



**Monte Sahlin:  
Mission in Metropolis**

**Shining in  
the Silicon**



**No Junk  
Evangelism**



# Adventist *Today*

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conferences should  
be abolished**

**By Pastor Fredrick A. Russell**  
Miracle Temple Adventist Church,  
Baltimore, Maryland



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## Your Questions

Andy Nash

*We're usually the ones asking the questions. It's only fair that we answer your questions too.*

### Why is the new website paid only?

The website is a bonus feature for those who subscribe to *Adventist Today* magazine. You can probably understand our dilemma—and the dilemma of many publications right now. When the website was free, many people were filling up with free content (mostly news and news feeds)—and not seeing the magazine material and special features that we've put the most time into. Further, they were judging *Adventist Today* only by the free stuff they saw on the site.

In this new model, everything is on one tier. Everyone pays for our product, rather than some people subsidizing the rest. This puts pressure on us to provide quality content, but that's the kind of pressure we want. We're up substantially in subscriptions this year, and we believe this will continue the momentum.

### Do you offer an online-only subscription?

Yes. We're now offering an \$8.00/year online-only subscription, which gives full access to the website, including the current issue (and back issues) of *Adventist Today* magazine. We know this option will be welcomed by those outside of North America, those on tight budgets, and those who prefer to read online.

Most readers, however, prefer to read the magazine on their couch, beanbag, hammock, or bicycle, so the print version of *Adventist Today* magazine is offered at \$29.50/year and \$50.00/two years. First-time subscribers can order the magazine at a special rate of \$19.50 for their first year.

### Hey, why do first-timers get a price break?

We like them more. No, not really. It's a marketing decision. We think people who try *Adventist Today* will want to stick around.

**Why are your donors (listed to the left) called "advisors"? Does their donation mean that they advise and influence what goes into *Adventist Today*?**

It's a great question and one that I asked when I became editor in January. I was concerned that the donors influenced the content decisions. To my relief, that's not the case at all. Instead, these are people who believe so strongly in an independent press that they donate without conditions. These people make the free press of *Adventist Today* possible. Anyone who gives \$45/month or more is listed on page 2 as our small way of acknowledging their support.

To be honest, we need to grow these lists. If we were a far-right or far-left publication, it would be easier to rally a donor base. But as a publication trying to practice fair-minded journalism and bring people together, we need the support of people who believe we're doing the right thing. (Just email [atoday@atoday](mailto:atoday@atoday) to join a category of supporters.)

### Why should I donate to *Adventist Today* when I could be helping to build churches and feed the hungry?

I completely understand this sentiment. You *should* give to church and humanitarian ministries. But don't underestimate the power of a free press and the difference it can make.

Think of the impact of good responsible journalism on society at large. The late American journalist Tim Russert was the best of the best: asking hard questions not out of disdain for his country but out of genuine respect and concern. He pushed both liberals and conservatives so that the clearest truths—and the best ideas—would emerge.

The same thing can happen in the church. Our very scriptures themselves, from the prophets to the gospels to the epistles, are full of candor—reporting not only the high points but the challenges and failures as well. A responsible church media can help keep people and organizations on the up and up. Our next cover story, for example, will look at remuneration trends in the church and healthcare industry.

### Who is Adventist Man?

I'm not telling, and it's not me. But email your guesses to [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com) and we'll run the results—and maybe even a clue!—in our next issue.

**Don't underestimate the power of a free press and the difference it can make.**





## Ranking the Fundamentals

What a great mag! Articles are fresh dealing with real issues, not a rehash of old ideas.

But I have a question about R. Lynn Sauls's "Ranking the 28 Fundamental Beliefs" (May-June). Isn't Jesus the real "centerfold" of Scripture? The concepts (fundamentals) are Christocentric, aren't they? Wasn't this how W.W. Prescott presented his evangelistic series in Australia that Ellen White enthusiastically raved about?

To break up Jesus' teaching into "bullet points" separated from him is somewhat like taking an anatomy book to bed on your honeymoon.

**SHANE DRESEN**  
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Bearing in mind the adage "No list is worth anything unless it's prioritized," I appreciate Lynn Sauls's effort in ranking the Adventist Church's 28 fundamental beliefs. However, I think he could have benefited from the help Scripture affords, particularly when he places "Christian Behavior" dead last in significance, in an orbit all its own.

Micah says, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?"

Isaiah in chapter one quotes God: "Even when you make many prayers,

I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."

When asked in Luke 10, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus agrees with the Deuteronomy text, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

In addition, when describing in Matthew 25 the last judgment, Jesus summarizes, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Paul spends entire chapters on Christian behavior, including Romans 12 and the summary statement, "He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8).

James writes, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1: 27).

I could go on. Apparently, the Bible holds believer behavior in extremely high regard. Jesus himself rarely responds to questions of ultimacy with a discussion on, for example, Marriage and the Family, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, The Millennium and the End of Sin, or The Gift of Prophecy.

Perhaps we should acknowledge that one primary reason people today turn from God is Christian Behavior, and for this reason alone God infuses it with great import.

And while we're at it, let's change the existing Christian Behavior fundamental to focus more on what we should do (starting with Micah's admonition)

instead of what we should avoid.

Anyone for a rewrite?

**CHRIS BLAKE**  
Lincoln, Nebraska

I really liked R.Lynn Sauls's article but was disappointed by his parting words: "For lack of space, I have not explained why I placed each belief where I did."

Wah!? That's like filling up on breadsticks and salad and not leaving room for the portobello ravioli! Why not take advantage of the hollow leg that is the Internet and post Sauls's explanation in an online feature? Now that would make for a satisfying intellectual meal (and drive traffic to your website).

**DAVID HAMSTRA**  
Berrien Springs, Michigan

## Generational Loyalty

In his editorial, "The Problem With Generational Loyalty" (May-June), Andy Nash describes how his college students strongly prefer their own time for living over that of their parents, grandparents, or a hypothetical future.

It is no surprise that each generation prefers their own. Most of us are more comfortable with what we understand, and we are more likely to understand what we have personally experienced.

Past generations are known, but not personally experienced. We cannot understand the future; we can only predict it. Preferring a future generation is fraught with uncertainties, including the possibility of another really big war. So we logically favor our best-known entity, our own generation—unless it is very bad.

All of this begs the question: Why do we continue to have children when we are convinced that they will experience a world worse than we know?

**JIM MCNEILL**  
Pasco, Washington

## Adventists and Lawsuits

I am quite impressed with the new *Adventist Today*. Probably the best word to describe the magazine is “relevant.” You seem to discuss issues that are probably a little more relevant to Adventists than other publications.

I found Jim Coffin’s “The Adventist Church and Lawsuits” (May-June) very stimulating. In particular, this is a very relevant topic since I have just been thinking about the idea of having some type of judicial or mediation service within the church. As a pastor, I see conflict that is far too often settled in secular courts, giving God and church a black eye.

The biggest challenge I see with the magazine is this “Adventist Man” feature. While I’m all for humor, this column seems to border on irreverence. I don’t really see the point in this particular feature.

**SHAWN BRACE**  
Warner, New Hampshire

James Coffin’s article “The Adventist Church and Lawsuits” (May-June) could have been a useful contribution to the litigation problem that strains the finances and emotions of the church.

Instead, Coffin’s analysis turns on a naïve and highly misleading dichotomy between “the way of lawyers” and “the way of Jesus.” According to Coffin’s mythology, lawyers intervene to prevent pristine “truths” from being told and pure justice from being achieved. This

hackneyed, and frankly offensive, anti-lawyer trope helps create the straw-man villain that Coffin must have to set up his contrast with an allegedly better way, the law of Jesus. This method, by way of alleged contrast, would have disputants engage in a resolution according to lofty but ill-defined standards drawn from Jesus’ teachings.

It is anachronistic to deal with contemporary social issues in terms of “what Jesus would have done.” Of course we follow Jesus’ teachings of love. But that is hardly the issue in legal disputes.

Coffin’s difficulty is twofold. First, he doesn’t recognize that lawsuits are built on intractably different perceptions of the truth of what occurred, or what justice would even mean in the context of so highly disputed a set of circumstances. How would Jesus’ teachings have any meaningful bearing on resolving “he said/she said” disputes, whether or to what extent there was an injury, or the “value” of an injury relative to the utterly unpredictable results of jury deliberations?

Second, Coffin divides the world into pure categories of right and wrong, and if the lawyers would just get of the way, peace and tranquility would reign upon the earth. I’ve spent nearly 19 years litigating, and I have never encountered Coffin’s make-believe world. Plaintiffs are frequently over-reachers, gold-diggers who see the church as a “deep pocket.” And sometimes they’re

just outright frauds. None of these all-too-frequent realities appear in Coffin’s article. Of course injured people should be compensated. But the church can’t open the doors of the treasury and unthinkingly distribute funds. The church is not only legitimate in fighting claims, but is duty-bound to do so to protect the treasury for the benefit of all church members. This is the expertise of lawyers, judges, and claims adjusters, not pulp-pounding preachers.

Perhaps the church now seems like “just another litigant.” But lawyers alone didn’t put us there. This is a litigious society in which plaintiffs, including many church members, want \$100,000 for a \$5,000 injury and refuse to accept a reasonable settlement until both sides have wasted time and effort. That’s modern litigation, inside and outside the church. It is not a “fault” of lawyers or the church. It is simply the result of a highly diverse society pursuing its disputes according to the rules of the litigation game. If the church plays hardball and wins a few against the hordes of undeserving plaintiffs, it’s hard to see how this would be against “Jesus’ way.”

**KARL W. KIME**  
Valencia, California

## LETTERS POLICY

*Adventist Today* welcomes your letters. Short, timely letters have the best chance at publication. Send to [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com) or to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Please include full name and location.

## The People Behind Atoday.com

The following people made the new *Adventist Today* website happen. As with all *Adventist Today* staff, these people have other jobs. You can drop them a note of appreciation at [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com).



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## New Adventist Today Website Goes Live

All paid subscribers get full access to site.

Launched May 19, the new *Adventist Today* website has a fresh design and many new content additions: online-only feature articles, music and film reviews, exclusive interviews, regular Adventist news updates, blogs, and more.

All paid subscribers to *Adventist Today* magazine get full access to the website. (See “Getting Access” sidebar.)

### Blogger Lineup

The blog section allows readers to interact with *Adventist Today* bloggers, who represent a wide range of Adventist perspectives.

**DAVID PERSON** is an editorial writer and columnist at *The Huntsville Times*; the host of



“WEUP Talk,” a daily call-in talk show on WEUP-AM; and an

occasional opinion writer for *USA Today*. David graduated from Oakwood University, where he majored in communication and minored in theology. David’s blog addresses current events and social issues from

a Christian perspective, including looking at the two greatest commandments and social-justice applications of our faith.

**HEATHER QUINTANA** has a master of divinity degree from Andrews University and a bachelor’s in English from Southwestern Adventist University. She has previously



worked as a chaplain and an assistant radio producer and currently

writes for *Kids’ Ministry Ideas* and *Lead*. Heather blogs for *Adventist Today* on trends in pop culture.

