It's what strengthens our hope.
“Behold, I come quickly . . .”

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

18 Preaching in Action
CELESTE RYAN BLYDEN
Blessed is the church that harnesses the energy of its young adults.

14 Breaking Up With Church
ANNE ELLIOTT
We can’t go back; we have to go forward—together.

24 After Death
NATHAN BROWN
While we don’t look forward to death, we can face it unafraid.

28 The Antidote to Religious Fanaticism
JOHN GRAZ
Fanatics have been giving religion a bad name. What can be done to turn the tide?

6 The Ministry of Diversity
A movement that embraces every “nation, tribe, language and people” can hardly afford to be parochial.
How Much Do the Games Cost?

I am thankful that Tim Ponder, in “How Much Do the Games Cost?” (Jan. 23, 2014), has brought this matter before us. I’m reminded of this quote: “We must now strive for eternal life with an intensity that is proportionate to the value of the prize before us. It is not money or lands or position, but the possession of a Christlike character, that will open to us the gates of Paradise. It is not dignity, it is not intellectual attainments, that will win for us the crown of immortality. Only the meek and lowly ones, who have made God their efficiency, will win for us the crown of immortality.”

I’m grateful for a better promise because of our star Player who said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again” (John 14:3, KJV).

RICK GREVE
Knoxville, Tennessee

Of Faith and Football

Wilona Karimabadi uses a good analogy, and one that will resonate with many who follow team sports (see “Of Faith and Football,” Jan. 23). Even when a team accomplishes the greatest thrill, as the winning quarterback is walking off the field, the question is posed: “You’ve just won the Super Bowl . . . now what are you going to do?” The reply is: “I’m going to Disney World!” That’s the human equivalent for heaven.

I’m grateful for a better promise because of our star Player who said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again” (John 14:3, KJV).

RICK GREVE
Knoxville, Tennessee

A Winner

The January 16, 2014, Adventist Review was another winner! Hyveth Williams’ article “A Few Words About Jesus” was a masterpiece! It’s a message worth sharing. Thank you!

VELMA BEAVON
Dayton, Montana

In Christ There Is Neither Conservative nor Liberal

In his article “In Christ There Is Neither Conservative nor Liberal” (Jan. 16, 2014) Chris Blake hit the nail squarely when he writes, “We must repent and change our ways.” We have delayed Christ’s return long enough! “Repentance and reformation” is quoted 49 times on the Ellen White CD-ROM, whereas “revival and reformation” is quoted eight times. There are many areas where we have to repent and change, such as diet, dress, entertainment, and worship.

Standards have to be raised so we may indeed be the peculiar people that the Lord must have before He will return.

“Repent” was the message of John the Baptist, and it has to be called for today. When we truly repent, we will also reform and have a genuine revival, which will be manifested in the latter rain. Love for God will motivate, and self will be lost sight of. May God help us in earth’s last hour!

HOWARD LOEWEN
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Thank you, Adventist Review and Chris Blake, for offering inspiration to help us choose to quit using the labels that tend to divide. I choose instead to listen to God and each family member, and begin being united in Christ.

GEORGE GROW
Candler, North Carolina

Youth and young adults will be there to see the work finished. May we uphold them in prayer and encouragement so that they remain faithful in their commitment to serve the Lord with heart, mind, and soul.

—NATALIE DODD, Centerville, Ohio
Laodicean church has a theology that gives them a false assurance of salvation. Their theology in regard to salvation is flawed, fatally flawed (Isa. 30:1). It’s a theology that has to be given up in exchange for the remedy. May God help us to make our calling and election sure.

GARY PYKE
McEwen, Tennessee

» Chris Blake makes a number of good points. But the fact remains: no matter how one labels them, some things are nonnegotiable. Many of our doctrines, including some of the original “pillars of our faith,” are being attacked from within the church. There can be no compromise on these issues. If it was “present truth” 100 years ago, it can’t be false today. Some things may have been more relevant at different times in our history, but new truth does not negate or contradict old truth.

There may indeed be neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, neither Black nor White, but there is still truth and error. There can never be any compromise between the two, whether or not one wants to label any particular issue “conservative” or “liberal.”

WALTER SUMNER
Canaan, Maine

New truth does not negate or contradict old truth.

—WALTER SUMNER, Canaan, Maine

It Is So
» I am responding to Clifford Goldstein’s article “It Is So” (Jan. 16, 2014). Yes, belief is important, but we must remember that the devil believes, and they won’t be saved (see James 2:19). If I remember my Seventh-day Adventist early teaching, Jesus is still the Truth. Jesus is still God. Jesus is still teaching that we must be “perfect,” stop sinning, and keep the Ten Commandments for our eternal life (see Matt. 5:17). None of that is a “belief” without doing, without action, without work. Didn’t Jesus state that it isn’t those who hear, or believe, who will be saved, but those who do? (see Matt. 7:21). Isn’t “do” a work? …

Let us not listen to “ignorant and unstable” people, no matter how many degrees they have or what their position is in the church. Let us turn our faces to Jesus Christ and place all “beliefs” upon the teachings of Jesus and live in obedience to Jesus.

RonalD Issler
Lucerne Valley, California

Five Good Articles
» Several articles in several editions spoke to me. In these four—Scott Griswold’s “Reach the World Next Door” (Nov. 14, 2013), Lael Caesar’s “Christmas With Abraham” (Dec. 12, 2013), William G. Johnsson’s “The Color of Freedom” (Dec. 19, 2013), and Emanuel Millen’s “Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh” (Dec. 19)—I noticed a wonderful common thread: Jesus and God as our Savior, Friend, and King.

It was also encouraging to read Justin McNeilus’ editorial “And It Was Good” (Dec. 26, 2013). Yes, youth and young adults will be there to see the work finished. May we uphold them in prayer and encouragement so that they remain faithful in their commitment to serve the Lord with heart, mind, and soul.

NATALIE DODD
Centerville, Ohio

Postmodernism: A Great Opportunity for Witnessing
» I am writing in regard to Claude Richli’s online article “Postmodernism: A Great Opportunity for Witnessing” (http://adventistreview.org/church-news/2013-11-15-temples). We Adventists have what it takes to reach a postmodern culture in the form of our medical missionary work—something other churches don’t have. They also struggle to connect with secular society. We have to give health its proper role in conference evangelism.

ALBERT DITTES
Portland, Tennessee

We welcome your letters, noting, as always, that inclusion of a letter in this section does not imply that the ideas expressed are endorsed by either the editors of the Adventist Review or the General Conference. Short, specific, timely letters have the best chance at being published (please include your complete address and phone number—even with e-mail messages). Letters will be edited for space and clarity only. Send correspondence to Letters to the Editor, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; internet: letters@adventistreview.org.

We Adventists have what it takes to reach a postmodern culture in the form of our medical missionary work, something other churches don’t have.

—ALBERT DITTES, Portland, Tennessee
He Called My Name

DECEMBER 21, 2013, MARKED A VERY SPECIAL MOMENT FOR RETIRED teacher Margaret Ann Wolf Harris in Catonsville, Maryland.¹

Christmas was just around the corner, but it wasn’t “Silent Night” or the anticipation of spending time with her family over the festive season that thrilled Harris’s heart. On December 21 the 71-year-old heard, for the first time in her life, the voice of her father, turret gunner Sgt. Cody L. Wolf, who had been shot down over Germany on January 11, 1944.

Earlier in 2013 Baltimore Sun research librarian Paul McCardell had discovered a package containing vinyl recordings of a wartime holiday broadcast from England that featured more than 50 soldiers and women in the Red Cross from the Mid-Atlantic region, including Sgt. Cody Wolf. “I’ve been thinking a lot about Catonsville,” Wolf said to the host of the broadcast. “My parents and my wife and our 16-month-old daughter, Margaret Ann.”

“I heard him call my name, and that is something special,” said Harris. “I could hear the pride in his voice.”

I swallowed hard when my wife told me the story. I could palpably feel the joy and exhilaration and thrill of hearing somebody I care about call my name. We love to be recognized by name—not “What’s her name again?” We need to be loved, and know that we are not just a number in a file or an anonymous database record. I need that—and so do you. Can you imagine listening, for the first time, to somebody you love say your name?

God knows about this deep need for name recognition. He does not worry about it as an advertiser worries about name recognition during the Super Bowl. As our Creator and Redeemer He must have built into our emotional DNA this longing to be called by name—because, ultimately, it marks our need to find Him and be safe in His all-powerful, yet gentle, hands. “But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine’” (Isa. 43:1).² “For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me” (Isa. 45:4).

