and September 1997 to volunteer for service overseas. We pray that their experiences make a difference in their lives as well as in the lives of the people they serve. This material has been provided by the Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Please contact them if you want to be a part of this important work.

Ira Eugene Bailie, to serve as relief physician/surgeon, Sheer Memorial Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal, and Rita Farrar Bailie, of Denair, California.

Betty Jean Barlow, to serve as elementary teacher, Bangkok Adventist Church School, Bangkok, Thailand, of Pendleton, Oregon.

Robert Philip Beavers, to serve as project director, ADRA/Azerbaijan, Baku, Azerbaijan, and Evris Belloroda (Ella) Beavers, of Bear Creek, North Carolina.

Arthur Nelson Brown, to serve as landscape horticulturist, Southern Asia-Pacific Division, Singapore, of Mesa, Arizona.

Paul Yosun Chung and Iris Chung, to serve, respectively, as ophthalmologist-physician and family practice physician, Guam SDA Clinic, Tamuning, Guam, of Loma Linda, California.

Peter Edward Howell, to serve as country director, ADRA/Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal, and Patricia Howell, of Laurel, Maryland.

Catherine Elizabeth McDonough, to serve as certified nurse-midwife, Guam SDA Clinic, Tamuning, Guam, of Tucson, Arizona.

Monroe Alexander Morford, to serve as interim principal/project director, Maridi Secondary/Vocational School, ADRA/Sudan, Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa, and Frances Jean Morford, of Marysville, California, extended their services one year.

Ralph Eugene Neall and Beatrice Neall, to serve as theology lecturers, Avondale College, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia, of Lincoln, Nebraska.

Teresa Casheen Thomas, to serve as dental hygienist, Guam SDA Clinic, Tamuning, Guam, of Loma Linda, California.

Remember our regular missionaries who have recently left for or returned to other countries. Put them on your prayer list.

Judith Hope Strand Barcelo, to serve as teacher, Humanities Department, Antillian Adventist University, Puerto Rico, Harold Barcelo, and one child, left Redlands, California.

Edwin Lee Baumgartner, returning as departmental director, ADRA/Nicaragua, Managua, Pamela Colene Baumgartner, and four children left Houston, Texas.

Max Henry Church, returning as ADRA director, Malawi Union Mission, Blantyre, Malawi, Davona Gae Church, and five children left Detroit, Michigan.

Rene Alder Church, returning as production manager, Zambia Adventist Press, Lusaka, Zambia, Licette Araceli Church, and one child left Detroit, Michigan.

Lloyd Martin Dull, returning as teacher, Maxwell Adventist Academy, Nairobi, Kenya, and Dixie Mae Dull left Minneapolis, Minnesota.

David Abner Dunn, to serve as director, ADRA/Armenia, Elizabeth Dunn, and three children, of Wexford, Pennsylvania.

Dean Mitchel Edwards, returning as teacher, Maxwell Adventist Academy, Nairobi, Kenya, Gwendolyn Edwards, and two children left Memphis, Tennessee.

Carlyle Fleming, to serve as chair, Math, Engineering, and Information Science Department, West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica, of Miamisburg, Ohio.

Ronald Ethelbert Forde, returning as dentist, Adventist Dental Practice, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Dorothy Evadne Forde, and three children left Miami, Florida.

Allen John Fowler, returning as administrator, Mwami Adventist Hospital, Chipata, Zambia, and Airlie Elizabeth Fowler left Vancouver, British Columbia.

Gordon Robert James Gray, returning as treasurer, Africa-Indian Ocean Division, Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, and Inge (Sieglinde) Gray left Boston, Massachusetts.

Laurence Edward Habenicht, returning as surgeon, Bella Vista Polyclinic, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Deborah Diane Habenicht, and two children left Miami, Florida.

Kenworth Fitzgerald Holness, to serve as family practice physician, Andrews Memorial Hospital, Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies, Lisa-Lynnae Holness, and one child, of Rockford, Illinois.