**ALEX BRYAN** is pastoral director of mission and ministry at Collegedale Church on the campus of Southern Adventist University. Alex is currently in the midst of a doctor of



ministry program at George Fox University, where he is studying

“Leadership in the Emerging Culture.” Alex blogs on the

missional church, emerging cultures, and discipleship from a postmodern perspective.

**SHAYNA BAILEY**, 25, has become a leading young adult voice for Christian dating and relationships in several venues,



including print magazines, blogs, and Christian seminars—

which she frequently hosts. Shayna just co-authored her first book, *The GODencounters Devotional*, which will be released in the fall. She holds a B.A. in psychology from Johns Hopkins University and will start medical school in 2009.

**ERVIN TAYLOR**, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, and



executive publisher of *Adventist Today*. Dr. Taylor blogs on the creation/

evolution divide, science and religion, ethics, and Adventist history/theology.

**CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN**, a top-selling author and leading conservative voice, has written 20 books and hundreds of magazine articles. He is editor of the *Adult Bible Study Guide* and also edited *Liberty* and *Shabbat Shalom*. Clifford blogs on current issues and traditional Adventist teachings—and will take reader questions.

“This should be fun,” says the always outspoken and gregarious Goldstein.



“My own soapbox, without the kind of editorial restraints

one finds when writing for the denomination. Watch out all of you libbies!”



## Getting Access

Only paid subscribers (like you) to *Adventist Today* magazine get full access to the new website, atoday.com. Here’s what to do.

Go to [www.atoday.com](http://www.atoday.com). Set up an account by clicking “Sign In” and then “Create New Account.” (You can choose any username you like. You can also create a permanent password.) Once you’ve set up an account, email your username to [linda@atoday.com](mailto:linda@atoday.com). Linda will upgrade your account to “premium” status.

Enjoy the site!





# The Good News Tour

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## Angels Distribute Radios to Villagers?

Adventist World Radio president says he believes it really happened.

By Noreen Malcolm

Call it a miracle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Angels reportedly visited villagers in a *restricted* area, distributed radios to the people, and taught them how to tune into the Adventist World Radio programs, according to information obtained from an article written by the Adventist World Radio (AWR) president, Benjamin Schoun.

Said the report, “some strangers whom [the village chief] did not know had come to their village. These strangers were tall and had an aura of bright light about them. These bright beings gave the chief in each village a radio. They showed the chiefs how to use the radio and then carefully showed them how to tune the radio to hear the Adventist World Radio programs. They told them the frequency and the time of the programs. After a few words of encouragement, these strangers suddenly disappeared and the village people never saw them again. ... [The

person who reported this information] said that these village people are now very devout believers. They keep the Sabbath and worship while listening to the radio.”

In an interview with *Adventist Today*, Schoun said he is convinced about the credibility of the story because no missionary has had the opportunity to visit the area. “It was a closed area,” Schoun said. “The government of that country had sealed it off and would not even let citizens of their own country into this area without a special permit.”

When two Christian believers from a nearby area in the same country decided to visit in the past, their trip was unsuccessful. “They got past one checkpoint,” Schoun said, “but by the time they got to the second checkpoint, they had been caught. One of them was shot dead on the spot, and the other one somehow escaped into the jungle and was eventually able to escape and get

back safely. ... We know that’s simply an illustration of how serious that government is about keeping people out of that restricted area. And so I know that none of the people who knew anything about AWR would have been able to go up there into this area.”

Soon afterward, some members of the AWR team received a surprising report from a non-missionary visitor who visited the restricted area. “I didn’t talk to that person directly,” said Schoun. “Our producer was the one who talked to him by cell phone eventually and heard the story from him. But apparently he was up in this restricted area visiting these villages. And I don’t know whether it was because he had some business or something, but when he came back out of that area to another part of the country, he ran into some folks who were listeners and some of our internal leadership team from that country and told them the story. Then it was passed along to our producer who does the programs, and they talked by phone. And the report came back to me.”

According to the visitor’s report, someone described as a “tall person with a kind of aura of light” distributed radios to people in the area—a place where Christian missionaries are prohibited, said Schoun. Then the person instructed the people how to use radio and access AWR broadcast programs.

A few months later, Schoun received confirmation that this event really



**EVERY TONGUE:** Listeners such as these in Laos will soon be able to hear the gospel message in their own language. Adventist World Radio is currently working with the Southeast Union Mission and the Thailand Mission to build a studio in Thailand, where programs will be produced in Thai, Lao, and Hmong.





**LOCAL HELP:** Adventist World Radio provides training to new producers eager to begin radio work in their local area. In Uganda, producers are creating programs in Moru, Bari, Dinka, English, Zande, Acholi, and Juba Arabic. (Right) Benjamin Schoun, president of Adventist World Radio

took place. “Since then, just a couple of months ago,” said Schoun, “I was in a nearby area and I happened to meet a person from that country who is from the general area. ... He confirmed to me not only the story, but has since told me that they now have reason to believe that there are more than six villages who had that same kind of experience. So the longer we go, it seems the more support and veracity is being developed for the story rather than questions.”

Adventist World Radio receives many reports of miracles. “We also have some other stories from that area that have been passed out,” Schoun said. “I haven’t even written those up because I’m very anxious to report credible stories. And this one seems credible enough to report on. So that’s the one that I chose. The other ones may be very true as well, but I just haven’t gotten enough verification. ... We’re pretty certain that at least the sequence of events took place. Now again, whether this person who came to those villages was an angel or somebody else, we don’t know.

“[But] the fact that the person suddenly seemed to disappear...as they [the villagers] were gathered around...and they ran around the area...and couldn’t seem to find the person anywhere and they never seemed to find the person again made the village people themselves believe that some kind of divine event

had taken place. So they interpreted it as an angel or some divine being.”

Schoun has declined to reveal to *Adventist Today* where this area is located. “The reason I have not mentioned the location,” explained Schoun, “is because anything that goes into print or on the media is subject to being used by that government for interrogation purposes and persecution. And that has happened before. One of our listeners was brought in to the security police officers for interrogation. The guy was holding in his hand one of the publications of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that was saying something about their country and was interrogating the fellow about what was said. ... So we just cannot afford to have that kind of thing in print for the sake of the people involved, because it just makes life harder for them.”

As of January 2008, the top 10 countries in which Christians are subjected to persecution—starting with the first one on the list—are North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Maldives, Bhutan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Laos, Uzbekistan, and China, according to information obtained from the website of Open Doors USA, an organization that caters to the needs of persecuted Christians worldwide.

“I wish more of our people had a broader awareness of things around the world. I think typically Americans,

and Westerners in general, are largely focused on their own areas. And they don’t even know about other countries or what is happening. The only way we can be of help is to intentionally learn [and] become a little bit more aware of the world perspective. ... one important thing is to direct more of our resources to the unevangelized part of the world.”

Schoun referenced the book *World Christian Trends* and said that one of its editors, David Barrett, “points out some startling statistics. He points out that of all the tithes and offerings that Christians give, 99.9 percent of all Christian financial resources are spent on themselves. Another 0.09 percent—that’s 9 hundredths of 1 percent—are spent on a category called the *evangelized non-Christian world* (those are people who have had a chance to hear the gospel, but the majority are still non-Christians or of some other type of religion). ... The third category [is] the unevangelized parts of the world. These are the places where people have essentially not had a chance to hear the gospel, either because of these restrictions or the fact that there aren’t resources. ... [Barrett] said that in the [unevangelized Christian] category, of all the financial resources that Christians generate, only 0.01 percent (or one 100<sup>th</sup> of 1 percent) of the money is used for the unevangelized parts of the world.”

So where do we go from here? Schoun said: “If Christians are serious about fulfilling the gospel’s commission, which says that the gospel needs to go to every nation in all the world—and Revelation 14:6, 7 says to every nation, tongue and people—then we must become more serious by investing a few more resources in these [unevangelized] areas.”

THE ADVENTIST

“Pec



C H U R C H ' S

# uliar Institution”

BY FREDRICK A. RUSSELL

THE UNITED STATES IS INARGUABLY THE MOST POWERFUL AND WONDERFULLY IDEALISTIC COUNTRY EVER TO GRACE THE EARTH. THE VALUES THIS COUNTRY WAS FOUNDED UPON SET IT APART AS WITHOUT PEER IN THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONS. AND YET, WITH ALL OF ITS POWER AND IDEALISM, AMERICA HAS FROM ITS INCEPTION STRUGGLED WITH CERTAIN CONTRADICTIONS; DECLARATION AND PRACTICE HAVE NOT ALWAYS ALIGNED.

The framers of the Constitution seemed to anticipate the tension that could exist between declaration and practice when they inserted, as an overarching aim, the desire to “form a more perfect union.” To be sure, that “more perfect union” has always been, and continues to be, a work in progress.

This is especially so when it comes to the thorny issue of race in America. As a country we’ve never found a collective “comfort zone” in which to talk about this sensitive subject and its historical impact that reaches into the very present.

The institution of slavery is clearly the major point of departure by which the entire subject of race (especially between blacks and whites) starts from in this country. However, that departure point can itself be a problem. Blacks feel that white America has failed at adequately acknowledging the continual and ongoing impact of that terrible period in U.S. history, and whites, for the most part, are tired of talking about it in hopes that it will just go away. “Get over it!” is the call from some in white America.

**Why race-based conferences should be abolished.**

## **America’s Peculiar Institution**

America has always been to a degree conflicted over slavery, even while it was going on. Thus, those who lived during that era had to find a way to soften slavery’s impact on the country’s psyche, notwithstanding the fact that there were laws in place that affirmed America’s version of “man’s inhumanity to man.”

Terminology became the preferred weapon of choice. And so Confederate legislators, in particular, begin to describe slavery euphemistically as “(Our) *peculiar institution*.” Some saw this expression as a way of glossing over the apparent contradiction between legalized slavery and the statement in the Declaration of Independence that “*all men are created equal*.” In other words, it was a coy and skillful way of legitimizing an inconsistency between what America believed about itself and what it practiced.

## **Adventism’s Peculiar Institution**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America has its own “peculiar institution” that finds its genesis in the historical issue of race in America. What we *believe about ourselves* and what we *practice* are inconsistent. This is played out most clearly in the official validation of a race-based organizational structure that continues to exist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The irony is that even as the wider, secular culture has moved to dismantle any and all organizational structures that reflected

government-sanctioned racial division in American history, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has “doubled down” on keeping a racially segregated infrastructure in place. Many Adventists in America are not even aware that this structural condition exists—and certainly not aware of how it came about that the vast majority of the 58 conferences in the North American Division are racially segregated at their core.

## The History

The Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced a significant season of growth moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as blacks began to join the church. This was a challenging period, as the church ministered in an environment that was inundated with racism and a xenophobic hatred of blacks in the wider white culture. The Adventist denomination early on struggled as to the “place” this emerging black membership would have.

