### NEWS

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**President Obama’s Mental Health Initiative Receives Support from the Adventist Church:** Deadly attacks in recent years by US gunmen believed to be mentally ill or disturbed are prompting dialogue on the question at the presidential level, and Adventists are willing to play a significant role....

**Adventist in Kenya Sues the Defense Force for Violation of Sabbath Rights:** Is it a violation of religious rights when a superior in the military arbitrarily refuses to make accommodations for an Adventist's request for relief from routine labor on Sabbaths? An Adventist officer arbitrarily denied such freedom and jailed for several weeks has taken the matter to court....

### OPINION

**No Man’s Land:** How should the Church respond to those people who have been badly damaged by stressful and violent circumstances? They live in no-man's land and far too often are allowed to fall through the cracks of ministry, says blogger Harry Banks....

**How Do Clergy Observe the Sabbath?**: In line with other denominations that rose to prominence in the United States, performance and productivity (including quality and content of worship programs) has often been a high priority in the Adventist Church. How does this square with the proposition that the Sabbath should be a day of rest for all? asks blogger Monte Sahlin....

**Motivated by Love:** Jesus told his friends that they would demonstrate their love for him best by loving one another. Columnist Mark Gutman suggests, however, that while obeying out of love is good, the best motivation factors include elements of knowledge and logic....
Leader of the Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea Expelled by the National Government: Is the Adventist president of the Church in Equatorial Guinea a foreign agent engaged in espionage, using sophisticated radio equipment? This is the reason given for his expulsion from the country....

News Briefs June 14, 2013: Several Adventist hospitals are in the news, two with civil and legal issues, others for awards of merit. Anniversary celebrations for some Adventist colleges and academies continue. Notice has gone out regarding a gathering of Adventist academics who teach philosophy....

FEATURES (available to AT subscribers)

I Am His Joy: Poet Robin Sanchez looks at a fervent relationship with God as epitomized by the ardent and growing rapport between a father and his toddling son or daughter....

Laila Mickelwait (Part 2) about working with children in Haiti and how her faith motivates her work: Laila Mickelwait continues answering questions from Adventist Today regarding her decision to leave the high-paying entertainment world in Southern California and dedicate herself to the well-being of others, especially those victimized by worldwide human trafficking....

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Well-known Evangelist Mark Finley Diagnosed with Pre-Cancerous Condition

Submitted: Jun 12, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Late Wednesday (June 13) Pastor Dan Jackson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, released a statement concerning the health of Pastor Mark Finley, one of the most widely known evangelists in the denomination. Finley retired as a vice president of the General Conference (GC) in 2010 and is currently assisting Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the GC, with an evangelism campaign in New York City.

Finley is facing a health challenge which necessitated extensive testing, said Dr. Peter Landless, a physician and health ministries director for the GC, in the statement. "He has a condition which could be termed pre-myeloma. The small number of abnormal cells in the bone marrow produces a protein (immunoglobulin). We are thankful to report that the bone marrow, otherwise, is functioning well. This condition is known as MGUS (monoclonal gammopathy of uncertain significance), and often remains static with no further progression."

The statement said that Finley and his wife, Teenie, "are of good courage, and their hearts’ desire is that God be glorified in and through every circumstance of their lives." Dr. Landless also stated that he has advised Finley to "cut down his activities, take appropriate time for rest, and limit his travel commitments."

"We request that you lift Mark, Teenie and their family up in your prayers, not only on the issue of his health, but also as they mourn the passing of Elder Finley’s father," Jackson said. "As a courtesy and consideration to their privacy, please direct emails of support and condolence to Elder Finley’s assistant, Joy Alexander. She can be reached at alexanderj@gc.adventist.org."

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President Obama’s Mental Health Initiative Receives Support from the Adventist Church

Submitted: Jun 9, 2013

By ANN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America joined dozens of other organizations in the United States last week in pledging support for President Barack Obama’s initiative to promote mental health. Katia Reinert, health ministries director for the denomination’s North American Division, represented the church at the National Conference on Mental Health in the East Room of the White House as President Obama applauded public commitments made by faith communities and other groups leading efforts to raise mental health awareness.

“The Adventist Church has historically looked at people as wholistic, with mental health and physical health both linked to spiritual health,” Reinert said. "Being able to bring this perspective from the faith community and let them know that Adventists care about mental health and have active recovery and support ministries was significant.” The meeting was an opportunity to build partnerships with likeminded groups and benefit from an arsenal of mental health resources, as well as share the church’s unique approach toward health.