I look forward to the day that I will hear my heavenly Father call my name. Revelation 2:17 reminds me that God already knows my real name, a new name testifying to His grace and transformation. I imagine that I will just stand—and be thrilled.

God knowing my name reaches also to you, my brother and sister worshipping with me in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It levels the playing field; I am not better than you, and you are not superior to me. When He calls, we recognize that God called us both by our names; that His grace is operational in both of our lives; that “we” is the operational word in Jesus’ presence, not “I” or “mine.” We suddenly understand that before His throne there are no liberals, conservatives, or cultural Adventists. Suspicion, misgivings, or distrust have no place in His presence; we will just see Him, the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:8). We stand among sinners—looking like you and me—who hear their names being called in the throne room of the universe. Like Margaret Ann Wolf Harris it will mean the world to me. Like Margaret Ann Wolf Harris it will be the greatest gift ever. Like Margaret Ann Wolf Harris we will know that we are loved!

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20)!

²Scripture quotations in this article are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
Things That Matter Most

IT IS AN OLD STORY, BUT ITS LESSONS STILL SPEAK TO US: JESUS WAS relaxing in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary sat near Jesus, absorbing every word. In the kitchen preparing food, Martha became agitated when Mary wasn’t helping her. Jesus’ words echo down the centuries: “Martha, Martha, . . . you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41, 42).

It is possible to be distracted, worried, or troubled about many things, but one thing matters above all else: knowing Christ passionately, and listening to and obeying His Word.

In telling the story Luke makes this insightful comment about Mary, who “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (Luke 10:39). It seems that this calm, devotional spirit is becoming secondary to many other trifling things today.

Surveys indicate that fewer than half of all Seventh-day Adventist families have family worship. Fewer church members study God’s Word daily. Devotional life seems to be waning among God’s people.

Some things are periphery; some discussions border on the edge of faith. Some issues may seem significant, but in reality have little real importance.

But knowing Christ matters. To hear His voice speaking through His Word matters. To spend time discovering His will in His Word matters. To neglect or minimize the authority of God’s Word, to downplay its significance, or to dismiss it as a product of its time with only some vague, moral principles is to miss the heart of Jesus’ lesson to Mary and Martha.

Some things really matter. Listening to and obeying Jesus’ Word are at the top of the list.

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Women of the Bible

ACROSS
2. The Bible calls this woman a “dealer in purple cloth.” She was converted after listening to Paul’s message (Acts 16:14).
4. She watched over her brother, a prince, and a servant of God (Ex. 2:7, Num. 26:59).
5. Also called Tabitha, “she was always doing good and helping the poor” (Acts 9:36).
6. Daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, this woman led a king of Israel to his downfall (1 Kings 16:31).

DOWN
1. Her master’s names were changed (Gen. 16:1).
3. After the Lord answered her earnest prayer, she made good on her promise to Him (1 Sam. 1:21, 22).
4. This daughter of a king of Israel became the first wife of a future king (1 Sam. 18:20).
5. Daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, this woman led a king of Israel to his downfall (1 Kings 16:31).
Kettering College Board Names New President

Nate Brandstater Succeeds Alex Bryan

By KETTERING COLLEGE

KETTERING COLLEGE’S board of directors has named Nate Brandstater as the college’s seventh president, effective February 3, 2014. He replaces Alex Bryan, who will leave Kettering College at the end of the 2013-2014 school year to become senior pastor of the Walla Walla University Church in College Place, Washington.

Brandstater comes to Kettering College from La Sierra University in Riverside, California, where he served as associate professor of chemistry and accreditation liaison officer. He also was an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Radiation Medicine at Loma Linda University.

Brandstater joined La Sierra University in 2000 as director of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and associate professor of chemistry. He held several other positions at La Sierra including director of computer information services, assistant vice president for academic administration, and associate dean of the college of arts and sciences.

“We are pleased to welcome Nate Brandstater to Kettering College,” says Roy Chew, chair of the Kettering College board of directors and president of Kettering Medical Center. “Under Nate’s leadership Kettering College will continue to develop outstanding curriculum and programs to help our graduates meet the needs of today’s health-care environment. Nate understands and embraces the Kettering tradition of innovation. This is the beginning of an exciting era in the history of Kettering College.”

A native of rural Ontario, Canada, Brandstater received his undergraduate degree in chemistry from Occidental College in Los Angeles. He earned his Ph.D. in physical chemistry from UCLA, and a master’s in financial management from La Sierra University. His wife, Ronda, is a registered nurse who most recently served as director of patient care at Loma Linda University Medical Center in California, and interim director of the Loma Linda International Heart Institute.

Kettering College is a fully accredited, coeducational college that specializes in health science education. A division of Kettering Medical Center (KMC), the college is located on the KMC campus in a suburb of Dayton, Ohio, and is chartered by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Kettering College offers certificate programs, Associate and Bachelor of Science degrees, and a Master of Physician Assistant Studies degree.

Born out of Adventist faith and upholding Christ, Kettering College educates students to make service a life calling and to view health as harmony with God in body, mind, and spirit.

Volcano Disrupts Communities in West Indonesia

Adventist schools shelter displaced families; January 25 offering aids relief efforts

By ANN STAFF

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST schools in West Indonesia are among institutions serving as shelters in the wake of a series of major volcanic eruptions that displaced more than 25,000 people and left nearby villages mired in ash and mud.

Mount Sinabung in North Sumatra erupted several times, spewing lava, volcanic ash, and gases as high as 16,000 feet (5,000 meters) in the air, and affecting communities well outside the established danger zone surrounding the volcano.

The mountain has erupted intermittently since September, with activity intensifying in January. Local sources say lava has flowed continuously since mid-January, with more than 200 eruptions reported in one week.

Three of the 37 Adventist churches near Mount Sinabung withstood damage in the latest series of eruptions, local church leaders said.
ERUPTION’S AFTERMATH: Joseph Peranginangin, president of the West Indonesian Union Mission, visits Berastepu, a village in Indonesia’s North Sumatra province, where the farmlands of Adventists were destroyed by volcanic ash.

“With continuing eruptions, damage assessment is not an option, so it’s difficult to determine the extent of the damage to churches and homes,” said Adventist pastor Tirsawaty Sinuhaji. Adventist schools in Sumbul and Kabanjahe are accommodating an estimated 700 displaced people. Medicine, blankets, clothing, and clean water are all urgent needs, church leaders said.

On January 25 Adventist churches in West Indonesia collected offerings to assist families displaced by the eruption. Offerings will also go toward those affected by flooding in Jakarta and Manado earlier in the month.

Mount Sinabung is one of 127 active volcanoes in Indonesia. Prior to 2010 the volcano had been dormant for centuries.

Model spokesperson: Former supermodel Waris Dirie speaks at Krankenhaus Waldriede (Berlin Hospital) on September 11 during the opening of the Desert Flower Center, which is a partner of her foundation for activism against female genital mutilation. The center is expected to treat 50-100 women each year.

World church

Adventists Join in Opposing Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

February 6 was International Day of Zero Tolerance

By Ansel Oliver, Adventist News Network

Seventh-day Adventists are among many faith groups, NGOs, and organizations working to end female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).

FGM/C, often referred to as female circumcision, is practiced in nearly 30 countries in Africa and Asia. Young girls are subjected to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to their genital organs for nonmedical reasons, often as part of a coming-of-age cultural tradition or ceremony.

FGM/C is sometimes viewed as a status symbol, and some practitioners say it promotes chastity. Its effects often include infection, chronic pain, and infertility. The United Nations banned the practice in 2012. The World Health Organization estimates that more than 125 million women and girls are victims.

Many people, especially in Western countries, are not aware of FGM/C, and are often shocked to learn about it. Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to the practice, according to a document adopted by the Adventist Church’s Christian View of Human Life Committee in 2000.

“Our church should continue to seek loving ways to discourage this practice, as well as to educate of its dangers,” said Peter Landless, General Conference Health Ministries Department director. “It is our desire that young women may grow in the natural way God created them.”

Landless urged respect for culture and sensitivity for those who are victims of the procedure. “It is very important that we do not inadvertently add insult to the injury of this mutilating procedure by inferring such patients are irreversibly shamed,” Landless said. “Such an attitude or approach may give them the feeling that they are less than normal people. Plus, there are millions of women affected, and one needs to be concerned lest the issue becomes a face-off of cultures, rather than a compassionate concern for the well-being of women and their status in their society.”