Unfortunately, some in the church took on the attitudes of the wider culture when it came to how black members were treated. Some Adventist leaders exhibited racist attitudes that matched, and in some extreme cases exceeded, the racism perpetuated against blacks in greater America. The details of this history can be secured elsewhere in books by Adventist authors who have written poignantly and powerfully on this subject.

Suffice it to say that around 1928 and into the early 1930s, blacks (especially black pastors) had become frustrated with how they and their people were being treated. Jacob Justiss in his historical work, *Angels of Ebony*, wrote:

“Black ministers felt that the only way to improve the work among Negroes of the country was to organize colored conferences, whereby the colored people may handle their own money, employ their own workers and so develop administrative ability in all cultural lines of work ... to organize Negro conferences that would function in exactly the same relation to the General Conference as *white* conferences.”

## The Beginning of Regional Conferences

At the General Conference's Spring Council held April 8-19, 1944, in Chicago, the following resolution was passed:

“WHEREAS, The present development of the work among the colored people in North America has resulted, under the signal blessing of God, in the establishment of some 233 churches with some 17,000 members; and WHEREAS, It appears that a different plan of organization for our colored membership would bring further great advance in soul-winning endeavours; therefore WE RECOMMEND, That in unions where the colored constituency is considered by the union conference committee to be sufficiently large, and where the financial income and territory warrant, colored conferences be organized.”

Again, all of this was taking place against a backdrop of overt racism and unfairness being carried out by some white leaders and members against their black brothers and sisters.

Even when it came to camp meeting convocations, blacks were treated badly during those times of presumed heightened spiritual focus, being compelled to sit in the very back of the tent auditoriums used for camp meeting services and even forced into segregated, substandard living arrangements at these “sacred gatherings” of God's people. Not surprisingly, this caliber of treatment from their “brethren” was becoming too much for Negro members to endure.

The General Conference around 1928 appointed a special commission composed of eleven whites and five blacks to consider the issue of establishing “colored” conferences. The commission itself engendered controversy after key black leaders accused the white members of the committee of meeting separately and expecting black leaders to “rubber stamp” decisions already made in the secretive conclaves. This move to consider colored conferences eventually went nowhere. But by 1944, there was fresh momentum, driven in part by racial insensitivities at the highest levels of church leadership.

A group of black laity organized themselves into a group called the *National Association for the Advancement of World-wide Work Among Colored Seventh-day Adventists* on Oct. 16, 1943. The group met at least twice with the General Conference president, Elder J.L. McElhaney, to discuss and request an end to racial discrimination in Adventist institutions, which was widespread. The group submitted a bold petition entitled *Shall The Four Freedoms Function Among Seventh-day Adventists?* The title was a direct reference to the State of the Union address by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Jan. 6, 1941.

The petition outlined in graphic fashion the racial injustices and “un-Christ-like” behavior that black members, and especially black workers, were encountering.

Their “thesis” statement was stark and stunning given the era: “*The present policy of the white Adventists in responsible positions will not stand the acid test of the Judgment.*”

While the many indignities had become extremely problematic and insulting to Negro members and leaders, the “tipping point” for moving with expedition toward colored conferences was the refusal of service to an Adventist layperson, Lucy Byard, a light-skinned black woman who was admitted to the Washington Adventist Sanitarium based on her looks. On discovering that she was black, hospital personnel placed her in a drafty hallway until another hospital could be found for her. She was ultimately taken to the Freedman's Hospital, where she soon died of pneumonia.

## Segregated Conferences

When the General Conference convened the Spring Council

*continued on page 14*



## When Oakwood and Southern Got Together

Two Adventist university presidents, Delbert Baker of Oakwood University and Gordon Bietz of Southern Adventist University, have been encouraging more interaction between the two schools through a program called DEEPER. Oakwood, a historically black college in Huntsville, Ala., is 120 miles southwest of Southern, whose student body is primarily white. Recently the journalism and communication faculty from both schools got together for an afternoon of dialogue. Independent of each other, Rachel Williams of Oakwood and Andy Nash of Southern each wrote a brief reflection on the experience.

### Bridging the Divide

By Rachel Williams

Riding along in an SUV toward Southern Adventist University along with five other Oakwood University communication department professors, I didn't feel particularly excited. I had never been to Southern and frankly didn't feel a need to go. Bottom line: I really didn't have a burning desire to spend the day with strangers.

But that was on the way up to Southern. On the way back, I felt completely different.

As the miles sped by between us and new friends that we were leaving behind, I realized the "strangers" I had not been eager to meet had been people on the other side of an invisible divide that has historically maintained itself in black and white contrasts.

But the visit had bridged the divide and forged new connections.

Riding along, I couldn't help but ponder what had done it. It wasn't any one thing—though a delightful reunion between two people who realized they had been academy buds didn't hurt. Neither did spending the time and sharing a meal. But it was more the sitting down together and opening up about individual interests and challenges, talking and asking questions, and challenging the silences that have hung for decades over institutionally supported racial divisions in Adventism. It was the imagining and planning that seemed to spontaneously erupt as we discovered, in the words of a famous senator who may become our next president, that "what unites us is greater than that which divides us." We were not a white school and a black school but rather two schools with one common goal of educating Adventist youth who, despite history, are more similar than different. And so we found ourselves dreaming of ways to work together and planning how to forge more connections—among ourselves and between ourselves and each other's students.

In the end it was actually hard to leave. Strangers had met, but now friends didn't want to part.

The SUV I was riding in turned off the highway and made its final stretch toward home, and it occurred to me that something more than making friends and establishing connections had happened: that old invisible divide had not only been bridged, it was being narrowed. Stepping out of the vehicle onto Oakwood's campus, I realized that that could only mean one thing: the divide was finally being transformed from invisible to nonexistent.

Rachel Williams is an assistant professor of communication at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Ala.



### Yes, We Can, Too

By Andy Nash

Spending a laugh-out-loud afternoon recently with our journalism and communication colleagues from Oakwood University reminded me of three kinds of black-white relations:

1. The kind where all you see is black and white. ("Honey, roll up your window.")
2. The kind where you pretend not to see black and white. ("What? You're black? I didn't even notice you were black. How about that!")
3. The kind where you see everything—black and white included. ("I have a dream that one day down in Alabama . . .")

The third kind is way better.

We talked about a lot in our time together: the future of the media, the latest technology, how to spice up speech classes.

We also talked about being black teachers and white teachers, and being Adventist, and getting together up and down US-72 a little more often.

We wondered about doing a teacher exchange, maybe even a mass teacher exchange where one morning Oakwood and Southern students would come to their communication classes and discover a totally white—and totally black—faculty, respectively. We think this would be a hoot.

Oakwood's Rachel Williams talked about even bigger ideas, such as co-hosting a forum this fall with Barack Obama. Perhaps for balance, and given the candidates' expressed desire for joint appearances, both could come.

But the bigger issue is this: If Barack can get Americans of all backgrounds chanting, "Yes, we can!", Adventist Christians 120 miles apart ought to be able to show how it's done.

At the end of our meeting we joined hands and prayed together. It later dawned on me: the children Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of—the little black boys and black girls joining hands with little white boys and white girls. We were those children. We've grown up.

Andy Nash is an associate professor of journalism and communication at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tenn., and editor of *Adventist Today*.



REUNION: Southern journalism and communication office manager, Janita Herod, hugs Oakwood communication professor Kyna Hinson. Herod and Hinson attended Mt. Pisgah Academy together in the early 1970s and hadn't seen each other since.

meetings in Chicago in April of 1944, a resolution was passed, after significant debate, giving the go-ahead to establish black conferences. From 1945 to 1947, seven black conferences were established, with two others created some years later.

It is significant to note that with the establishment of black (regional) conferences, the vast majority of the conferences in North America were still white (state) conferences. In other words, all conferences in the country were now race-based at their core.

At the time that blacks held membership in the state conferences, the state conferences were white in their leadership, practice, actions, and policies. Having blacks on the membership rosters did not alter that—thus the problem.

Some whites and blacks in recent years have wondered “why the need for black conferences?” without acknowledging the existence of white conferences. To even have the discussion, there must be acknowledgment that we have both. A one-sided discussion in which only the dismantling of black conferences is at issue would be insulting, given the fact that white conferences do exist.

The most obvious way that race-based conferences can be defined is that they are dominantly led and directed by one racial group, that the vast majority of churches reflect that makeup, and that the focus of their mission is toward their group. A few conferences have, over time, experienced sizable demographic shifts in their membership base—and, to a lesser extent, in their leadership. But they are the exception and not the rule.

Notwithstanding, a very valid argument can be made that if the present arrangement of black and white conferences is working, why change it?

The fact is that the present arrangement *does work* to a degree, and many conferences are making an impact in their territory. But when we “drill down” a bit deeper, it may not be so workable when it comes to public perception, witness, economics, and efficient organizational structure. Unless we challenge ourselves to make it better, we will settle for the Adventist version of “our peculiar institution.”

### A Defining Moment—The Change

If there ever comes a “defining moment” when bold and courageous denominational leaders “step up” and declare that we can do better, there are a few things to consider.

First, it’s going to take a high level of intestinal fortitude, because any change will be gut-wrenching at first, and it’s easier to maintain the status quo. Conferences will need to act against their self-interest for the good of the whole. More specifically, the entire organizational structure and infrastructure in North America will need to change and give way to a new, more efficient structure.

The old idea of disbanding a few conferences and merging them into other conferences will not work. Even if the race question were taken out as a factor, we would still have an inefficient system. We have too much duplication.

So I gently propose that NAD conferences, specifically in the United States, be reorganized into a series of regional units across the country, but not as large as most union territories presently cover. These regional units would be responsible for all “work” in their assigned territory.

For instance, the Washington/Baltimore metropolitan area (northern Virginia, Washington D.C., and Maryland) would be such a regional unit. At present, three conferences cover this particular metropolitan area—with three separate school systems, three separate systems of governance...three of everything! It’s an inefficient, cost-prohibitive way to do the business of the church, even if there were no race issue.

This kind of painful inefficiency is duplicated across the United States. In less-populated regions, the church attempts to maintain conference structures where it would be more advantageous to go to a broader regional unit. Obviously a move to consider this more efficient way would need to include a fresh look at union conference organizational units, and what role, if any, this level of organizational structure would play.

### Net Effect

The net effect of this organizational change is that we would organize around *mission* and not *race*. But there is one other thing that would need to be considered: Who would lead these regional units?

Some have suggested that the West Coast model, where there are no black conferences, is the best way to go. Not so. The West Coast model has inherent flaws, one of which is that the white membership is “mainstreamed” and others are treated as “special-interest groups” to be tolerated. And even though a trickling of blacks, Hispanics, and Asians are being given opportunities to lead—in California in particular—there still exists a mentality that is more comfortable when whites are at the helm. It’s this mentality that has to be challenged and changed.

So as we move forward, it will require that leadership in these proposed regional units be intentionally diversified with Spirit-filled leaders who have integrity, competency, good people skills, and bold, visionary leadership. Selecting leaders who are merely “safe” individuals, but who lack the necessary skills to lead, will negatively impact whatever the organizational structure.