In February this year, church health professionals launched Adventist Recovery Ministries, a pathway toward healing for those battling addiction and compulsive behavior. The 12-step program is one of the focuses of next year’s National Health Summit. The weeklong event will also offer training in mental health first aid, depression recovery and optimizing brain potential, Reinert said.

The church’s additional plans in its public commitment presented to the White House include (1) designating February 2014 for a special emphasis on mental health; (2) devoting the February 2014 issue of Vibrant Life, the health promotion journal published by the Church, entirely to mental health; (3) asking all local churches to focus on mental health awareness on Sabbath, February 15, 2014, and promote awareness in their communities; (4) plan a National Mental Health Conference with Adventist HealthCare in 2015; and (5) publish a youth devotional book focusing on mental and emotional health in 2015.

A task force organized by the church’s Health Ministries department in North America is overseeing the efforts. Members were culled from Adventist hospital systems, mental health facilities, education and research institutions, supporting ministries and publishing houses.

The church’s efforts are part of what President Obama is calling a national conversation about mental health. Ongoing dialogue will help lift the stigma associated with mental illness and improve health care for those struggling with such issues, particularly veterans and students, stated a press release from the White House Office of Communications.
Reinert said she hopes the conversation inspires Adventists to offer support and friendship to church and community members struggling with mental illness. She also wants Adventist churches to serve as centers of hope and healing in the community. “Many of our members are afraid to come out of our churches and mingle, but we end up making valuable partnerships and benefiting from other perspectives and resources, as well as sharing what we know and impacting our communities,” she said. “This is a great opportunity moving forward.”

This story was supplied by the Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news service of the denomination, with reporting by Elizabeth Lechleitner.

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Adventist in Kenya Sues the Defense Force for Violation of Sabbath Rights

Submitted: Jun 13, 2013

By AT News Team

A former army officer in Kenya has sued the government for violations of his religious and human rights. Polycarp M. Nyakora served the nation's military from 2002 until December 2012 when he was discharged, reported The Star. "He says that he was discharged after he insisted on observing the true Sabbath day."

Nyakora is an Adventist and was in detention for 42 days because he declined to work on Saturdays. The Kenya Defense Force had not respond to the law suit as of this morning. Nyakora told the court that for the ten years he served in the military, he always sought permission in advance to go to church whenever he had been assigned duty on Saturday. He said that he always attended church on condition that if a distress call was made, he would be able to respond.

Nyakora stated that the confrontation began on May 31 last year when he sought routine permission to be absent from duty on June 2, his usual day of worship. His immediate superior, a sergeant, declined to grant him permission. Shocked by the decision, Nyakora reported the incident to a warrant officer who in turn promised to follow up the issue with the sergeant. When attempts by the warrant officer to plead Nyakora’s case failed, the serviceman sought a meeting with a senior air traffic control officer who simply referred him back to the sergeant who created the incident.

The veteran told the court that he then asked if one of his colleagues could stand in for him so that he could go to church but this too was refused by the sergeant. He said he wondered why the sergeant refused to allow a colleague to stand in for him when he had on several occasions been called upon to stand in for others who were supposed to be on duty but who for various reasons needed to take time off.

After all the attempts to get permission failed, Nyakora admits that he still proceeded to church and reported to work in the evening. He was then informed that he had been discharged. He was also punished with a loss of six days salary. Nyakora also stated he was forced to do manual labor as punishment and ordered to do so on the Sabbath, but defied the orders and attended church on two more Sabbaths which resulted in his being locked up for 42 days. He believes the confinement and subsequent discharge from service were a violation of his rights and is demanding compensation. Nyakora also wants a declaration that the 42-day confinement with a salary cut were illegal.

Nyakora's lawsuit also asks for a court order that he be entitled to pension because he was willing to serve until his retirement and was discharged unlawfully. The Kenya Defense Force is expected respond to the allegations before the court dates are set.
The Seventh-day Adventist denomination in Kenya has nearly 700,000 members in 8,300 congregations. It is estimated that the number of Kenyans who identify with the Adventist faith may be as high as two million. Sociologist Ron Lawson reported in 1994 that more than a million individuals had told the official census they were Adventist adherents.

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Leader of the Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea Expelled by the National Government

Submitted: Jun 11, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team
Pastor Manuel García-Cáceres, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea, has been arrested and deported from the small nation on the west coast of Africa. His deportation was announced in a news bulletin released on Friday (June 7) by the Adventist Review. He was arrested on May 22 and forced to leave the country the next day.