Heather-Dawn Small, General Conference Women’s Ministries Department director, said her department at the...
world headquarters and its affiliates in local communities are continuing to create awareness to the problem in order to end it.

“We’re doing what we can to help and heal our sisters who have suffered FGM/C through setting up homes for the victims, reaching out to communities where the practice is perpetrated on young girls to help stop this practice through education.”

One country in which the Adventist Church has worked to combat FGM/C is Kenya. The Kajiado Rescue Centre is a girls’ rescue home and education facility that celebrates adolescence with an alternative rite. “It is seen as a blessing by many families in many villages,” said Denise Hochstrasser, women’s ministries director for the Adventist Church’s Inter-European Division, which helps sponsor the project.

Already Kenya’s government has worked to eradicate FGM/C. In 2001 the Children’s Act criminalized the subject of children to FGM/C, and the new constitution, which was approved in 2010, offers clauses meant to protect children from any cultural practice that is harmful to their health.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has also worked in Kenya with anti-FGM/C projects over the years. One recent project helped educate more than 2,500 people about the issue by young girls performing songs and skits about FGM/C to their families and government officials. The initiative equipped 89 trainers to work with community leaders in bringing awareness to the issue. The program also helped support those who formerly performed FGM/C with other income-generating activities.

This year ADRA is implementing a program called the Girl Child Empowerment Program in Kenya’s western province of Nyanza. The project will offer a 10-week skills course that includes instruction about healthy relationships and the dangers of FGM/C.

“Being part of the church’s efforts in this global initiative to bring awareness to this issue is just one of the many ways in which ADRA is committed to empowering women and girls around the world,” said Jason Brooks, an ADRA senior program manager.

In Germany last year the Berlin Adventist Hospital opened the Desert Flower Center, an FGM/C reconstruction surgical center in partnership with supermodel Waris Dirie, one of the world’s most prominent advocates against FGM/C.

“As always, the Adventist Church seeks to restore the image of the Creator and to avoid adding grief and pain to those in suffering,” said Landless.
Adventist HealthCare to Divest Its New Jersey Hospital

BY ADVENTIST HEALTH CARE STAFF

ADVENTIST HEALTH CARE (AHC), based in Gaithersburg, Maryland, has announced plans to transfer its 111-bed, New Jersey-based Hackettstown Regional Medical Center to Atlantic Health System. AHC officials noted that the transaction is subject to state regulatory review and could take several months. If approved, Atlantic Health System will pay $54 million for the property.

“This decision was not an easy one for our organization, because Hackettstown has been a valued member of Adventist HealthCare,” said William G. “Bill” Robertson, AHC’s president and chief executive officer. “However, because of the changing health-care market in New Jersey, discussions began a few years ago about the best step to continue to ensure a strong future for the hospital and the community it serves. It was decided that by partnering with a health system in its region, Hackettstown would be in a better position to serve its community and receive help with

SOUTH PACIFIC

Addicts Give Up Drugs for Jesus

BY ZACHARY LIPEN/LINDEN CHUANG, South Pacific Division Record

“SAY YES to Jesus and no to drugs for forever.” That was the slogan adopted by a group of 52 marijuana users who publicly renounced their addiction at an Adventist evangelistic meeting in Papua New Guinea in January.

The program, held at Gumanch in the Dei District of the Western Highlands Province, attracted some of the most infamous drug addicts in the region. Among them was an elderly man known as “Fatherman,” who served as the group’s team leader. During the weeklong program, “Fatherman” gave up his notorious nickname as a symbol of his newfound faith. He is now known as William.

William commended the local Adventist church and guest speaker Solomon Kewa for recognizing the young men as people of value.

Local community counselors and chiefs were on hand to support the recovering drug addicts, encouraging them to “[not] let drugs lower your self-esteem.”

“You are worthy. Your families, church, community, province, and country needs you,” they added. “Above all, God loves you.”

The 52 former drug addicts are currently attending the local Adventist church. The success of the program captured the attention of Papua New Guineans across the country, with a story about the series featured in the January 23 issue of the Post Courier.
Chinese Adventists Have New Hymnal

BY CHINESE UNION MISSION

A NEWLY compiled hymnal is now available to Chinese Adventists worldwide, according to the Chinese Union Mission (CHUM). The new product is the fruit of the painstaking work of many over a course of seven years. Their efforts included, but not limited to, the careful selection of hymns, the retranslation of some lyrics, and the addition of the numbered music notation to the conventional staff notation.

A task force comprising nearly two dozen Chinese Adventists gifted in music, language, ministry, and theology, was organized by the Chinese Union Mission to undertake this massive project. Its objective was to update the old hymnal to make it more user-friendly and content-rich to the Chinese Adventists living in the twenty-first century.

The old Chinese hymnal was first published 48 years ago. It contains many hymns that are rarely sung by congregations. Many popular, spiritually uplifting, and lively new hymns that are loved by Chinese Adventists are not included in that hymnal. The CHUM taskforce took out the unpopular ones from the old hymnal and added new ones.

The translators made sure that the newly translated lyrics rhyme, and that they are accurate and easy to understand. The discrepancies in the number of stanzas in some songs between the old Chinese hymnal and the English hymnal were also reconciled, facilitating the use in bilingual Chinese congregations.
When our sons Tommy and Tyler were 6 and 4 years old, they had very vivid imaginations. They loved listening to Bible stories, especially stories about David. They often pretended to fight the Philistines with their wood-scrap swords and cardboard armor.

One day we took them to an ice-cream shop, and as we walked in they both stared incredulously at a customer who had green and purple hair formed into large spikes on his head. The customer also had rings in his nose, ears, and lips. Suddenly Tyler said in a close-to-terrified voice, “Daddy, is that a Philistine?”

—JON DALRYMPLE, SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

My 5-year-old son Zachary had just learned to read. He was reading the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 from an easy-to-read Bible. After he was done, Zachary came to me and said, “Mom, there’s an interesting word in there: dis-kipple-ous.”

“Huh?” I replied. “Let me see.”

Zachary showed me the word, and sure enough, there it was—disciples! Let’s hear it for phonics!

—MICHELLE CANDY, HONG KONG

“Some people like to spell salvation D-O, but Jesus spells it D-O-N-E.”

—SUBMITTED BY NECOLA GRANT, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

“A God who doesn’t have wrath is a God who doesn’t care.”

—YVON CAZA, AN ELDER IN THE PONOKA SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN ALBERTA, CANADA

Did You Know?

Millions of people consider The Desire of Ages, Ellen White’s classic volume on the life of Christ, to be their favorite White book. But her most popular book is Steps to Christ, which presents the essentials of basic Christian living. First published in 1892 and since translated into more than 165 languages, tens of millions of copies are in circulation.

—INFORMATION FROM THE ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE, WWW.WHITESTATE.ORG

Adventist Life

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—MICHELLE CANDY, HONG KONG

Let’s Pray

Have a prayer need? Have a few free minutes? Each Wednesday morning at 8:15 EDT the Adventist Review staff meets to pray for people—children, parents, friends, coworkers. Send your prayer requests and, if possible, pray with us on Wednesday mornings. Send requests to: Let’s Pray, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; fax: 301-680-6638; e-mail: prayer@adventistreview.org.
Breaking Up

IS IT THE BEST SOLUTION?

BY ANNE ELLIOTT

I’ve been watching the storm clouds brewing over the issue of women’s ordination, but I didn’t expect them to drift so close to home. And then they did. Unexpectedly, my home church was asked to consider a female pastoral candidate. Suddenly the tempest was raging directly over us.

During a conversation with an elder who was upset about the matter, I asked, “What would you do if the church hired a woman pastor?”

“Leave,” he promptly replied. “I don’t agree with it.”

I thought about his statement a lot. Now, I’m not about to solicit any ideas on it from you or share any of mine with anyone. But it does seem like abandoning the church has become the prevailing action when there’s a disagreement. Who doesn’t know at least one person or family who has jumped ship over differences either in personality or opinion with someone else in the church, or with the church itself?

I’ve been at my home church for nearly 30 years, and I myself have left and come back a couple times. The important thing, at least to me, is that I do come back. But in relationships there are no guarantees. The next time could always be the last time, for me or for anyone.

This lack of fidelity is disturbing to me on a personal as well as a corporate level. It’s as if the church has been reduced in importance to the status of a throwaway institution, like a club rather than a vital gathering of Christians working toward a goal far larger than their own individual petty disagreements and squabbles. You have to wonder how much the “easy come, easy go” attitude of the world around us has penetrated the church body when we would rather walk away over a disagreement than stay and “reason together” like the mature, adult Christians we believe ourselves to be. Let’s face it, the church—that is to say, a cohesive body of believers who represent the attributes of...
Chris rather than just spouting them—will be present and accounted for at Christ’s return, with or without us. God has always preserved a remnant that reflects His character to the world. That’s what we’re here for: to be a living demonstration of God to the dark world in which we live. Can we expect to accurately represent a steadfast God when we are all too ready to abandon ship at the slightest provocation?