### Now, More Than Ever

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is at a crossroads on many fronts. And now, more than ever, all assumptions and organizational practices need to be evaluated. This is the moment to reposition ourselves in “pulling out all stops” for the last great push to do our part in warning this world that “it’s almost over.” The petty stuff that separates us has to be deleted!

The time is now!

*Fredrick A. Russell is senior pastor of the Miracle Temple Seventh-day Adventist Church in Baltimore, Maryland.*



# A TREASURE

for All Ages



## Red Books

Our Search for Ellen White

When Ellen White spoke,  
people listened! They still  
do. But times have changed.

*Red Books: Our Search for Ellen White* is a diligently researched, professionally filmed, artistically presented, 75-minute dramatic report on what Adventists young and old are asking themselves as they search for a place for Ellen White in their lives.

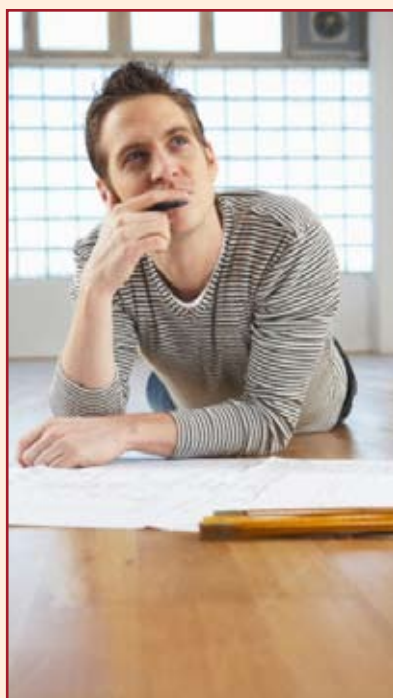
The DVD (released in March) is now available from *Adventist Today* for the introductory price of \$19.95, plus postage and handling. What a wonderful addition to any Adventist library. Regardless of your personal views on Ellen White, this is a drama that will bring tears to your eyes as you reflect on the deep and vital issues Adventists confront as they relate to the writings of their founder.



“Red Books is, without a doubt, a seminal moment in the history of Seventh-Day Adventism.”

Deepthi Welaratna, KQED Public Broadcasting for Northern California

## *New Thoughts from a New Generation*



*Red Books: Our Search for Ellen White* presents views from each era of Adventism, from all generational points of view—without condemnation, without mockery or sarcasm.

There's humor yes—humor youthful ears will find credible in an otherwise serious and undoubtedly permanent new entry in the annals of Adventist dramatic literature.

Ellen White herself is presented as a youthful, committed Christian, determined to better represent her Savior. The actors (who co-wrote the script, drawing thoughts from some 200 interviews they conducted with real-life Adventist youth and thought leaders on the subject of Ellen White) are all current or recent students and faculty at Pacific Union College. While occasionally bold in its use of the vernacular, the lines are thoughtful and cohesive in presenting questions—and thoughtful responses—to the question, “Who is Ellen White?”

Parents and grandparents can share this DVD program with their families, assured that it will hold their attention and speak to their children's minds and hearts.

“The play was never boring. There was pacing. Moreover, the writing was clear and on target. I looked forward to each scene and was seldom disappointed.”

Adrian Zykotskee, Retired Adventist educator and health care executive.

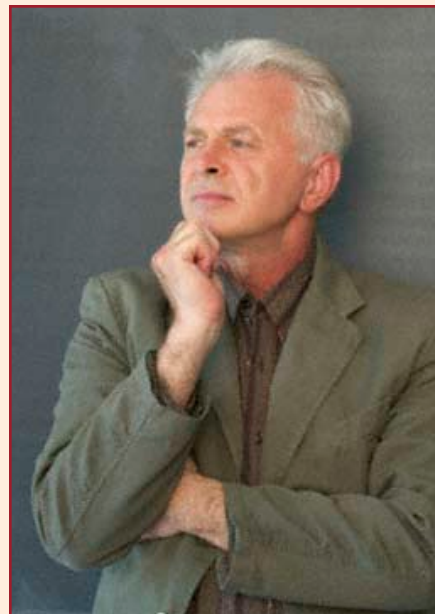


## *An Affirmation of Mature Adventism*

Countless Adventists have turned away from their church because of misguided portrayals of Ellen White and misuse of her writings. Yet others have been guided by her ministry into uniquely satisfying manifestations of Christ-centered spirituality. Who IS this woman—prophetess, messenger, writer, lecturer, seer? And why does there seem to be no unified description that satisfies everyone?

*Red Books: Our Search for Ellen White*, looks at the complexity (and frailty) of a woman who lived in a time of social and religious transition, and who through her life moved with the frontiers, passing away peacefully just a few miles from the birthplace of this drama, in the Napa Valley of Northern California.

*Red Books: Our Search for Ellen White*, is a documentary, skillfully presented by a troupe consisting of the writers themselves. Like the Red Books themselves, this DVD is an Adventist literary treasure—a complex, emotional, but satisfying portrayal of the life and philosophy of Ellen White.



“I believe God has called Adventists to a much greater calling than arguing over the precise nature of White’s inspiration or the particular interpretation of her passages. I believe our calling is much like White’s own calling—to point others to God, the plan of salvation, and most of all how to live.”

Julius Nam, associate professor, Loma Linda University School of Religion

# Order Today!

A limited pressing of 1,500 copies of this DVD is available, each handsomely labeled for gifting or use in the home library. The nominal price is \$19.95 for the first copy, plus \$2.95 for postage and handling; \$19.95 plus 1.00 for postage and handling for each additional copy ordered at the same time.

Supplies are limited at this time, and sales are brisk. Order your copy of this treasure for all ages: *Red Books: Our Search for Ellen White*.

“It is impossible to describe the uniqueness and creativity, perhaps pure inspiration, of the way this topic was written and portrayed.”

Carol Leach, Third-generation Adventist

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## The Prayer of Jabez Strikes Again

By Alden Thompson

Recently an intriguing devotional project has changed my life. I've been working through books of the Bible in search of good breakfast reading. There's a bite to the project because I'm writing out the passages by hand in a hard-bound journal.

This is no quick read or computer cut-and-paste; it's not the next Bible chapter or the next page. It's pen and ink with no delete key to rescue me along the way. And it has to sound good out loud.

The New Testament offers stand-alone gems more readily than the Old. But even in the New, a good fit for the day doesn't always come quickly. And once, from the slim pickings of Judges, I sinned against good judgment, writing out a passage of historical interest but of questionable devotional value.

"I think you're having difficulty finding good passages," was the gentle table comment that morning. "Erase that passage." Ouch.

I now understand why those who only read the Bible devotionally miss a lot of scenery. And I can see why some good people avoid their Bibles completely.

1 and 2 Chronicles were last in my queue. I saw them coming with mixed feelings. I remembered rich blessings when I began discovering how Chronicles had adapted Samuel-Kings to the spiritual needs of God's people. Samuel-Kings was the bad news, a forceful reminder that idolatry and disobedience had cost them both kingdom and temple. Even their greatest kings, David and Solomon, were great sinners. By contrast, Chronicles brought hope to discouraged exiles as they returned to a desolate land. Could God ever bless them again? Yes, shouted the Chronicler. But that meant skipping the tough stuff from Samuel-Kings and emphasizing the positive. Like all good parents, pastors, and prophets, the Chronicler adapted message to need. Seeing that practical application in Scripture itself had been a blessing to me.

But I also remembered my amazement when I charted out the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1-9. The author's overall goal was clear, but the bits and pieces were a hopeless jumble, at least if one expected precision.

So what would Chronicles yield devotionally?

The prayer of Jabez, that's what—two verses (9 and 10) dropped into chapter four without warning. I was caught off guard as Jabez led me into several hours of searching and reflection. Honored above named his brothers, and named Jabez because of a painful birth, his prayer asked for enlarged borders, God's blessing and presence, and protection from harm.

That's it. But Bruce Wilkinson's 93-page devotional, *The Prayer of Jabez* (2000), in spite of some puzzling theology, has mushroomed into sales of some 22 million books, even though, as one analyst noted, the prayer is not mentioned even once in the standard 38-volume Edinburgh edition of the Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers.

Given my own interest in making the whole Bible safe to read, Jabez's prayer haunts me. How could one seminarian grab the prayer and ignore its tangled genealogical context? What of more inquisitive seminarians tempted to ask why? Roaming through commentaries and reference works, I realized again how far I was from the technical expertise necessary to grapple with Jabez. Had I made the right choices in my life? Did I actually have a choice?

I still think Adventists have a marvelous opportunity to provide a framework within which it is safe to read Chronicles and to ask questions about Jabez. Will we be brave and ask God, as Jabez did, to enlarge those borders? I hope so. Scripture says God granted Jabez's request. He could grant ours, too.

Given my own interest in making the whole Bible safe to read, Jabez's prayer haunts me.



# Shi

## IN THE



SHARK CEO GREG JAMISON



INTEL VP PATRICK GELSINGER

BY SAM McKEE

AS A FIRST-YEAR PASTOR IN COLORADO SPRINGS, I SAW A metaphor of what I've always dreamed an Adventist church could be. The city sits at about 6,000 feet, nestled up against the front range of the Rocky Mountains. But towering above the city is Pike's Peak at more than 14,000 feet. People

**SHARK CEO** (top left): Greg Jamison, the CEO of the San Jose Sharks, was the first executive to sign on and give his time to the Business & Spirituality series at Sunnyvale Adventist Church. An audio-visual volunteer put up a sign at our church that said, "This is Sharks' Territory!" Jamison's sermon was the most well-attended of the series. He later donated a sky box to a local Adventist family whose daughter has a brain tumor and wanted to see the Wiggles children's music concert at HP Pavilion.

**INTEL VP** (top right): Patrick Gelsinger, a senior vice president in charge of more than half of Intel's revenue, spoke at the Sunnyvale Adventist Church on Feb. 23, 2008, on "Balancing Faith, Family, and Work." On his way to the airport, he stopped to visit Nora Guarin, who wasn't well enough to attend church that day. Nora, who attends a local Catholic church, has worked at Intel for 25 years. She is facing her second battle with cancer and was amazed to see the second in command of her company at her door to offer flowers and prayer.

can see it from every corner of the city. It makes even common intersections look like they should be featured on a postcard. Since it is directly west of the city, people use it as a reference point when traveling. Everyone in the city knows where it is, and they stand in awe of its beauty as it changes from dawn's orange glow to twilight's "purple mountain majesty." (In fact, Pike's Peak is the mountain that inspired the song "America the Beautiful.")

The Bible says that the church in the last days should be like that mountain. As Adventists, we've often heard the prophecies of gloom and doom, and I don't doubt that there are challenges ahead, but there's a positive Adventist prophecy that we sometimes miss: "In the last days, the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it." Micah 4:1, NIV.

The church is meant to finish the way it started—rising above its surroundings

with power and passion and beauty. The people of the world should know we're there. The heart of a graceful church should be a magnet drawing the city into God's meetinghouse.