A missionary from Spain, García-Cáceres has been president of the Equatorial Guinea Mission for about a year. He left the nation without being able to say goodbye to his wife and daughter, both of whom were waiting to return to Spain for a reunion with García, according to the bulletin on Friday.

García-Cáceres was summoned to the nation’s Justice Ministry on May 21 and accused of bringing “special equipment for satellite communications” into the country. He was alleged to have to equipment “to report outside of the country ‘internal information’ of Equatorial Guinea.” Officials accused García-Cáceres of having equipment that could elude Guinean security services detection, and thus was deemed “a danger to national security.”

Someone had informed authorities that legally-imported FM broadcasting equipment was the allegedly illegal “satellite equipment.” Police then searched the pastor’s home and office, finding only one piece of electronics. “The single object they found similar to what the detractors described was a radio FM transmitter, donated by the Adventist church in Villajoyosa, in Spain’s Alicante province,” Torres reported. “The FM radio equipment was correctly reported at customs when imported from Spain.” At the time of the police search, the gear had not been unpacked or used in the country.

The next day, May 22, García-Cáceres was again summoned to the Justice Ministry, and this time ordered to pay a fine of one million Central African Francs or approximately $2,000. Despite paying the fine, authorities jailed the pastor that day. On May 23, Spain’s ambassador to Equatorial Guinea visited García-Cáceres in prison and that evening he was taken to the airport in Malabo, with his passport returned to him once the plane took off.

The events illustrate the dangers still confronting missionary workers in some parts of the world, said John Graz, director of public affairs and religious liberty for the General Conference. “The deportation of Pastor Manuel García-Cáceres after 13 months of good service for his church and for the people of Equatorial Guinea, shows how fragile religious freedom and the rule of law are in some parts of the world,” Graz told the Adventist Review. “Missionaries who bring their knowledge and expertise for the good of people are [sometimes] subject to the will of political authorities, without any regards for the ministry.
they give, or for the international protection of human rights.”

The first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries arrived in Equatorial Guinea in 1960. The work was interrupted by the political situation in 1972, but resumed two years later, according to the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia. As of 2011, there are 19 Seventh-day Adventist churches and 2,453 baptized members in the nation.

Equatorial Guinea has one of the worst human rights records in the world, consistently ranking among the "worst of the worst" in Freedom House's annual survey of political and civil rights.[10] Reporters Without Borders ranks President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo among its "predators" of press freedom.[11] The US Trafficking in Persons Report, 2012, states "Equatorial Guinea is a source and destination for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking." The report rates Equatorial Guinea as a "Tier 3" country, the lowest (worst) ranking: "Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so."[12]

Equatorial Guinea, one of Africa’s poorest and smallest nations, was a colony of Spain until 1968. The first elected president became a dictator, created a single-party state and presided over a reign of terror in which a third of the population was killed or fled. He committed genocide, closed down churches and presided over the economy's collapse. A coup d'état in 1979 deposed Macias Nguema and he was executed.

The constitution of Equatorial Guinea, written with help from the United Nations in 1982, gives current President Teodoro Obiang extensive powers, including the right to make laws by decree, dissolve the elected parliament, and serve as commander in chief of the armed forces. Under Obiang, the basic infrastructure of Equatorial Guinea has improved, with more than 80 percent of the roads paved and ports and airports being built. However, when a British parliamentary group toured the country as guests of the president in 2011, The Guardian newspaper reported that very few of Equatorial Guinea's citizens seem to be benefiting from improvements. The Obiang regime is an ally of the United States. During a recent UN General Assembly, he urged the U.S. to strengthen cooperation in Africa. U.S. President Barack Obama posed for an official photograph with President Obiang.

There are nearly 3,000 Adventist adherents among a population of about 700,000 in Equatorial Guinea. There are 19 local churches and only three credentialed clergy, with no schools or health institutions. There has been an exceptional growth rate among Adventists in recent years, averaging nearly five percent each year.