Little Has Changed
It is no surprise to anyone with a cursory knowledge of Bible history that God’s chosen people were often confidently self-righteous while simultaneously stiff-necked and rebellious. At one point Moses told them, “Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of the Lord your God in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord” (Deut. 9:6, 7). Unfortunately, it often seems as though little has changed. And isn’t that the real point? The reason we’re so willing to chuck it all at the first sign of trouble is that we aren’t growing up. We can’t develop spiritual maturity while we are focused on the small things instead of the Great Commission.

Pulling Together
A disagreement does not have to result in a parting of the ways. People can disagree on particulars and still pull together for the greater good. As members, we aren’t “dating” the church; we’re in a committed, “monogamous” relationship. We’re not sampling denominations anymore; we’ve chosen one, this one. How would a marriage fare if couples broke up every time they disagreed? Just as married couples are one flesh but two separate individuals, we can exist in the church as active, productive, vibrant members even when we don’t completely agree.

That’s not to say we should take disagreement with official church positions lightly, because the church certainly doesn’t advocate them lightly. Is the church infallible? No; only God is
infallible. But the church is, and should be, constantly growing, and growth involves change, a continual refinement of understanding. The Wisconsin Conference of Seventh-day Adventists puts it well when they say on their Web site that “[religious freedom] implied a right to read the Scripture for oneself and come to conclusions not bound by creedal presuppositions. The ‘present truth’ perspective assumed that new insights would arise as Seventh-day Adventists continued to study the Scriptures.”* If you choose to view change in such a light, “present truth” is exciting stuff; it means that our faith, our understanding, and our interaction with God and His Word are constantly growing as we become able to accept and comprehend it. This should make us more, not less, forbearing with one another and with the corporate church, of which we are a part. We will not all grow at the same rate, however, and we must treat with kindness and understanding both those who grow faster and those who grow slower than we do.

To be clear, I’m not advocating that anyone stay in an abusive church relationship. I’m talking about the petty differences of opinion such as the color of the sanctuary carpet, or the Sabbath school class teacher, or the food offerings at potluck that put people’s noses out of joint. These are opportunities for us to exercise our God-given forbearance and love for one another. But so long as abuse isn’t being perpetrated, this concept applies to greater disagreements as well, including strongly held opinions such as who should lead and serve in the church, and on what basis.

It Happens to Everyone

Make no mistake, sooner or later you will disagree with someone or something in the church. You will feel hurt, or betrayed, or just plain angry. You will want to leave. You can do this, of course. Or you can be like Moses, who continually put the interests and salvation of the people before his own personal good. Time after time he could have stomped off into the desert, saying, “That’s it! I’ve had enough!” He had an inarguable right to be Israel’s number-one critic after what they put him through; but instead, he continued to champion them in the very teeth of their relentless disobedience.

It may not be easy to continue to be a contributing part of an organization when you have a difference of opinion over one (or more) of its positions. It takes a great deal of humility. Not surprisingly, the Bible lists humility as Moses’ strongest character trait. It says he was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth (Num. 12:3). No doubt he would have agreed with Paul when Paul wrote: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Phil. 2:3-7).

When we have differences with the church or individuals in the church, the question we must ask ourselves is this: is it more important to be right as we understand it, or to be Christlike? Putting others before ourselves isn’t a natural action for humans. We’re too self-centered for that. Instead, it’s an action that is available to us only when God is running our lives.

Only then can we be sure that nothing will shake us loose from the church, no matter what. In marriage one of the basic tenets when trying to work through a disagreement is that neither party brings up the D word. Instead, both determine that divorce is not an option and channel all their combined energies into finding a solution to their problem. This isn’t always a straightforward proposition. Sometimes, in order to restore peace, one or the other will have to yield their will or extend grace. If they find that impossible to do in their own strength, they must allow God to work what is needed through them. Their hearts will have to change before they can move forward.

In the same way, perhaps it is our own heart, and not the church or someone else’s strongly felt position, that needs to change. When we are able to practice this level of Christian maturity, not only will the church be a happier place, but we will finally stop circling this mountain and cross into the Promised Land.


**ANNE ELLIOTT** is a pseudonym.
The Enormous Radio

THE MAY 17, 1947, ISSUE OF THE NEW YORKER RAN “THE ENORMOUS RADIO,” A short story by John Cheever about a typical married couple with two young children living in a twelfth-floor apartment in Manhattan. It begins: “Jim and Irene Westcott were the kind of people who seem to strike that satisfactory average of income, endeavor, and respectability that is reached by the statistical reports in college alumni bulletins.”

One day Jim brings home a radio housed in a large, wooden box, the kind that today exist only in museums. Much to their surprise, the new radio allowed them to listen in on others in their building. “Those must be the Fullers, in 11-E,” Irene said. “I knew they were giving a party this afternoon. I saw her in the liquor store. Isn’t this too divine? Try something else. See if you can get those people in 18-C.”

Over time, though, what came from the wooden box disturbed Irene. Jim came home one day and found her upset over the fighting, the dysfunction, the dishonesty, and the battles over money and other things she heard all day over the radio. When Jim angrily told her to stop listening, Irene begged him not to fight with her, and to affirm that they were happy and that their lives weren’t as sordid and messed up as those others. After he assured her they were different, Irene calmed down and Jim got the radio fixed so that only music came from it.

A few weeks later Jim and Irene did get into an argument about money. Irene begged him to be quiet because people would hear. When Jim asked, Who would hear? she said, “The radio.” He responded that it didn’t hear them and he didn’t care if it did. Jim then attacked Irene for thinking she was so much better than everyone else. “You stole your mother’s jewelry before they probated her will. You never gave your sister a cent of that money that was intended for her—not even when she needed it. You made Grace Howland’s life miserable, and where was all your piety and your virtue when you went to that abortionist? I’ll never forget how [cold] you were. You packed your bag and went off to have that child murdered as if you were going to Nassau.”

Cheever ends it like this:

“[Irene] stood for a minute before the hideous cabinet, disgraced and sickened, but she held her hand on the switch before she extinguished the music and the voices, hoping the instrument might speak to her kindly. . . . Jim continued to shout at her from the door. The voice on the radio was suave and noncommittal. ‘An early-morning railroad disaster in Tokyo,’ the loudspeaker said, ‘killed 29 people. A fire in a Catholic hospital near Buffalo for the care of blind children was extinguished early this morning by nuns.

“[The] temperature is 47. The humidity is 89.”

With his story, Cheever wanted to make a statement about the domestic abjection of 1950s life in America. Yet I took something so much broader from “The Enormous Radio.” We’re all, like Irene, guilty and sin-damaged creatures who, unable, even unwilling, to confront the fullness of our faults, mask them by gawking at those of others, even if we do so subtly, nurturing those judgments in the quiet, unobtrusive corners of our brains. This is not the outright hypocrisy of the Pharisees; it’s more insidious because it’s private, less likely to be exposed, as theirs and Irene’s were.

But it’s hypocrisy nonetheless, and Paul warns: “So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?” (Rom. 2:3).

Each in our own way, we’re the Westcotts, and we don’t need an enormous radio to tell us that, either. So instead of judging others, let’s give them the grace that we covet for ourselves, the grace of unconditional love because, were love conditional, who could meet its conditions? When we condemn others, we condemn ourselves; and we need grace, not condemnation. Imagine our existence were we to give the hurting battered souls in front of our eyes the grace that the hurting battered soul behind them craves for itself.

CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN is editor of the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide. He is also featured on the web site 1844MADESIMPLE.ORG.
They use different ministry methods, but these four young leaders share the same goal.

Kris Eckenroth: Connecting the Disconnected

On a recent Friday morning Kris Eckenroth gave me a rundown of his Sabbath schedule. “Tomorrow is second Sabbath, so that means it’s ‘Jean Sabbath,’” he said. “At 7:00 a.m. a group will cook breakfast for the homeless at the Opportunity House, a local shelter. At 9:30 there’ll be a time of prayer, Sabbath school at 10:00, then corporate worship at 11:00. Jason is speaking tomorrow—oh, and we have someone coming from Bridge of Hope.” Bridge of Hope connects church families with single mothers who are homeless or struggling. They give a short presentation during worship to pique interest and seek volunteers for a year.