### Making It Easier to Invite Friends

Our church is located in the heart of Silicon Valley, a valley that is known for having one of the highest concentrations of millionaires and one of the lowest rates of church attendance. We are home to Apple, Google, HP, IBM, eBay, PayPal, and many others.

We are a unique mix of conservatives and liberals, traditional folk and modern thinkers, drums and organs, ties and flip flops. We're a picture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

The average age for our smaller traditional service is 51, and the average age for our larger contemporary service is 30. We're a church that has been around for more than 55 years, but the older folks





# ning Silicon

**By inviting Silicon Valley leaders into the mix, the Sunnyvale Adventist Church has put itself on the local radar.**

have found a way to make room for the next generation.

Our aim isn't to be liberal or conservative. We want to be biblical and Christ-centered, and we want to love the world like God does. And we really believe that what we have in Jesus is worth sharing with a rare mix of passion and humility.

The Christian Church grew like wildfire through simple invitations to come and hear about Jesus.

Two years ago I was praying and asking God, "How can I make it easier for my members to invite friends to church?"

I read in the local newspaper that Greg Jamison, the CEO of the San Jose Sharks, loved his church and raised millions of dollars for the needy. So I prayed and sent him an email. I basically said, "I'm a young pastor in the Bay Area, and here's what our church is up to: loving God, blessing people, serving the world. Our church aims to pour the rich resources of the Silicon Valley into the poorest

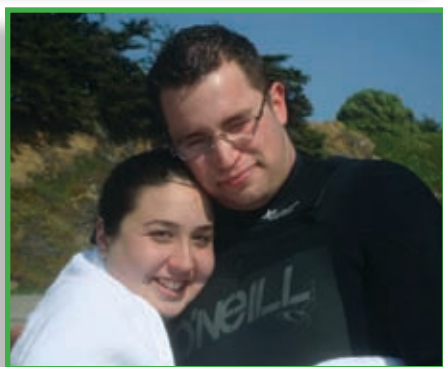
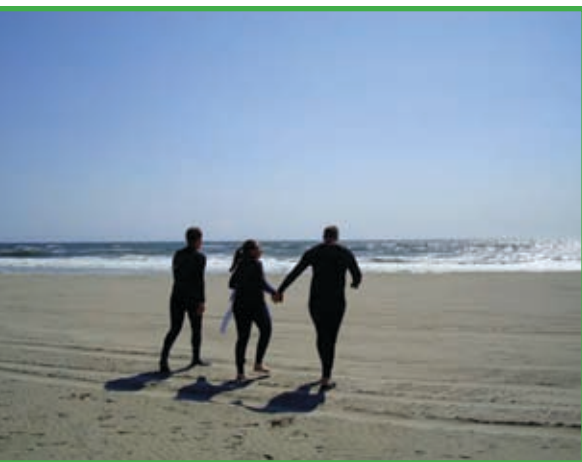
places on earth, both at home and abroad. We consistently make charity a priority, supporting kids with cancer at Stanford Hospital. Last year we gave more than \$24,000 to the Muslim people of Pakistan for shelter and quilts during the winter that followed the earthquake, and we plan to do more in the future as we grow. It impressed me that you have a similar passion for those in need as you helped develop the Sharks Foundation. We really respect what you're doing, and we wanted to have you come and share what it's like to walk with God in the corporate world. Are you free on a Saturday morning anytime in the next two years?"

He wrote back and said that not only would he come, but he wouldn't accept an honorarium. Because someone of his caliber signed on, we were able to get one of the top five vice presidents at Apple to come and share his faith journey as well. We asked Barbara Taylor, a highly successful Adventist business leader, to

finish off the series talking about her journey to Christ—which included being a senior executive at Playboy. We called it the Business & Spirituality Series. It would be a mixture of practical business and the life-giving spirituality.

I told my church members: "If I can muster the guts to invite the CEO of the Sharks to our church, you can invite Bob from Lockheed Martin or Pam from Google or Mary from the retirement center." And many of them did. One deacon, who is a vice president for a pharmaceutical company, invited all 200 of his employees to come to this personal and professional growth opportunity. He let them know that it would be at the Sunnyvale Seventh-day Adventist Church, where he regularly attends.

Our church normally has about 300 in attendance. When the CEO of the Sharks came, we had 450 people show up. During the series, these seekers heard about the prayer life and the Scriptures that inspire



**RESPONDING TO THE CALL** (above): Michael Esau and Annalisa Padilla heard Intel's Pat Gelsinger give a powerful call for people to move from the lukewarmness of Laodicea into being fully devoted followers of Christ. Michael tapped his girlfriend on the knee and said, "He's talking to me." Two months later they were baptized into Christ in the Pacific Ocean at Monterey Bay Academy.

some of the top leaders in Silicon Valley. And these top leaders now know that Adventists love Jesus, enjoy the Sabbath, and are ready to learn from and serve alongside other Christians.

## Changing Impressions

This year I wanted to invite Patrick Gelsinger, the senior vice president at Intel, to come and speak. Pat is in charge of more than half of Intel's revenue and will likely become the next president of the company. He also reads through his Bible twice a year and is an elder in his church.

What I didn't know was that Pat didn't have the best first impression of Adventists. His aunt had become an Adventist and was very judgmental of the rest of the family. It seemed as if Seventh-day Adventists were old-covenant



Pharisees at best or a cult at worst. So when Pat read the email, he thought to himself, "I don't think I want to speak at an Adventist church." Then he noticed that his friend Greg Jamison had spoken here. So he emailed the CEO of the San Jose Sharks and asked how it went.

The CEO of the Sharks basically said, "Those guys at the Sunnyvale Adventist Church are great. They love God; they have a lot of unchurched people coming to hear about Jesus. If you have time, you should spend some with them."

So Pat said, "Even though I'm really busy, I don't want to miss out on this," and he said yes!

I told my church, "You have the CEO of the Sharks recommending the Adventist church to the future president of Intel! Do you think you could invite somebody too?" When Pat came to our church, he was inspired by the ethnic and musical diversity. Our traditional and contemporary services reminded him of his home church in Oregon, and he felt the passion and love of a Christ-centered, grace-oriented Adventist church in worship.

In that setting, Pat made a powerful call for people to step out of lukewarm devotion and into being fully devoted

followers of Christ. As a result, two young adults were baptized in the Pacific Ocean a few months later.

## On the Local Radar

A year and a half after we started the Business & Spirituality series, our attendance is 25 percent higher, and our church is clearly on the radar of the local culture. The mayor of our city showed up at our Christmas outreach along with more than 500 others.

He came up to my wife and said, "I have always had a soft spot in my heart for Adventists." His sister was born in an Adventist hospital in Hong Kong. And when his grandmother had a difficult type of cancer, they couldn't find any surgeons to operate. The only one who offered to help was an innovative Adventist doctor. The surgery was successful, and she lived for another 20 years.

For years, this Silicon Valley mayor saw the Adventist movement as a mountain where people come for healing and help when they need it most. So when someone invited him to the Adventist church, it was easy for him to say yes.

More and more people are hearing about Jesus from all segments of our society. We are in the business of bringing the message of Jesus to the world. That's the heart of the Adventist faith—not to hide out from the world but to engage it and transform it with faith, hope, and love.

*Sam McKee is pastor of the Sunnyvale Adventist Church in Sunnyvale, California.*

**"You have the  
CEO of the Sharks  
recommending  
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future president  
of Intel!"**



EVANGELISM IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF what it means to be a follower of Jesus—Jesus himself said so.

His final instructions to his closest followers at the end of his time on earth included what has become known as the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19, 20). Luke's version emphasizes a different aspect of Jesus' command: "When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere . . . to the ends of the earth" (Luke 1:8\*).

Skip forward 2,000 years and, with the development of mass communication, we have adapted evangelism into many forms. Many Christians recognize and respond to the call, challenge, and possibility of taking the gospel "to every nation, tribe, language, and people" (Revelation 14:6). In doing this, they have recognized the efficiency of large public events, publishing, and broadcasting. With countless sermons, books, pamphlets, Bible studies, websites, TV ministries, and radio stations, the

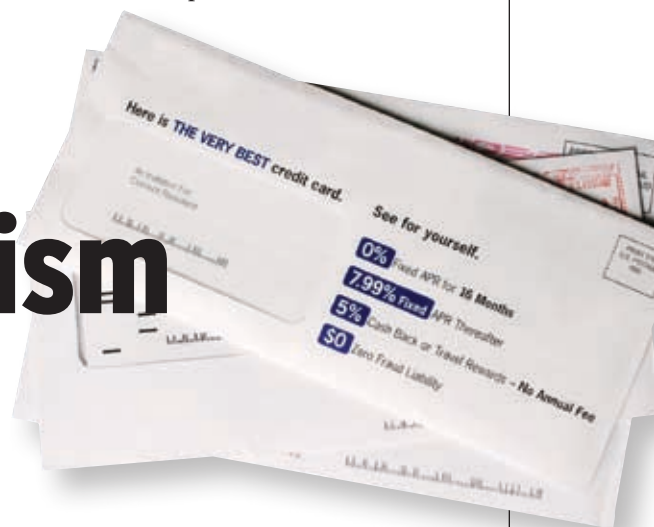
evangelism rarely take the discipline of theology very seriously. . . . Those who produce the literature on evangelism are particularly reluctant to think critically about the theology presupposed in their practice."

The need is for a theology of evangelism, not just evangelism of theology. Rather than seeking "any means possible" to somehow communicate our formulation of theology, how we go about the spiritual practice of evangelism is itself an expression of what we believe.

# NO Junk Evangelism

By Nathan Brown

*The good news demands a good "how."*



The sequence is obvious. People get to know Jesus, the Holy Spirit injects power into their lives, and as a result they are witnesses to their knowledge and experience of God. At its simplest, that's evangelism—each of us sharing our faith with the people with whom we share our lives.

But Jesus also laid the foundation for the church as a community of believers and, thus, a community of witnesses. Within that community, various individuals have different and complementary gifts and abilities that used together make up a body that can be more effective than the individuals alone (see 1 Corinthians 12).

world has never been so filled with Christian "content."

And, in one sense, this is how it should be. If the gospel is the "best news ever," sharing it deserves our best attention, best creativity, best imagination, best investments, best technologies, and best efforts. But the temptation is thinking that the command to evangelize urges "any means possible."

## A Theology of Evangelism

In *Evangelism After Christendom*, Bryan Stone describes this challenge to contemporary Christianity: "Those who think theologically rarely think about evangelism, and those who think about

And our belief must inform what means or methods we will or will not employ, regardless of how efficient or effective they might seem.

Remarkably, God *does* work through our misguided attempts at evangelism, our earnest impositions on our neighbors, and even our super-slick, hyper-marketed "gospel presentations." That is an amazing testament to the power of God and the gospel. But as a church, how might we do evangelism differently if a rigorous theology of evangelism was allowed to critique our evangelistic programs or strategies—whether "traditional" or "innovative"?

Can we authentically share a

relationship with God in an impersonal context? Can we really market our church as just another consumer “product”? Can we share the good news of God’s judgments with prophetic mathematics but without an active concern about injustice today? Are we prepared to sacrifice “easy” and efficient evangelism for the sake of being faithful witnesses?