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News Briefs June 14, 2013

Submitted: Jun 13, 2013

By AT News Team

Adventist Today regularly provides a summary of stories that we have decided do not require in-depth reporting, but our readers may want to be aware of:

Two Adventist secondary school are celebrating anniversaries. Valley View Adventist Academy in Arroyo Grande, California, celebrated it's 100th anniversary with a groundbreaking for expanded facilities, reported the Santa Maria Times. At a time when some Adventist secondary schools are closing, the enrollment of this school in central California is increasing and a new classroom wing is being added. Katcho Achadjian, an elected lawmaker from the state legislature, and Mayor Tony Ferrara participated in the ceremonies along with children from the school and church administrators. A 50th anniversary event was held last weekend at Espirito Santo Adventist Academy in Colatina, Brazil. The local mayor spoke at that event as well, according to Adventist News Network (ANN), the Seventh-day Adventist denomination's official news service.

Two Adventist hospitals in California found themselves dealing with local politics this week. Dr. Richard Ellsworth, chief of staff at Adventist Medical Center in Hanford, appeared before the Kings County board of supervisors and disagreed with a report from the county's public health director, Keith Winkler, a week earlier that led to a vote to close the county's reproductive health clinic. Winkler had told the elected officials he reports to that Adventist Medical Center was willing to take over the patients which the county is dumping. "Not so, said Ellsworth," reported The Sentinel newspaper. "Adventist officials are still in negotiations and haven't made any promises." In Glendale an anti-smoking activist that was fired months ago by Glendale Adventist Hospital has gone back to Federal court after Judge Dolly Gee dismissed his lawsuit for lack of evidence, according to the Glendale News-Press. He previously accused three elected council members in the City of Glendale of pressuring the hospital to fire him after he spoke out against a deal they made to reduce restrictions on smoking in restaurants. Now is focusing only on one politician, Councilman Ara Najarian. Two weeks ago the judge also ordered him to settle his claims against the hospital through an arbiter.

Two organizations of Adventist academics have announced their annual meeting agendas for the fall of 2013. The new organization of Adventists who teach philosophy issued a call for scholarly papers to be presented at its November 21 meeting in Baltimore. The topic is "Essentialism: Adventism and Questions of Race and Gender" and interested scholars can get more information about how to submit a proposal at http://adventistphilosophy.org. The Association of Adventist Forums is meeting September 6-8 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Its theme is "A Third Way: Beyond the Conservative/Liberal Divide to a Christian Identity Refreshed by Interfaith Dialogue." Speakers will include Evangelical writer and activist Brian McLaren; Samir Selmanovic, the Adventist minister who founded Faith House in New York City; William Johnsson, retired editor of the Adventist Review; Gordon Bietz, president of Southern Adventist University; and Lisa Diller, historian at SAU.
**Adventist hospitals continue to win awards for excellence and quality care.** On Monday (June 10), Adventist Health's Aspire Orthopedic Institute in Portland, Oregon, was given the top certification for joint replacement surgery. On Tuesday (June 11), Adventist Health System (AHS), which includes 44 hospitals in the South and Midwest, was recognized with the Gallup Great Workplace Award. The award is based on "the most rigorous workplace research ever conducted," reported the San Marcos Daily Record, a Texas newspaper. AHS has 79,000 employees, the vast majority of whom are not members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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No Man’s Land

Submitted: Jun 13, 2013
By Harry Banks

This week I wrote an evaluation for the CEO of a nonprofit agency which serves as a safety net for our community. As I was poring through the minutes, reports, financials and other documents, I ran across a line from our Chief Executive's annual report in November.

A Little Background

As part of this agency's outreach it offers the only nationally certified emergency domestic violence shelter in our state. In addition they have several related services which offer interventions for batterers and domestic violence prevention for men and women. In speaking of these services he said that we were building a bridge through “No Man’s Land” for victims ... A bridge to “support, productivity, strong relationships and self-respect.”

No Man's Land

As I have watched some of the conflict reported in some of the articles and comments in Adventist Today, and watched the conflict in my home church and conference, it seems that we may be experiencing our own kind of “no man’s land.”

I once had two friends. (Some of my acquaintances might ask me how I got that many. You notice I didn’t call those acquaintances "friends.") I once had two friends who found themselves at extreme odds with each other. Since the environment for our friendship had been a clinical supervision course and I had managed to reach advanced standing in the certification process ... (Hmm, but let's not digress.) my two friends decided that I should mediate their issues. I should probably mention that one of these two individuals was the clinical supervisor for the program.

Talk about a “No Man’s Land.” I felt like I was out in no man’s land while they lobbed charges, counter charges, accusations, and general vitriol at each other. I was thinking, I could lose both friends at one stroke! Yeah! Somehow it all worked out.