My interest was already piqued, even before Eckenroth noted that first Sabbath is “Connection Sabbath” with a potluck after service, and on the third weekend of every month there’s a church party or event. “We might have a bonfire, a banquet, a pajama party...”
ECKENROTH:
“WE ARE A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WHO WANT TO—THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS—BE A BRIDGE TO JESUS.”

and red shirts that identify their church, “Grace Outlet,” and hit the streets of their hometown, Reading, Pennsylvania.

Eckenroth tells me that the city, population 88,000 and located about an hour west of Philadelphia, was once a thriving manufacturing hub where knitting was big money. After World War II business dried up, lots of people left, and the economy declined. Things got so bad that not long ago Reading was identified as the poorest city in America for two years running.

Yet here he is, raising his family, pastoring the Seventh-day Adventist church that he and seven others prayed into existence four years ago, and planning Jean Sabbath.

All of this explained a lot. This is why Eckenroth has such a burden on his heart to reach inactive and missing members, why he started Grace Outlet in 2008 in a ballet studio in an old goggle factory in downtown Reading with the mission statement “to connect the disconnected,” and why he believes relationships are key to drawing and keeping members. “I’ve been part of so many churches where we go, sit through a sermon, and go home,” he said. “We are a community of believers who want to—through relationships—be a bridge to Jesus, whether you’ve never picked up a Bible, or used to be a church member.”

It’s happening. About 100 people attend each week, and 60 to 65 percent are Adventists who were once inactive. Now they’re part of a church family that’s engaging, supportive, and affirming; that holds them accountable and is helping them grow spiritually.

And tomorrow, after church, they’re not going home for “lay activities.” They’re going to the Boys and Girls Club to do crafts and play games; to the Children’s Home of Reading to spend time with teenage boys; to the Animal Rescue League to walk dogs; to the Villa retirement home to sing hymns and encourage the seniors to make a decision for Christ; and to set up a mobile soup kitchen, where they’ll give out sandwiches, water, hot chocolate, and carnations. In fact, that’s how they met Renee, who’s now attending regularly and starting Bible studies.

And Eckenroth, who can hardly believe what God is doing in Reading, says Grace Outlet’s leaders are now mentoring two other groups in Pennsylvania—Engage in York and Legit Worshipers in Easton.

“They’re trying to do something too,” he told me. Besides praying for guidance and acting on the burden God placed on his heart, Eckenroth says that’s all he did. Something.

Carmela Monk Crawford: Providing Access to the Message

Some people think it’s significant that Carmela Monk Crawford is the first female editor of Message, a magazine published every other month. Others think it’s significant that she returned to the ministry based at the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland, 16 years after she left her associate editor role there. And still others find it significant that she’s following in her father’s footsteps. J. Paul Monk, Jr., a pastor, youth direc-
(many of whom were newly freed slaves), was the vision of Ellen and James White’s son James Edson. Answering his mother’s call to develop the church’s Southern work, he famously sailed a steamboat called The Morning Star down the Mississippi River and engaged in “offshore evangelism.” He also founded the Gospel Herald in 1898, which Crawford calls the precursor to Message’s 1934 launch.

As she sees it, White was trying to provide people with access to the Adventist message. Now, more than a century later, in a different time, with a different format and with different challenges and needs, she’s trying to carry on his vision and tradition.

At her first meeting with the Message magazine advisory, in December 2012, Crawford had only a few moments to address leaders of the church in North America charged with ministering to the Black community—and who are the major backers and users of the periodical today.

“After Jesus cleared the Temple, I believe it was premeditated,” she announced to the group gathered around lunch tables at Oakwood University’s Wade Hall in Huntsville, Alabama. Like the trained child-advocacy lawyer and skilled assistant public defender she became on her hiatus from publishing, she handily made her opening statement: “When Jesus cleared the Temple, He was concerned about the doves. And I kept wondering, Why the doves? Why the doves? Some people could afford only doves, and I believe He was talking about providing access for everybody, even those who couldn’t afford it,” she said to a chorus of amens.

Crawford later shared this with me via email. “Message provides access to God and His love. We are an evangelistic and outreach paper for the church, what Sister White called ‘the silent preacher,’” she said. “Message presents biblical truths connected to current events that we view through a prophetic lens.”

That will continue under Crawford’s leadership and that of her associate editor, Pat Harris; the designer, Ron Pride; and the periodical marketing director, Samuel Thomas—along with the popular meatless menus and recipes; columns on marriage, family, and other lifestyle themes; and the strong emphasis on disseminating truth. “We also want to share some of the distinctive Adventist beliefs, such as the sanctuary and how each phase of Christ’s earthly ministry matters to us and makes a difference in our lives,” she revealed.

Since taking the helm, she has introduced several new sections: The Experience, written by Atlanta pastor Rashad Burden, walks readers through a topical Bible study and then invites further discussion through social media. Myth Busters, authored by Los Angeles pastor Don McPhaull, looks at and explains verses in the Bible that people need to understand, such as the state of the dead and the “rapture.” Everyday Ethics, another new section, provides practical solutions for sticky situations, e.g., time management in the social media age.

Eye on the Times spotlights good works and keeps watch on religious liberty issues that impact our world. Future-answers will explore what it takes to cultivate a relationship with God like that of David, cast, a partnership with Breath of Life Ministries and its speaker/director Carlton Byrd, presents biblical prophecy in the context of current events.

“We’re talking about providing access,” she reminded me. “In the past, perhaps, we’ve relied upon the pastors, evangelists, or others to do that, but I want to work with them to mobilize laypeople like me and cast a wide net so, when possible, we can nurture a spiritual relationship where a conversation takes place. We can make the initial contact with that coworker, neighbor, friend, or family member, and then Message—a nice, neat package that’s attractive to read—will give the talking points and cover the bases.”

One of last year’s “packages” targeted parents who really want to do better, for, and by their children. Crawford says the issue was based on Luke 2:52 and touted 30 ways to protect your children and help them grow “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” The issue also looked at how animated films impact children.

This year Crawford plans to tackle health. “We’ll introduce the ‘guerrilla gardener,’ who is growing fruits and vegetables in his backyard swimming pool in South Central Los Angeles,” she says. “He’s challenging people to transform their health by any means necessary, even if—and especially if—they live in a food desert.”

In the annual fall family issue Message will address the dilemmas of being single and living with a sexually transmitted disease; and will ask the question “Has abstinence become the new scarlet letter?” And later Take 6 member Alvin Chea will explore what it takes to cultivate a relationship with God like that of David,
who had the heart of a psalmist and was said to be a man after God’s own heart.

Crawford says that the big push for 2014 is to get Message into the hands of incarcerated men and women. “That’s another point of access to share our church’s message, which really does bring peace and freedom,” she said.

In sharing that message, she’s hoping Message magazine will too.

Michael Kelly II: Tweeting the Good News

If you sometimes attend church in your pajamas, you’re not alone.

Michael Kelly II, senior pastor of the Mount Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church in Riverside, California, says that while there are about 1,000 people attending his church in person each Sabbath, there are at least 30,000 more watching the live stream and archives online.

While this wasn’t an intentional approach to growing his predominantly African American but increasingly diverse congregation, it is now.

The 30-something married father of two, who’s been in the pulpit at Rubidoux for four years, says their cyber-ministry, rubitv.tv, took flight in 2010 when the church held a Revelation Seminar that attracted 800 to 1,000 people three nights a week for four weeks—and yielded 70-plus baptisms. “Four to five other churches picked up the feed, and so many people watched it online that the server crashed,” he recalled.

That’s when they recognized the momentum and potential.

“We’ve [discovered] that a lot of people don’t go to church, and a lot of them are just watching the service. There are barbershops that [broadcast] the service, so while people are getting their hair done they’re watching our worship service,” he offered as an example.

Like a good pastor, Kelly wants to involve these viewers too. “We know that watching online feels like you’re outside a house watching what’s going on inside. So we’ve really been working to bring our viewers ‘in the house’ with us so they feel like they’re a part of what’s going on in the congregation.”

To that end, Kelly and his team work to make the program visually appealing by designing a set for each sermon series and dressing accordingly. Second, they try to engage virtual members in service. (For example, when they went to Haiti on a mission trip, some of the online viewers went along.) They also invite participation in the church’s ministries, including assistance from a graphic artist who designs projects remotely. Such efforts are paying off as they recently enjoyed their first baptism for online viewers, some of whom drove eight to nine hours to be baptized by Pastor Kelly.