The treasure Jesus has entrusted to us demands we give evangelism our careful, thoughtful, and faithful best (see Isaiah 52:7).

## The Numbers Game

In Jesus’ instructions to be his witnesses, there is no mention of keeping score. But whenever evangelism is talked about, it doesn’t take long until the conversation turns to numbers. It is a human thing to do, and even at the beginnings of the church, one needs to go only as far as Pentecost to read the first evangelistic numbers—“about three thousand in all” baptized on that day (Acts 2:41).

And numbers do have their place in assessing one aspect of the growth and witness of the church. But in a culture in which almost every aspect of life is measured by numbers and percentages, we go too far in assessing bottom lines, whether financial or baptismal.

It’s one reason the word *evangelism* raises such negatives. Language is important, and perhaps we would better use terms that have less salesman-like connotations. We are not selling, we are sharing. We are not crusading, we are inviting. We are not demanding, we are serving. And perhaps more often we should not be telling, we should be listening. The concept of evangelism as the sales department of faith—with success measured by growth percentages and “dollars per soul”—is fundamentally flawed.

In sales terms, to connect with countless potential customers increases

the chance of a few responding positively—that’s how marketing such as junk mail and email spam operate. The percentage of positive responses might be low, but if enough people are contacted, that low percentage will still yield satisfactory numbers. Evangelism, however, must be different because God cares—as should we—about every individual, not merely about a mass market and a bottom line.

## Anti-evangelism

In his intriguing recent book *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman reflects on what this means for evangelism: “In our research with some of the leading ‘mass evangelism’ efforts, we found that often these measures create three to ten times as much negative response as positive. In other words, imagine your church is considering mailing Bibles or videos or other Christian materials to homes in your community. Our research shows that the ‘collateral damage’ of doing so—those whose impressions of your church and of Christianity would be more negative as a result—is significantly greater than the positive impact on those who will respond favourably to these efforts.”

What would it mean if we were to measure the effectiveness of evangelism by our “anti-evangelism,” by how many people we turn away from Jesus? It’s a sobering thought. Matthew 18:6 suggests serious consequence for those who cause “little ones”—including those of little faith—to sin and who turn them away from God.

Of course, such an idea would be misunderstood by some who would use it as an excuse for non-evangelism and criticized by those who adopt the “whatever means necessary” approach to winning one more “soul.”

And there will always be those who choose against the gospel, who—in biblical terminology—harden their

hearts against God. Paul comments on how foolish the message of the cross can sound (see 1 Corinthians 1:18). But should we be careful that by the way we present this Good News to others, we might be assisting them in stepping further away from God or be an agent in hardening their hearts?

“Today’s media and technology creates unparalleled opportunities,” Kinnaman continues, “but they also wield the potential to harm the Christian image among many outsiders. If you create more barriers with outsiders because of your tactics, you have not been a good steward of the gospel. How we choose to share Christ is as important as our actually doing it.”

Would our assessment of whether evangelism “works” be different if we were to offset the positives with the negatives? And how would we do that? Would five baptisms outweigh 50 people who are disgruntled, confused, or otherwise discouraged by the same evangelistic endeavor?

Spending time with such questions should quickly remind us that Jesus was not talking about a numbers game or marketing strategy. Rather he was calling us to be his faithful witnesses, sharing his concern and love for those with whom we come into contact and with whom we share our lives.

As Paul urged, “Live wisely among those who are not Christians, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and effective so that you will have the right answer for everyone” (Colossians 4:5, 6).

## A (W)hole in How We Do It

One of things about Adventist belief that really makes sense is the wholistic nature of our belief system. From the deeply spiritual to the almost-boring, practical routines of physical life and health, from

a present and urgent concern for the well-being of others to the ultimate hope of a world made new with all wrongs set right, the Adventist “bundle of beliefs” impacts all aspects of our lives, demonstrating that the spiritual and the practical, the helping and the hoping, are not as far apart as we might have assumed.

Indeed, this integrated approach to Christian doctrine and living could itself be our most important belief. But how we actually do it—how we connect our beliefs with our everyday lives and how we connect our beliefs with the lives of those around us in ways that make sense to them and to us—must be our constant challenge.

And it is in this aspect of Adventist practice that it seems we have a growing hole. To a large extent we are victims of history—the history of our belief system itself and of changing social attitudes and beliefs. Our success in meeting the challenges of previous generations has left us exposed when trying to connect in the present.

Adventism began in a time and a place in which the majority of the population were practicing, church-going Christians of one variety or another. In this environment, the emerging Adventist group focused on demonstrating to other Christians why some aspects of their traditional faith were not in accord with the teachings of the Bible. We didn’t always convince them, but at least we could engage in a worthwhile discussion and they would have some understanding of our point of view.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Adventism—and Christianity generally—faced new frontiers. With the growing acceptance of evolutionary theory and atheism, we began to employ scientific methodology to describe our faith and to bolster the foundations of our beliefs. We readily employed the rationality of Christian

apologetics and the science of creationism to challenge the assumptions of non-believers. We didn’t always convince them, but at least we could engage in a spirited debate and at least we had a hearing for our defense of the faith.

Today, both of these “strategies” have their place and their appropriate audiences, and perhaps particularly with reference to a prophetic calling. But as the audiences most receptive to these approaches diminish in many societies around the world, the hole in how we do this grows. With an increased interest in spirituality but a declining interest in formal religion, the majority of the population has shifted away from both entrenched Christianity and avowed atheism. This same shift has also been seen as Adventism has expanded into non-Western cultures, in which these two extremes are not necessarily mirrored. And our traditional methods of communicating our faith have become less useful.

Reflecting on both these approaches, it seems we have always been good at telling others how and why they are wrong. Perhaps we need to learn to tell others how and why they are right, to share and celebrate their faltering steps toward spirituality as they share and celebrate ours. We bring our treasured beliefs and lifestyle, and demonstrate the value and meaning these bring to our lives. At the same time and without compromising our own beliefs, we respect and recognize the meaning others find in the understandings they bring.

So when grieving friends describe their loved one looking down on them from heaven, is our first response to straighten their doctrine or give them a hug?

If a relative tells us about the time they take for spiritual renewal on Tuesday afternoons, do we affirm that prioritizing spiritual space is also important to us or

“warn” them that it doesn’t really “count” unless it takes place on the seventh day?

Do we devalue our neighbors’ environmental concerns by telling them it’s all going to be destroyed anyway when Jesus returns, or do we focus on our belief in the goodness of God’s creation and our shared human responsibility to be stewards of our planet? Do we then express an interest in joining in their next environmental project?

Do we intentionally seek and celebrate the goodness, beauty, and creativity in our culture as a way of finding common ground with those with whom we interact day-by-day—not in a contrived, awkward attempt at “relevance” but because there is goodness, beauty, and creativity to be found and shared?

These can be challenges, but the wholistic nature of our belief system holds the best answer. The scope of our understanding and concern gives a breadth of commonality with a wide variety of people, communities, and concerns. And from this threshold of shared beliefs, hopes, values, and life practices, we can set off as fellow pilgrims, trusting the strength of our distinct beliefs and the power of God working in our lives to lead us to a greater understanding of his goodness and purposes in our lives and our world.

“His purpose in all of this was that the nations should seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:27).

*Nathan Brown is editor of Signs of the Times and Record in the South Pacific Division, based just out of Melbourne, Australia.*

\*Bible quotations are from the New Living Translation.





**As a church administrator, you've been able to keep focused on mission and avoid getting tunnel vision about institutional survival. What has been important in keeping this focus in your life?**

From my first sense of call to ministry (during the summer between finishing academy and entering college), I have always understood it as being primarily about Christ's mission in the world and not about institutions or organizational structures. Perhaps it is because I am a fourth-generation Adventist and grew up hearing a lot about church politics from childhood on. I know what the wiring behind the panel looks like, and I am not in awe of it. I don't know why it is so difficult for so many to see that in God's

## “We MUST CENTER on the M

**Minister, community organizer and social analyst Monte Sahlin talks with Marcel Schwantes about the latest research findings on the church, surprising facts about evangelism campaigns, and the future of a graying denomination.**

Marcel Schwantes interviews  
Monte Sahlin

*Monte Sahlin is an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister, community organizer, and social analyst. His 20 years of denominational service included working as assistant to the president of the North American Division, vice president of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and vice president of the Columbia Union Conference. He currently serves as director of research and special projects for the Ohio Conference and as chairman of the board for the Center for Creative Ministry and the Center for Metropolitan Ministry. Sahlin is the author of 20 books, more than 50 research monographs, and many journal articles. He is an associate faculty member in the Tony Campolo Graduate School at Eastern University and an adjunct faculty member in the Doctor of Ministry program at Andrews University. Monte is married to Norma, a writer and editor, and they have two adult daughters.*

eyes the organization, the institution, is simply a utility. In fact, it is a serious spiritual deficiency. When we make the institution more than simply a utility, we begin down a slippery slope that ends in a kind of idolatry.

**Who were the mentors in your early ministry that you can now see had a lasting effect on your ministry?**

I was exposed to a remarkable faculty at La Sierra College in the late 1960s. Norval Pease, Fritz Guy, Madelynn Haldeman, John Robertson, V.N. Olsen, Alonzo Baker, Bob Westerhout, and James Stirling. But more than that, I was right on the heels of a remarkable cohort of theology students—Bailey Gillespie, Rick Rice, David Neff (now the editor of *Christianity Today*), Jon Butler, Ron Graybill, Dick Duerksen, Dick Davidson (now an Old Testament scholar at Andrews), and Tom Dybdahl (who became an attorney, congressional staffer, and activist).

Perhaps the three men who did the most for me getting started in ministry were Miller Brockett, Herb Ford, and Vern Carner. I also must mention Aaron Brogden and W.W. Fordham, who showed

me that the historically African American churches have always integrated social action with evangelism.

**What do you think are the top three challenges facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the coming decade?**

(1) Diversity. The Adventist denomination is the most diverse denomination in the United States today! Diversity is more than ethnicity, more than its global span; we encompass a great range of worship styles, socioeconomic niches, and viewpoints.

(2) The “graying of Adventism” and the need to engage new generations. I am working on a new demographic survey right now, and it appears that the median

Dr. Jan Paulsen, has the wisdom and grace to focus on a few basic, overarching themes and not try to force everyone into a mold. If we have future leaders who are as rigid and inflexible as some have been, they will simply break up the church.

**In what part of the country is the Adventist Church most effective, or growing at a faster rate than average, in terms of reaching people in particularly unchurched places?**

The research I have been working with the last 10 years, together with Roger Dudley and Paul Richardson, shows very clearly what works and what does not work in terms of thriving Adventist congregations. It takes five essential elements: (1) active, practical

of problems in the eyes of most pastors.