"A bridge through no man’s land” got me to thinking. What kind of bridges am I building for the people who have been placed in my life? I teach at a college and this spring I saw students graduate who had overcome severe odds, complex impediments to success. And one with the most impediments graduated with honors! One day one of the business staff came charging into my office and announced with direct firmness, “You are changing lives.” She went on to document the indications of success that were appearing in the life of one of my students. Hmm ... Had I built some kind of bridge? But compared to a bridge from domestic violence, maybe not so much.

Another friend of mine is a nurse for the Department of Corrections. I often think that he has an opportunity to build bridges through no man’s land. Yet another friend carries out a prison ministry and reports some of the purest faith he has seen anywhere is found in his time spent with prisoners. That sure sounds like a bridge being built.

So I guess my question is this; What no man’s land is God asking you and me to venture into? And no matter what no man’s land we find ourselves in, what kind of bridges are we to build?
Victims

Some of my students and coworkers have experienced domestic violence first hand. When I did my advanced degree work, I interviewed people who sat at the business end of a rifle for years until their arm went numb or others who endured domestic stress until they physically lost their sight. One of my friends told me that during a certain period in her life whenever her children heard her and her husband start to argue, her son would start packing a pillow case because he knew they would be leaving home in state custody. As I get to know these friends better they gradually let me know how difficult it is for them to develop trust. They tell me how important it is to be very cautious and careful to avoid any appearance or tone of coercion.

One of the most haunting pieces of Scripture for me is from Isaiah 42 where “my servant” is being described. Most preachers seem to like to preach from the “cry aloud” verses, but this passage also says, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.” (Verse 2) And then comes the haunting part ... “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.” (Verse 3)

It’s that “smoking flax shall he not quench” that gets me. Really!? Here in Alaska we camped for a year or so while we started construction on a log home. In some of those early weeks we felt so uptown when we had a tarp overhead to protect our fire from the rain. Some days a smoking flax would have never had a chance. Poof ... Snuff ... Done ... Out!

Quenched

When I see all the attempts at spiritual coercion, the spiritual violence that we practice on each other, I think, How can we not help but crush, snuff out smoldering faith?

And what is “my servant” in Isaiah about? Isaiah says “my Servant” is given for a light to the Gentiles; “To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” (Verse 7)

Nearly every time I sit with this Isaiah 42 passage it seems there is a Divine grace that cares for victims, with such gentleness, such deliberateness that any spark of faith will not be crushed, or quenched.

So What Am I Looking For?

First of all, I’m not sure. I’m not sure why it seems important to share this. Maybe it’s because it gives me hope. Hope that when I feel beat up, about ready to give up hope, there is this vision of even a smoking flax surviving because of the care of the Servant in Isaiah. And he seems to want to build bridges from blindness, from prison ... to freedom, to fulfillment, to healing.

So what am I looking for in this piece? I’d like to hear about bridges through no man’s land that are being built. I’d like to hear about victims that are emerging into a land of support, faith, and redemption (personal and spiritual). Tell me there is something beyond “no man’s land.”

_______________________ Join in the discussion:

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How Do Clergy Observe the Sabbath?

Submitted: Jun 13, 2013

By Monte Sahlin

Last week Alban Institute, a research organization and resource center affiliated with the Episcopal Church, published in its regular newsletter a piece on the Sabbath. It indicates the increasing interest in the topic among Protestant clergy and others. And it highlights some of the ways that other Christians approach the topic differently than do many Adventists.

Which day of the week is the Sabbath is never mentioned in the Alban newsletter. The focus is entirely about the quality of the Sabbath experience. Listening to the recent interview about the 150th anniversary of the General Conference on NPR, I heard a similar perspective from the Baptist historian who joined Dr. David Trim, director of the GC office of Archives, Statistics and Research, in the interview. The Baptist scholar readily admitted that Seventh-day Adventists are correct about Saturday being the seventh day identified in the Bible as the Sabbath.

The Alban newsletter reported on group interviews with support groups for clergy. One of the issues that the researchers asked the groups about was Sabbath-keeping. They asked if the time spent by pastors in these support groups was experienced by them as a "Sabbath" or time of rest. They reported "a debate not only about whether the group time is Sabbath but what Sabbath is, period. Participants identified elements of Sabbath in their time together: It separates them from their work routine. No one is judging anyone else. ... Others hold back from calling it Sabbath because it involves the hard work of exploring and understanding" the topics under discussion.