Eugene (King-yi) Hsu, returning as president, East Asia Association, Hong Kong, and Alice Ol-lian Hsu left San Francisco, California.
Sermons and devotionals abound on grand Bible characters such as Daniel, Joseph, David, and even Peter, without the threat of idolatry. The virtues of Esther are upheld as we carefully retell the story of a beauty contest that would be illegal if conducted today.

We remain strangely silent, though, when it comes to Mary. Apart from a superficial reference to her in December, she is rarely mentioned, even though her closet is free of any proverbial skeletons. With the Old and New Testaments dominated by male figures, Adventists cannot afford to devalue or eliminate the role model of a sanctified woman for fear of Mariolatry. But what is the correct place in the Christian faith for Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus?

One church idolizes her. Seventh-day Adventists sometimes ignore her. Thousands claim to have seen her in visions and apparitions, to have shared conversations and witnessed as she performed miracles.

While others may see these manifestations as signs of the end, Adventists, with the unanimous support of the Bible, realize that Mary the mother of Jesus does not feature in any biblical descriptions of last-day events. Rather Adventists relegate these “miracles” to satanic delusions, designed to confuse and lead astray many professing Christians.

When friends and acquaintances from other faiths ask our opinion on Mary, we might reply all too hastily. The prayers addressed to Mary, worship dedicated to her, statues depicting her, and teachings identifying her as “the mother of God” and a mediator in heaven often prompt an uncharitable answer. This kind of answer can have devastating consequences to our friendship with those from other faiths. Instead, if we made the most of the opportunity with an accurate and positive reply, our friendship with other Christians and their understanding of the Bible would be improved.

We could share that Seventh-day Adventists believe and teach exactly what Mary taught and believed. Without a shadow of doubt, it was Mary who taught the infant Jesus the great truth of the Sabbath, instilling within Him the custom of Sabbath worship (see Luke 4:16). The Desire of Ages confirms this, “His mother was His first human teacher. . . . The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother’s knee” (p. 70).

Loving Jesus as a dedicated mother and committed believer, Mary would have longed for the second coming of the ascended Christ more than any other human being. Parenting the perfect Child would have made her well aware of her own faults. Mary would have cherished the great truth that Jesus represents her as her heavenly advocate. There was one occasion, as a result of neglect, that she lost her Child for three days (see Luke 2:44-46). We could also ask, “Where was Joseph?”

Yet from her lips came a simple and significant teaching of the New Testament: “Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you” (John 2:5, NIV). These words are remarkably similar to the later teaching of Jesus, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15, NIV). Mary demonstrated the true place of Jesus in our lives, treasuring all of her experiences with Him in her heart (Luke 2:51). As Jesus was dying in the “Godless” darkness on the cross, isolated from His Father by the barrier of sin, she did not flee, nor did she deny Him. She remained, watching the torture and death of her pure Son, infected by her own sin and the guilt of an evil planet. Simon’s prophecy that “a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:35, NIV) was being fulfilled.

Only a parent who has lost a child to death can imagine her joy three days later. This joy destroyed any skepticism after the Resurrection. Mary was always a believer, and Scripture’s final glimpse of her is praying with the disciples (see Acts 1:14) after the ascension of Jesus.

Unlike Enoch, Elijah, Moses, and her precious Son, there is no biblical evidence, not even a hint, to suggest that Mary now resides in heaven. Rather Mary is among the multitude described to Daniel, who sleep in the dust of the earth, awaiting the resurrection to everlasting life (Dan. 12:2) at the return of Jesus.

Anthony Kent is union evangelist for the Trans-Australian Union Conference
The Adventist Review on-line is made available free through the sponsorship of the North American Division Adventist Health Ministry Department—coordinators for “The Year of Health and Healing.”

During this year, Adventist Health Ministry invites each Adventist congregation to reaffirm the church’s health principles and share them throughout their communities.

For more information and materials on the Year of Health and Healing, call the Adventist PlusLine at (800) SDA-PLUS or Adventist Health Ministry Department at 301-680-6733.