The most disappointing is how little impact the church has had on large cities. It has been 100 years since Ellen White launched an initiative to reach the cities of America, and over that century we have accomplished virtually nothing. We did random telephone surveys of the general public to measure name recognition and perceptions of the church, and we found that in most of these large cities, where we have been doing evangelism and outreach for a century or more, only about 5 percent of the general public could tell us one true fact about the Adventist Church. Two-thirds have never heard of the Adventist Church. We are largely invisible. When the mayors of these cities convene religious leaders to talk about things like the needs of children or teaching better health habits, there is often no one at the table representing the Adventist Church. In most cases when someone is at the table for the Adventist Church, it is a local pastor who has no authority to speak for the church or make any commitments, no funding or staff or organization to back up any Adventist involvement. In many cities our neighbors have concluded that Adventists care only about their own needs and issues. Consequently, they are not interested in anything that Adventists have to say.

**The Adventist church establishment spends millions of dollars on elaborate public evangelism campaigns and media to preach our eschatological message. Moment of truth: Does it truly work, and do churches grow as a result?**

Yes, it does work in some contexts. It clearly is not working in other contexts, or at least we are not doing the other things that are necessary to generate growth in those contexts. There is a lot of confusion on this topic, both among proponents and critics. The denomination does not spend more than two or three percent of the Tithe Fund on evangelism of all kinds, while it spends about 40 percent on education in North America. A lot of the evangelism spending is from designated donations, which is money from donors who want to spend it on certain kinds of activities whether they

# MISSION of CHRIST”

age for the Adventist Church in North America has inched up to 62. That means half of our members are over 62 years of age! We are not doing a good job of passing on the church to new generations. We must improve on that front.

(3) The need to encourage more innovation and creativity. If we do not release the energies and gifts of the younger pastors, teachers, and lay leaders, we will sink under the weight of aging, diversity, and all of the institutions and programs that we can't let go of. If we want new generations to carry on the mission of the church, we have to trust them to learn how to relate to their contemporaries.

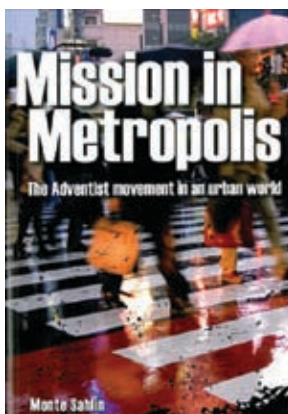
**Getting back to diversity, how do we maintain some sense of unity and togetherness? How do we have any shared focus and sense of identity with such tremendous diversity?**

I do not think we can maintain unity by trying to enshrine traditions or by being inflexible and rigid, fighting off changes in policy and practice as long as possible. Rigidity will only cause splintering and weakening of the church. What is required to overcome fragmentation is flexibility and suppleness. I appreciate the fact that our current General Conference president,

community involvement; (2) strong, rich spirituality; (3) focused intentionality; (4) a warm, welcoming, grace-oriented fellowship; and (5) Sabbath activities that target the unchurched. There are examples of congregations with these characteristics in all kinds of places, in all regions of the country.

**Last year you published *Mission in Metropolis: The Adventist Movement in an Urban World*, which is based on your research findings from interviewing nearly 1,000 congregations between Boston and Washington, D.C. What was the most surprising finding for you? And the most disappointing?**

The most surprising is the way in which all kinds of churches—large and small, suburban and inner city, African American and white, immigrant and native-born—report the same challenges: The members commute to church and almost none of them live in the community where the church is located. Most of the members come to church to meet their own needs and do little to reach out beyond the congregation. Growth is more and more difficult; the methods we have always used are no longer yielding significant results. There is a convergence



Sahlin's book *Mission in Metropolis: The Adventist Movement in an Urban World* was published in 2007 by the Center for Creative Ministry.

*When denominational leaders take a principled stand instead of going along with designated donations, then some of these donors just take their money and create independent ministries to do what they want to do.*

are effective or not. Much of what is done in these elaborate campaigns is done to please ourselves rather than to be effective for Christ or meet the needs of lost people. When denominational leaders take a principled stand instead of going along with designated donations, then some of these donors just take their money and create independent ministries to do what they want to do. The attitude is "Don't bother me with the facts. I know what I want to do." Some of this is rooted in a false theology that says the mission of the church is simply to "warn." If a document goes to every person in a city or a nation and they don't respond, we did our part; they were warned, "shake the dust off your feet," and move on. But what is really going on here is a rationale for people who simply do not really care for the lost. They just don't have compassion or love for the lost, no matter how they try to posture themselves as being supporters of evangelism. So don't get critical of church administration about spending on evangelism. It really isn't fair, although some of them lack the analytical skills and/or the backbone to insist on rational planning and go against established patterns.

Some of the churches having the best results really are not doing the "traditional" thing from North America. For example, evangelism in Latin America has never given the emphasis to eschatology. It is focused on family life. E.E. Cleveland, who has baptized more people than any other Adventist evangelist, never did the "traditional" thing. He had a more wholistic, broad approach.

There is good evidence that if a population has a higher percentage of newcomers in the community, we will have more attendance and baptisms. The Adventist message seems to get a greater response from people who are more marginal in a community, while it gets almost no response from those who are deeply rooted in the community. Another example is the research by economist David Beckwith, which demonstrates that Adventist church growth is correlated to key economic indicators. (See "Praying for a Recession?" *Adventist Today*, May-

June 2008.) If there is a recession in 2009, then it is likely there will be many more baptisms from the "Year of Pastoral Evangelism" that the North American Division is planning than if the recession is avoided and the economy booms.

There is no simple answer to this question, but there are a couple of truisms: (1) No single approach will work with all kinds of people. If Adventist church leaders believe that the mission of Christ is to all kinds of people, then they will avoid enshrining one method of evangelism. Instead, they will encourage many different approaches. (2) No approach to evangelism will work by itself. If community service and social justice are neglected, then the results will be less; the evangelism will be undercut. If we distance ourselves from the lost and do not demonstrate practical compassion for them, no evangelism will be very effective. These are realities clearly revealed in research, as well as clearly taught by Ellen White and in Scripture. Evangelism campaigns that ignore these realities will never be very successful.

**For you personally, what does it mean to be a servant of God in the context of our times?**

I believe that the times call for an Adventist faith, an Adventist movement that is Christ-centered, grace-oriented, compassionate, inclusive, progressive, and hopeful. We must center on the mission of Christ and the core values he has given us and quit worrying so much about the boundaries. I find a growing spiritual hunger in the world at the same time that there is a growing skepticism about rigid, politicized institutional structures. The fastest-growing segment of the religious spectrum in America today is the "none of the above" segment—people who are turned off by organized religion and do not want to be part of any denomination, but are deeply interested in an authentic relationship with God. This leads to a certain amount of silliness. People become enamored by books that were written by idiots and charlatans. They go off on New Age baloney. But one of the reasons for the silliness is that Jesus' followers are



not there, respecting their concerns and taking their needs seriously. We must take the spiritual needs of contemporary, postmodern people seriously and find new, creative ways to share the good news of Christ with them.

I don't think my generation is going to be able to do this. The Baby Boom generation started out with great expectations and some think they are forever young, but it has become very polarized and includes many people who are so demanding, judgmental, and self-centered that they have disqualified themselves from real leadership. It is time for Baby Boomers to focus on giving the next two generations the support that many of us did not get in our young adult years. (That wasn't true for me personally, but I know it was true for most.) "Generation X" and the Millennial Generation need to be encouraged to set aside the burdens of the past and take full advantage of contemporary opportunities.

**What are some real-life practical examples you can give the average layperson who wants to creatively engage contemporary society to express his/her faith?**

Walk of Faith Fellowship and Teen Esteem youth center in Cleveland is one example. Walk of Faith has about 75 members. Four years ago it started a major after-school drop-in center for neighborhood teenagers. The place cannot hold more than 40 teens at a time, but in four years they have registered more than 300 kids who come by occasionally. Recently they received recognition for their work from the Cleveland Public Schools.

Atkinson Memorial Center in Coatesville, Penn., is another example. Members of the Coatesville Adventist Church operate a homeless shelter and 26 units of transitional housing, and they have rebuilt the rest of the block, which had a number of dilapidated row houses.

A "community bookstore" is a new approach that was pioneered, starting in 2000, at Symposia in Hoboken, N.J. It is being replicated at Conscious Cafe in Pittsburgh and Agora in a suburb of Cincinnati. One dimension of these

centers is that they operate as a used bookstore. People in the community donate used books of all kinds, which are sold to generate operating expenses for the other programs of the center. Symposia schedules 15 to 20 events a week. These include small groups of various kinds (some religious, some entirely secular), health-education classes, job training, family-life seminars, and children's activities. The real product of these centers is "building community" in terms of relationships, neighbors connecting with neighbors. They serve to increase the kind of human assets that are necessary for economic development along the lines described in the book *The Creative Class*. And there are opportunities to answer questions about faith and help people grow spiritually.

Good Neighbor House in Dayton, Ohio, is a major social services provider located near downtown. The eight Adventist churches in the metro area formed a coalition about 25 years ago and pooled their community service activities and funds so that they could hire a professional director and leverage outside grants, etc. They provide basic services such as an emergency food pantry and a furniture bank for homeless families who are re-establishing housekeeping, as well as medical, dental, and optical clinics for the working poor. The clinics serve only the people who are not poor enough or old enough to qualify for Medicaid/Medicare and who do not have employer health benefits.

I could give you scores of other examples, all of them quite different. I don't believe in copying recipes developed elsewhere. I believe that where a few people want to explore opportunities for mission, pray together, conduct a needs assessment, get to know community leaders, and start thinking creatively, they will invent something with the help of the Holy Spirit—something relevant to their context and their resources.

**You wear many hats, have written many books, and have conducted many studies. What has been your most rewarding work to date? And why?**

The most rewarding thing for me has always been the same: to see a group of people sense the presence of the Spirit in their midst, learn to use research and analysis skills, catch a vision of compassion and change, and be empowered to implement that vision. When people come together in a fellowship that takes on real, wholistic mission, they really know what it means to walk with Jesus. Religion alone won't do that for you. I've walked through this process with more than 100 groups around the country over the past 40 years, and it never ceases to warm my heart!

**What's next for Monte Sahlin?**

Last year I ended 20 years working in the denomination's "hierarchy," at the General Conference, division, and union conference levels. I took a call to the Ohio Conference, which I left in 1987 to go to the GC. My title is director of research and special projects. I am working with pastors and local churches, helping them conduct community assessments and develop innovative outreach projects. I am also continuing the research on congregations and communities that I have been engaged in for the last 25 years, including serving on the steering committee of the interfaith association on congregational studies. I am teaching a course on field research for ministry for the Doctor of Ministry program at Andrews University, and I am continuing to teach community organizing for the Tony Campolo Graduate School at Eastern University. I have agreed to design and oversee an ongoing research program on leadership for the new Bradford-Cleveland-Brooks Center at Oakwood College. And I have several book-writing projects I am working on, including a book on innovation in the church, an exegesis of Matthew 24-25, and a book on community organizing. I've also started blogging. You can blame Ryan Bell, pastor of the Hollywood Church, for talking me into it. It is an easy way to share notes on recent findings before research and analysis is finalized and published in more permanent form.