Last year they launched a small-group Bible study series and used a program called LinkUp to identify the locations of registrants and connect them locally. “We have a member in Baltimore who watches from home because she has a special-needs child,” he said. “We sent her the same materials we gave our people here so she could participate in a small group there.

“Through this process we’re learning that church is not a building, it’s the people. Our goal is not to get people in our building, it’s the same as our mission statement: ‘to reach people far from God.’ Some people might not ever set foot in our building,” he continued. “We’re not different for different’s sake, but we understand that if we want to reach people nobody else is reaching, we’ve got to do things nobody else is doing.”

Relevance is a driving force and another reason Kelly is doing all he can to engage the 20,000 people watching online. And much like how he and his leadership team are stretching themselves to be relevant, he would like to see more Seventh-day Adventist churches develop ministries that address current community needs rather than trying to “forcefit” said needs into existing ministries.

Though he doesn’t do Facebook, he’s become “Twitterman,” connecting people who are far from God, conducting counseling sessions, engaging in theological discussions, asking questions, asking for prayer, and even “ranting” on the popular social media outlet Twitter. “Also, during the sermon I tell people to tweet whatever comes to mind to a particular hashtag such as #thepath, which was my last sermon series,” Kelly said. He’s got about 800 followers of his handle @pastakhelly and follows 500 people because “Twitter gives people permission to ‘stalk’ you. You’re letting people into your day-to-day activities. I see it as an opportunity to connect with people, meet new people, and try to engage people who aren’t Christian.”

Two things have happened as a result of his encouraging members to tweet during his sermons. “Their followers are checking out the church and even attending, and people who have no affiliation with our church are checking us out to see who we are, just as people browse for clothes online before they go to a store, they now go online to check out your church. If they like what they see, they’ll show up.”

Consider it twenty-first-century window shopping.

Jose Cortes, Jr.: Moving With Compassion

Everyone talking about youth leaving the church should visit the Atlantic Union Conference, where a large portion of the membership (almost 112,000 in seven states and the islands of Bermuda) is reportedly under age 35.

It’s also the birthplace of a year-old movement for, by, and about—of all things—compassion.

“God used youth and young adults
from this area to begin the Adventist movement, so perhaps God can use a large group of youth and young adults from this area to help our church become a church that is not only right, but full of love,” posited Jose Cortes, Jr., the union’s youth ministries director, at the commencement of his 2013 Com-
checked in with Cortes for an update:

to encourage the youth to adopt comp-
assion as a lifestyle, his team created a
Web site (www.compassion-now.org)
with supporting materials and shared
daily inspirations and Bible verses via

text messaging. They published a blog
with small-group lessons written by a

myriad of contributors. They orga-
nized “Compassion Sabbaths,” and
couraged participants to worship,
then work, in communities in need.

They also hit the streets, subways,
buses, and stoops wearing red-
and-white T-shirts—and unleas-
hing compassion to grateful

First stop: New York City, where
the NY13 evangelism initiative was
ramping up. On a cool Sabbath
afternoon in March, several thou-
sand church leaders and members
from 17 conferences in North Amer-
ica descended on “the big apple” to
march across the Brooklyn Bridge.

“Can you imagine thousands of
young people marching and calling for
New York City to be the capital of com-

passion?” Cortes asks. Despite the chilly
Sabbath afternoon, the group’s activi-
ties warmed the hearts of the police,
who accommodated the unusual
request, and the public media, who fea-
tured the event on the evening news.

Participants cleaned up streets, deliv-
ered donated furniture to families
affected by Superstorm Sandy, shared
Communion with homeless people, and
took part in 100 community service
projects, logging more than 25,000
hours of volunteerism.

Second stop: Boston, which was reel-
ing after a senseless April terror attack.

“After the Boston Marathon bombing,
young people started calling me, saying,
‘We cannot be silent, we must do some-
things,” Cortes says. So on the first Sab-

the compassion movement—I

promised. “We want this to become a
church, neighborhood, and city,” he

“TIt’s contagious,” he surmised. “Sev-
eral camp meetings held compassion

events during the year, and I’m seeing
that people and groups unaffiliated with
ours are starting similar movements.”

It’s also not ending here. Cortes is
getting calls from around the Atlantic
Union, the United States, and beyond.

“Compassion [is going] viral. We can’t
contain it,” he said. “We will help peo-
ple who want to take the compassion
movement around the world because
people can’t resist helping someone in need.

“It’s attractive. Every time we had an

event, media showed up… We also had no
problems getting funding for our events.

“It’s contagious,” he surmised. “Sev-
eral camp meetings held compassion

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“Compassion [is going] viral. We can’t
contain it,” he said. “We will help peo-
ple who want to take the compassion
movement around the world because
actions speak louder than words,” he
concluded, quoting their motto.

Next stop: Portland, Maine.

CELESTE RYAN BLYDEN ENJOYS
SHARING STORIES ABOUT HOW GOD IS WORKING IN AND THROUGH HIS PEOPLE IN THE COLUMBIA UNION CONFERENCE, WHERE SHE SERVES AS COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR.
Write Your Own Letter

TODAY THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, IS INCLUSIVE AND SENSITIVE TO its diverse citizens. However, more than 50 years ago this same city, because of its segregation, racial hatred, and violence, was called “Bombingham.” What brought about the remarkable changes? Ordinary people who were willing to stand up, speak out, and sacrifice for a moral cause they believed in.

The Power of a Letter

A noted example of this stand-up and speak-out mind-set is Martin Luther King, Jr. His famous “Letter From Birmingham Jail” made an elegant, systematic statement against segregation and racial injustice. Why did King write the letter? Eight White Alabama clergymen, four bishops, three pastors, and one rabbi, had gone on record calling King’s civil rights efforts “unwise and untimely.” They agreed that racial segregation was a problem, but that it should be handled in the courts instead of in the streets.

Fed up with the deplorable state of affairs, supporters of civil rights in Birmingham launched Project “C,” a systematic peaceful plan that stood for “confrontation.”

When King was arrested, he wrote his famous letter while incarcerated in a Birmingham jail.¹ In early May supporters began recruiting children and adults to march against segregation. In retaliation, segregationist Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor, turned high-pressure fire hoses and police dogs on them, creating some of the most indelibly violent images to date. Horrified Americans saw it all on the news. In less than two weeks more than 2,500 protesters filled jails, 2,000 of them children.²

King’s letter throughout the 1960s, and even today, motivates people to do something about social injustice. It came to symbolize one’s efforts, large or small, against any type of oppression.

Letter Writers, Past and Present

King wasn’t the first to challenge the status quo and practice civil disobedience. In his letter he spoke of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar. He referred to Socrates practicing civil disobedience in ancient Greece, American patriots participating in the Boston Tea Party.

A story in Acts could easily be labeled “Letter From a Jerusalem Jail.” Peter had been arrested for performing miracles and for telling the story of Jesus (Acts 5:12-32). When asked why he persisted in disobeying authorities, Peter answered, “We must obey God rather than human beings” (verse 29).

We can still write letters that make a difference.

First, recognize that many areas of injustice, unfairness, and inequality in society still exist. We can be change agents only when we take time to observe conditions around us.

Second, analyze injustices, and ascertain to which biblical or moral principles they stand opposed. Remember King’s perceptive observation: “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.”³

Third, accept responsibility. Pray about the situation and ask counsel from persons of experience.

Finally, spend time thinking what we can do, how we can write our letters. Consider the action, the impact, and the reaction to our actions. If there is a potential sacrifice, then count the cost and make the commitment to pay the price.

Write your own letter.

¹www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.
³Martin Luther King, Strength to Love (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 64.
Perhaps it was the rainy morning that set a somber tone and got me to remembering. But it was also nearing the twentieth anniversary of this friend’s death, and it had been quite a few years since I had last gone looking for his grave. The cemetery was only a little out of my way, and, on a whim, I made that small detour from a journey I had made many times.

As I parked the car and ducked through a gap in the hedge, I noticed the apparatus and preparations for a burial later in the day. The small green shade tent would be more likely to protect mourners from drizzle than sunshine. The mound of dirt waiting to fill the new grave was similarly covered, perhaps to protect from the weather, perhaps to make its final use less obvious.

When the grave I was looking for was new, it had been a sunny winter afternoon, and I knew it was near the fence that fronted the road. Heading in that direction, I stepped carefully along the neat lawn cemetery rows. I reached an access road, then headed left along a row of grave markers that had recently been cleared of grass by a grass trimmer.

Mostly ignoring the names in favor of the dates on this row, the markers assured me that I was in the right area. But the grave I sought wasn’t in this row, and as I neared the fence, I turned back on the next parallel row.

This second row was similarly fruitless, and I was soon working my way back toward the fence on the third row, from which the creeping grass had not recently been trimmed. I had to go slower to make out the names, but somehow, in my mind, I didn’t expect that the grave I was seeking would be overgrown.

But then, because I didn’t expect it, I was suddenly there. Just a small window of the grave marker was visible through the flat, encroaching grass. But there was something familiar about this glimpse, and I quickly identified it as
the spot I was looking for. Without thinking, I began ripping away the grass with my hands. It had been a wetter-than-usual summer, so it might not have been long since it was last cleared, but it seemed to fit with a grief, a sorrow, that was now two decades old. It’s still there, it’s still real, but it’s kind of overgrown.

I had not brought any flowers with me to the grave, but I soon had a small bouquet of torn grass that I placed neatly beside the marker. I brushed the plaque clean with my hands, removing stray pieces of grass and small clods of damp dirt. My hands were stained with red mud for the rest of the day.

More Than Death

We all have these kinds of stories. It is a profound part of what it means to be human. Every religion, philosophy, and culture throughout history has had to grapple with this somber human reality. Every grave we stand beside—whether a gaping hole, a pile of fresh earth, or a cemetery plot almost obscured by passing years—challenges the core of what it means to be human, and everything we believe about what life is or should be. And of course, we all have those moments and experiences in which we contemplate our own death, and consider that, in what seems the “natural” order of things, at some point we will no longer be part of our current lives.

Unsurprisingly, almost every religion, philosophy, and culture brings with it some kind of belief in some form of afterlife. Perhaps the most significant exception to this is the most dogmatic forms of modern atheism. Still, even among some of these philosophers and thinkers, we can sometimes find attempts to argue that their deceased colleagues, friends, and family members do continue to matter in some nonmaterial way—perhaps their genes live on, or their ideas, “spirit,” or memories continue to count in some way.

In the more religious sense, believers have often looked for the next life in the form of heaven, Valhalla, reincarnation, nirvana, or some other stories of the house of the gods or underworld. In some formulations these realms have an influence on the physical and day-to-day worlds; in others the two or more phases of life are quite separate. The Bible reminds us that God “has planted eternity in the human heart” (Eccl. 3:11). And a quick survey of religious and cultural beliefs supports this observation. Faced with the mysteries of death, human beings seem quick to fill the gaps.

Many of these beliefs have two practical results. First, there is often an element of reward or punishment in whatever comes after this life, giving ultimate meaning to right or wrong done in the present life. And second, the beliefs—usually assumed to point to something better after death—ease the process for the dying and the bereaved. We want there to be something—and something good—beyond death.

The Last Enemy

Despite any and all these beliefs—whether ancient mythology or contemporary psychology—we generally do not respond well to death. Something elemental within us recoils from death, whether our own or of those around us. For a time we might be able to convince ourselves with the theory of a life well lived coming to a peaceful sunset, but we still miss our grandmother after her death, and shed genuine tears at her departing. Worse yet are the unexpected, violent, painful, “untimely,” and senseless deaths that are heartbreakingly common in our world and our lives.

Part of our outrage is simply a result of the mystery of death. For all our various beliefs and sciences, death remains the great unknown. But it is even worse than that. As well as an insult to all we hold dear, work for, and value, death is an assault on our most basic human being. Again, the Bible offers an honest summary of our predicament: “the last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26).
Freed from any pretensions about death as a natural part of life, we no longer have to feel guilty about not being able to come to terms with death. In the Bible’s worldview, we are right to be horrified and heartbreakingly affronted by death.

Death had no place in God’s original creation. We were created to live eternally, and nothing could be less natural than our lives coming to an end. In the Bible’s story death and the sin that brought it are tragic aberrations. We do not have to be friends with death; we are at most only unwilling, uncomfortable, and temporary acquaintances. Indeed, we rightly and literally resist death with all our mortal being, even if only weakly and ineffectively.

**A Different, Bigger Hope**

Rather than some kind of individual, one-by-one afterlife, the Bible’s primary hope—and promise—is for the end of death itself. Ultimately, it is not about each of us going “beyond,” hopefully to something better. The Bible’s big story is about a new creation where “there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (Rev. 21:4). Most other afterlife scenarios leave the bulk of suffering humanity to toil away under the burden of death, with its fear, outrages, and tragedies. The Bible points us to a different and much larger hope.

The Bible describes death as a sleep (see Eccl. 9:5, 6; Ps. 146:4; John 11:11-14). Like sleep, it is temporary, and the next thing the sleeper is aware of is an awakening—resurrection, in Bible-speak. Compared with other beliefs and philosophies, there is no time missed for the departed. Those who remain alive can be comforted that their friend or family member is not suffering, struggling further, observing the sorrows on earth, or haunting them.

Like many other traditions, the Bible unashamedly talks about different outcomes after death for the good and the bad, the “righteous” and the “unrigh- teous” (see John 5:29). But this is not so much about merely doing right or wrong—it is about the choice offered to all people throughout history, although sometimes in different ways. Did the person choose to be part of God’s eternal kind of life and accept a place in the plan for the final defeat of death? Or did they choose to stick with the death and devil they knew?

God’s plan is to end death. That’s what Jesus taught, lived for, and died for: “Everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). In rising from the dead, He proved that death can be, and now is defeated.

Our experiences of life are so colonized by death that it can be hard to imagine life without it. But when we reflect on the variety of hopes and beliefs about what happens after death, the biggest possible hope is that death itself will be no more. Ultimately, we don’t tackle death one by one, even if we are victims of it in the meantime. Instead, led by the resurrected Jesus, all of the human race that chooses to be part of this death-defeating project will overcome and destroy death together in a glorious uprising of resurrection and re-creation.

**Back in the Cemetery**

I pause at the grave for just a few minutes before I notice other people arriving, perhaps connected with the burial about to happen across the drive-way. I head to my car, but, looking back over my shoulder, I still see the small pile of grass that now temporarily marks the spot I just left.

As I start the car, a song is just beginning that proves that there are “coincidences” in real life that a writer couldn’t get away with if they were making up the story. “Life is full of light and shadow/ O the joy and O the sorrow.” It’s a song called “Shadows,” by the David Crowder Band, from an album only recently recommended to me by a friend.

“When shadows fall on us/ We will not fear/ We will remember.” I remember the shock and challenge this death was to me 20 years earlier, in my final year of high school. There had been other deaths, but almost always older people, like grandparents. This death was new, shocking, horrible.

There are still questions and hurts, about this and so many other tragedies, disappointments, and sorrows. Yet “When all seems lost/ When we’re thrown and we’re tossed/ We’ll remember the shock and challenge this death was to me 20 years earlier, in my final year of high school. There had been other deaths, but almost always older people, like grandparents. This death was new, shocking, horrible.

There are still questions and hurts, about this and so many other tragedies, disappointments, and sorrows. Yet “When all seems lost/ When we’re thrown and we’re tossed/ We’ll remember the cost/ We’re resting in the shadow of the cross.”

Even 20 years on there’s still more to this story. Death is—and will be—defeated. And when it is, I hope and believe, our friendship will resume.

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NATHAN BROWN IS BOOK EDITOR AT SIGNS PUBLISHING COMPANY, NEAR MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA. HE IS AUTHOR/EDITOR OF 10 BOOKS.
Growing in Christ is a journey. And just as it is with any journey, growing in Christ has a beginning, a destination, and a multitude of steps in between. The recently published book *HeartLift: Experiencing God’s Freedom*, by Jill Morikone, is divided into seven “steps” that take readers on a journey from brokenness to transformation. Beginning with forgiveness, she helps her readers negotiate such roadblocks as fear, sadness, impurity, pride, and great disappointment, until they reach their destination: a state in which the heart is transformed for service.

In between the beginning of the journey and its end, the traveler learns about forgiving others and several elements of life that prevent us from connecting with Christ—elements such as bitterness, jealousy, pride, and impurity. In tracing this journey, Morikone describes the theological processes of salvation, justification, and sanctification as they unfolded in the daily events of her life and in the lives of others.

We meet a woman who shares with her Bible study group about how she struggled to forgive her father, who was in prison for sexually abusing her, and we are introduced to a teenager who had been cutting herself. We stand beside Morikone herself as she reveals her own struggles to overcome fear and bitterness when her mother was diagnosed with a serious illness and when she learned that she and her husband, Greg, were unable to have children. And forgiveness becomes real to us when we learn about the guilt a woman carried because she killed another woman in a car accident.