## 7 QUESTIONS for...Naturally 7

By Marcel Schwantes



**Naturally 7. Remember the name.**

Whether you're into Christian contemporary or secular pop music, these talented "7" have arrived with an explosive bang. Since 2007, they have performed for more than 1.2 million people and have just completed touring the United States, Australia, and Canada as the opening act for pop superstar Michael Bublé. They are now beginning the European leg of their world tour, including solo performances at the renowned Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, where they'll share the stage with the likes of Quincy Jones, Herbie Hancock, and Al Jarreau.

On May 13, Naturally 7 made their national television debut on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. DeGeneres called them "unbelievable."

So who really are these guys and why am I raving about them?

First of all, every member "plays an instrument" with his mouth—drums, electric guitar, horns, DJ scratching, you name it. And as it turns out, this New York-based, award-winning group has deep Adventist roots. Not since Take 6 has an all-Adventist group made such a favorable impression in the pop industry.

I set out to discover more—and how they share Christ to their largely secular audiences.

I spoke with group founder, musical director, composer, and arranger Roger Thomas during their busy touring schedule.

**Naturally 7 has been around since 1999. Why haven't we heard about you guys until now?**

**ROGER:** We spent most of the last six years overseas. Europe and Asia have been pretty much our second home. I'd also like to add that our name before Naturally 7 was Last Appeal. Five of the seven members were part of that outfit. We did quite bit of traveling as Last Appeal (to Youth Congress, camp meetings, etc.) in Adventist circles.

**A writer for your website describes Naturally 7 this way: "They make more noise than Nelly, R. Kelly, Dru Hill, Jaheim...., but they don't play any instruments!" How did you all learn to produce your entire music through your voices?**

**ROGER:** Coming from a rich church heritage of fine a cappella music, we've been always looking for ways to be original and take a cappella to the next level. My brother Warren had been imitating drums and electric guitar from our childhood, so we started there. We soon found out that we all had a gift to do things with our voices that many others could not do, including the other band members. We decided later on to call it "vocal play".

**What "instruments" does each member "play"?**

**ROGER:** Hops plays bass, Warren plays drums & guitar, I play guitar & synth efx, Dwight plays trombone & guitar, Jamal plays guitar, flute & strings, Rod plays vocal DJ (scratching) & guitar, Garfield plays harmonica & guitar. As you can see, we all do some sort of guitar (lead, power, wah

wah, etc.). We are all able to do horns for ensemble purposes, but Dwight is by far the best.

**Your live shows have been considered among the best in the business. What gives Naturally 7 that distinction?**

We try to do things that people have never heard or seen before, including being faith-based. Any mention of God is shocking to people. We play 7,000- to 10,000-seat venues every night, and because it is a completely secular event, people are more spiritually moved (we believe) than they would be at a religious event. I think people marvel that we can be fully entertaining and still leave a lasting impression of spirituality. We also try to give people a lot to think about during the performance and after. We take this lesson from Jesus, who often spoke to the multitude in parables that were not understood at the time he spoke, but were food for thought much later.

**As Adventists, was there a key moment that led you to realize that there is a whole world outside the church to explore?**

**ROGER:** This is a good question. When we re-formed as Naturally 7 and entered an a cappella competition, we competed with about 16 a cappella groups and didn't even know this world existed. You could hear a pin drop while we sang...they were listening to our harmony, dynamics, mic technique, lyrics, everything! Wow, there's a whole world of secular a cappella lovers. We went on to win this competition in New York and went to the final in San Francisco, which proved to be even more of a landmark moment as we observed groups from all around the country and an audience of 3,000 a cappella



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lovers. My reaction was "Let's explore this new world!"

The track "Tradition" has been called a "provocative confrontation with growing up." Does that have Adventist overtones? What's the song about?

**ROGER:** Mmmm! We say a lot in that song, and it is confrontational. Why do people do what they do? That's the question we pose. Is it mostly tradition? Some lyrics from the song are:

*Think like you or think it through  
I'll choose the latter way  
They go left, I go right, they go Sunday, I go Saturday  
If you know it's all tradition, why are you knocking  
on wood?  
Halloween trick or treatin' can that evil be good?*

We have Adventist overtones all over the album, which is natural. We are Adventists, and we have a lot to say!

What was it like for you and your brother Warren growing up Adventist in New York City?

**ROGER:** Warren spent three years at Northeastern Academy in Manhattan, but I went to Morris High School in the Bronx. We saw a lot of rough and raw street life. The fast talk and fast life were pretty attractive to us as teenagers and the impression made was strong, but our family values were stronger. We hung out with the most thugged-out individuals, yet neither one of us has ever smoked, drunk, or used profanity. It speaks well of our immediate and extended family. We never wanted to let our parents or grandparents down. This type of thinking helped us survive in New York. Here are some lyrics from the song "New York" also on our album:

*It's like a jungle sometimes, I gotta suit up in camouflage...or blend with the Philistines,  
And swing a sling on the boulevard.  
Nikes, Converse, Pumas, Adidas  
Everybody's moving fast, but they ain't running to Jesus.*

I think the excerpt from this song captures very nicely what growing up in New York was like for us.

**VISIT THE NATURALLY 7 WEBSITE AND MYSPACE PAGES:**  
(web) [www.n7house.de](http://www.n7house.de)  
(myspace) [www.myspace.com/naturally7](http://www.myspace.com/naturally7)

# Adventist Man

## Decaf in Starbucks, Creating Lucifer, Raising Hands/Hell

Now that Postum is gone, is it okay for me to buy a decaf mocha soy at Starbucks?

—Johnny Ramirez, Aberdeen, Scotland

Brother Johnny, the hard but simple answer is, "No-no, never-never, uh-uh-uh." After all, the eternal issue in sinful theatre attendance was location, location, location (remember?).

Adventist Man doesn't give a frosty frappuccino about actual content. As friend Michael C. defined the problem: "It's the company that decaf keeps." (Frequenting grocery stores that sell coffee products is allowable because the drinks have not yet been made. They are still in a prelapsarian state.)

Adventist Man vividly recalls photos of the pathetic web of a deranged spider after a shot of sextuple espresso. *Oh! what a tangled web we spin / When Beelzebub's bean we take in.*

The bottom line: If you do slip and enter a caf-house, your guardian angel will be waiting outside sipping a 7Up.

If he knew what hellish suffering would result, why did God create Lucifer in the first place?

This is one of the great philosophical questions of all time, one that has perplexed the world's most brilliant thinkers for centuries, so we can dispatch with it easily.

The quickest method to determine the "correct" answer, of course, is to employ the God-ordained Sabbath School quarterly approach of fill-in-a-selected-Scripture. But for our current query, let's move to another reputable research option: Call a friend.

God *didn't* create Lucifer in the first place. A little-known fact, which Adventist Man obtained from a reliable source, is that God *delayed* creating Lucifer for eons. Prior to Lucifer came Herman. Then Ebenezer. Then Madison. Then Connie. Then Frodo. Then Ava. Then Ishmael. Then Dikembe. Then Fritz. Then Dulcinea. Then Hiro. Then Alice. Then G'ong. Then Norval. Then Wilma. Then Barney. Then Betty. Then Sebastian. Then Velvet. Then Max. Then Latasha. Then Louie-Louie. Then Sigrid. Then Tiago. Then Azaria. Then Zach. Then Amburre. Then Ka-el.



Then Tatiana. Then Seamus. Then Thanh Huu. Then Tiffany. Then A.J. Then Bobbi. Then Ralph.

Finally, God could postpone the inevitable no longer. After Ralph came Lucifer.

Why don't parents today give their children more spiritual names?

You are greatly mistaken in your implication. According to a list of the most popular names in 2007 compiled by the U.S. Social Security Administration, for girls number 31 was Nevaeh, or "heaven" spelled backward. Also represented were (72) Trinity and (461) Miracle. For boys, the list includes (622) Sincere and (723) Messiah.

Adventist Man considers each of these names extremely Lautirips.

I've seen people raising their hands during worship in church. Should I subtly move away before the earth swallows them up?

Yes. The biblically based safe standard is seven pews.

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has "the answer." As a former member of "the remnant of the remnant," Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com)



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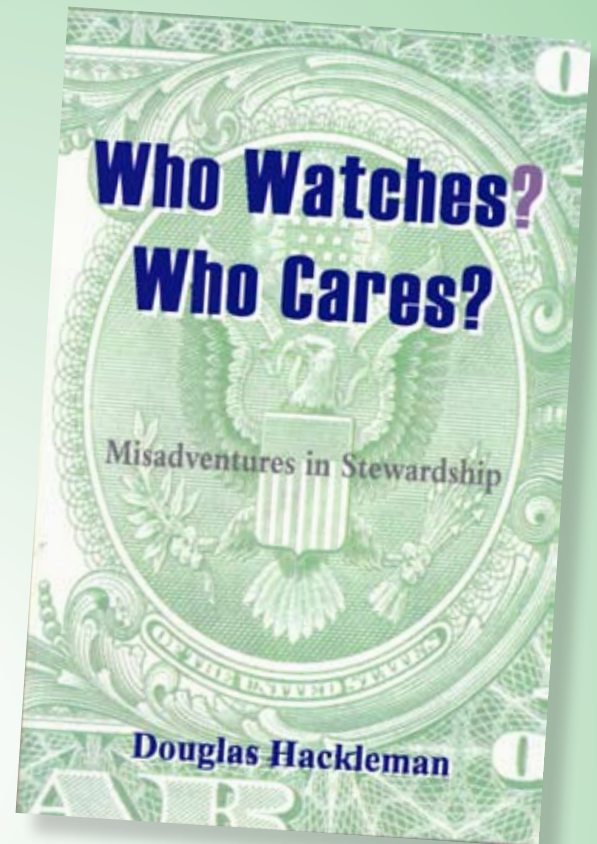
# TWO REGRETTABLE BOOKS

*“Who Watches? Who Cares?” documents nine financial crises in recent denominational history—carefully footnoted and intelligently narrated by professional writer Douglas Hackleman.*

Published this June (last month) by Members for Church Accountability (MCA) in Southern California, the author becomes the first in Adventism to sweep aside the rumors and to document, in book form for the first time, what **REALLY** happened in these crises:

The Harris Pine Bankruptcy  
The Robert Folkenberg Resignation  
The Family Enrichment Resources (LE Program) Failure  
The Davenport Conflict-of-interest Scandal  
The Pawtucket Nursing Villa Controversy  
The Shady Grove Hospital Compensation Conflict  
The Boston Regional Medical Center Demise

“MCA sincerely regrets the necessity of dissecting these painful incidents to alert the Adventist laity about the urgent need for real oversight and transparency concerning the finances and administration of the denomination at every level,” writes Hackelman.



## Limited Time Special Offer

For a limited time, *Adventist Today* is offering “Who Watches? Who Cares?” along with a Free Copy of “Truth Decay: A Call for Accountability and Transparency in the Adventist Church (Second Edition)” **FREE** with every order. of copy. Combined Value: \$35—Available now for \$19.95, plus \$2.95 P+H per order.

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