Morikone also relates biblical events to their modern equivalents. For example, she recounts how the Savior’s grace-filled words spoken to the sinful woman at the well extend to her own inward condition of heart and soul, her own “purity of thought, purity of heart, purity of life,” or lack thereof (p. 71). Furthermore, she helps us to understand today’s problems with jealousy by vividly reminding us of Lucifer, who was once the “most glorious of all the angels, the most talented, the most important” until he became proud of himself and desired to become “like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14).

Perhaps the two most important chapters of *HeartLift* are the last two: chapter 13, “A Heart That’s Transformed”; and chapter 14, “A Heart That Serves.” Chapter 13 points the reader to the Bible “as the most powerful cleansing agent” there is when it comes to purifying one’s soul (p. 119); and chapter 14 discusses the outcome of being transformed—developing a heart that serves. To that end, Morikone writes, “Our Master longs to use us even though we’re ordinary women—just ordinary clay pots—because only then can others truly see the power, the greatness, the goodness of our King. It can never be about us. It always must be about Him” (p. 125).

So it is that *HeartLift* carries its audience through the events of life to the feet of Jesus and His cross, where all people can receive life eternal.
Feature

THE ANTIDOTE TO RELIGIOUS FANATICISM
GOING TO EXTREMES IS NOT THE ANSWER.

BY JOHN GRAZ

A mother was arrested for saying something that was interpreted as being critical of the national religion. Asia Bibi was sentenced to death according to the anti-blasphemy law in her country. A governor and a government minister were assassinated because they defended her and denounced the abusive use of the law.

A Christian pastor, 33 years old, was arrested in 2009 for deciding to become Christian when he was 19 years old. He was sentenced to death according to his country’s law against apostasy. This law states that it is a crime to choose a religion other than the national religion.

Would you like your children to live in a country in which they would be treated as second-class citizens because of their religion? Or in a country in which police raid your church during the service, take parents to the police station, and interrogate their children because they are members of a religious minority?

Would you like to live in a country in which a young mother lost her job, was rejected by her husband, expelled from her house, and separated from her children because she chose to follow Christ as her Savior?

Speaking Out

You may think that such cases are rare; that they are caused only by religious fanatics. True, religious fanatics kill those who are accused of apostasy and blasphemy. They put such pressure...
on their governments that religious freedom does not exist. Sometimes police arrest their victims to protect them. And many of these individuals face the prospect of being assassinated either in prison or once they are freed.

The young pastor sentenced to death for apostasy was released after three years, and the mother accused of blasphemy is still alive. Why were their sentences not executed? Because people of goodwill around the world reacted, sent petitions, demonstrated, and prayed. Under those international pressures, the government commuted their sentences.

The best answer to religious fanaticism and religious persecution is religious freedom, promoted with love and respect for others.

Ellen White wrote, “We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be most earnest prayer, and then let us work in harmony with our prayers.”

As a church we take Ellen White’s counsel seriously. We have been promoting and defending religious freedom from the beginning of our history. Our church president, Ted N. C. Wilson, said that religious freedom is in the DNA of the Adventist Church. He also said that every Adventist should be a champion of religious liberty.

Faces of Fanaticism

Religious fanaticism is spreading around the world. Fanatics in one part of the globe provoke fanatics in other parts of the world. Believers are killed in their places of worship; churches are burned from Indonesia to Nigeria. Thousands of innocent believers lose everything they have—family, houses, schools—and now live as refugees.

Every day my colleagues and I receive news about persecuted believers, oppressive laws, and attacks on places of worship. Religious intolerance is increasing, and those who stand for freedom for all are underrepresented or forced to keep silent.

How is a Christian to respond to religious fanaticism? Jesus and the apostles were clear: They never commanded their disciples to answer violence with violence. They told us to pray for our enemies, for those who persecute us. We are to respond to hatred with love: to preach, proclaim, and live the good news without reservation.

The good news of Jesus can take many forms: helping the poor; promoting integrity and justice; healing the sick; preaching God’s message for this time; and, of course, defending and promoting religious liberty for people everywhere.

Ellen White wrote concerning the times in which we live: “The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands.”

Promoting and defending religious liberty is our mission, and it is a prophetic mission. Why? Because religious freedom is a gift from God.

God created us with the freedom to choose. Religious freedom is a sign of the kingdom of God and the expression of God’s character of love. No one is forced to love Him, no one is forced to worship Him; we are free to decide. Jesus gave His life to save us. He calls us, He wants us to be saved, but the decision is in our hands.

As religious intolerance spreads around the world, our answer is not to imitate the fanatics, but to affirm with conviction the supreme value of religious liberty for all people everywhere. God’s great gift of freedom is not only for Americans, Europeans, Africans, or Asians, but for all—men and women, poor and rich, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, atheist. Religious freedom for all is a gift from God.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a worldwide reputation as protectors of religious liberty. Adventist congregations around the world—everywhere possible—are encouraged to plan a special service at least once a year that begins with a sermon on the theme of religious liberty, continues with the sharing of information, and features prayer for those who are persecuted. Churches are encouraged to invite community officials and have afternoon programs with lectures and concerts to which the public is invited.

Some congregations organize symposia during the week and sponsor festivals of religious freedom on Sabbath. We want all Adventists to do their best to send a strong message to their communities: We love religious freedom. It is a gift from God. We want it to apply to everyone.

WE ARE CALLED TO BE ACTORS, NOT JUST OBSERVERS.

In the matter of religious liberty, we are called to be actors, not just observers. Inspired by God, and following in Jesus’ steps, we affirm that promoting religious freedom is the best antidote to religious fanaticism.


JOHN GRAZ IS DIRECTOR OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DEPARTMENT FOR THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.
She’s Trying To Find Jesus.
Too bad Google™ doesn’t care about putting Biblically accurate resources at the top of her search results.

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Of people who have been attending a church for less than a year, 27% found that church online. And 61% said the church website had been “somewhat to very important” in their decision to attend the church.

-Mark Dever, Dever

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Ambassadors of Love

WHEN I WORKED IN A NURSING HOME IN NEW ENGLAND, A WOMAN FAITHFULLY visited one of the residents every Friday morning. She always brought little gifts: books, food, flowers, a new clothing item—always something the resident enjoyed. “Are you her daughter?” I asked her one day.

“No. I’m a friend of her daughter’s. When Marjorie and her husband had to move out of state for three years because of his job, she asked me to visit her mother and do for her what she could no longer do herself. I mend her mother’s clothes; make sure she has what she needs; and of course, try to do a little something extra for her—as if she were my own mother. Marjorie provides amply, and I always tell her mother that the gifts are from her loving daughter.”

What a blessed friend! Rather than viewing Marjorie’s request as a burden, she saw it as an opportunity to be an ambassador of love on her friend’s behalf. It helped mother and daughter accept their separation and strengthened the bond between them.

I like to think this is the kind of ministry that Christ asks of each of us. I’ve always felt challenged, intimidated, and inadequate in the face of what is often referred to as the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19, 20.

Have you ever thought about what the Great Commission really means? Is it meant only for the trained and talented few who scatter to all parts of the world to teach, preach, and baptize? What about the priesthood of all believers? Is not the Lord’s commission meant for them, also—for homemakers, office clerks, farmers, students? Are we not all commissioned to His service when we call ourselves Christians?

Words—powerful and necessary as they are—have no strength for good without the greater power of love. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, our efforts, our skills, even our utmost sacrifices, are useless and without value if devoid of love.

Marjorie’s friend would have been amazed if someone watching her loving ministry had said something to her such as: “Your sermon this morning really moved and inspired me.”

“What sermon?” she might have asked. “I didn’t say anything.”

“Oh, but you did. I heard you say to your friend’s mother: ‘I brought you roses from the garden, and I made your favorite cookies.’ You kissed her cheek, hugged her shoulders, and listened to her stories. You laughed with her and felt sad with her. Before you left, you said, ‘There’s a little rip in the sleeve of your blouse. Let me help you put on another one, and I’ll take that one home and mend it.’”

“But,” she would have argued, “that’s not a sermon. That’s just standing in for her daughter, doing what she would do if she were here.”

That woman certainly inspired me. I don’t know if she ever realized that her life really was a powerful message. In most cases we don’t think of our day-to-day lives as sermons for or against the gospel of Christ, but if it is His love working in us, there will be an eloquence that emerges that words alone can never convey.

“As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:9-12, NKJV).*

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