The authors pointed out that the two versions of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy root the Sabbath in two different foundational ideas. In Exodus "the Sabbath command is warranted because God rested on the seventh day of creation. ... In Deuteronomy the command is warranted by" God's freeing of His people from slavery. Adventist theologian Samuele Bacchiocchi has written about this, pointing out that the Sabbath is both a memorial of creation and a celebration of social justice, but most Adventists have sidestepped this analysis and focused instead on the old fight about "which day" and who changed it.

"It may be that no other commandment is more difficult to translate in our culture than Sabbath observance," the Alban newsletter stated. "Translating Sabbath from an ancient agrarian culture into a diverse postmodern one is complicated. While Sabbath is essential ... it is important to honor the complexity of what seems to be a simple command to rest. How could a
command to rest be so challenging?" Nowhere are these issues more clear than for pastors. "The Sabbath is the day I worked the hardest," one pastor friend told me long ago. Imagine if your pastor announced, "I am going to stop working on the Sabbath. You will need to get someone else to preach and lead worship from here on out." Would your elders and church board petition the conference to fire the pastor, or step forward to cover the functions needed?

I still remember a man that I once gave Bible studies to. When we got to the Sabbath, he challenged me. "Do you get paid to preach on Sabbath?" I confessed that it was my understanding that if I stopped preaching on Sabbath it was likely that my paychecks would stop arriving. He replied that the same thing would happen to him and asked, "If it is OK for you to work on Sabbath, why can't I work on Sabbath? Is my job less acceptable in God's eyes?" He was a police officer who had night shifts, patrolling the city, keeping the peace and assisting in emergencies. Once every three weeks it included a Friday night. Was I ready to advocate that the city, or at least he, should take the view that God would care for things on the Sabbath?

Another Adventist theologian, Fritz Guy has admonished denominational leaders that it is really not biblical Sabbath-keeping to schedule training seminars, rallies and similar events on the Sabbath. I remember reviewing my notes from college classes that I took from Dr. Guy when I was part of a conference staff committee trying to figure out how to keep people occupied during a seminar until sundown, so we could open the book table and make sales after the Sabbath on Saturday night. I was uneasy, but I confess I did not come up with a good solution that accommodated both the Sabbath and our need to sell books and distribute information.

"Our clergy participants were in a hurry," the researchers reported in the Alban newsletter. "They had long to-do lists and they were pursued by guilt that told them, 'You're not doing enough!' They led congregations that were saturated in expectations of production and progress." Are Sabbath-keeping Adventists less interested in productivity and less focused on progress? Are we comfortable with a slower pace and lower expectations? A young man explained to me once why he had decided to stop attending the Adventist Church, although his father and grandfather had both been pillars in his home church. "It's a workaholic club."

Do you savor the Sabbath? Do you put too many unnecessary expectations on the people around you, in terms of how they dress, spend their time and rest? Do Adventists actually have, in practice (not theory), an exceptional quality of life on the Sabbath? Can people such as the participants in this Alban Institute study come amongst us and taste, smell and see a real qualitative difference about our life together on the Sabbath? Or do most Adventist churches simply experience a copy of what happens on Sunday in most Protestant churches?

I am asking these difficult questions not because I have answers, and certainly not because I want in any way to undermine or downplay the Sabbath. I am asking because it seems to me that all around us (at least in North America and Europe) there is growing interest in the concept of the Sabbath by other Christians, and I am concerned that we are missing a Divine opportunity because we have allowed the quality of this jewel to become clouded because we have fallen into ruts and are not making it relevant to the contemporary world. Now, I know many will jump to the conclusion that what I mean by "relevant" is lowering the standards. Surprise! This is a plea to raise the standard and make our practice of the Sabbath a richer experience and perhaps a simpler one.


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Motivated by Love

By Mark Gutman

"Love" is not enough as a motive. I realize that it is widely considered to be the best motive, but something about that concerns me. Wait a minute, I hear you splutter. How can anyone take issue with love as a motive? That’s tantamount to running down motherhood or the flag. Hear (or read) me out before you write this off.

What about all those Bible texts (and quotations and stories and . . .)! John 14:15 (NASB) quotes Jesus: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” In Philippians 1:15-17, Paul refers to two groups who preach Christ. One group preaches out of selfish ambition, but the other group preaches out of love. 2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV (NLT): “Christ’s love compels (or controls) us.” 1 Corinthians 13 says that love outranks faith or hope.

Love is certainly a better motive than hate or fear, partly because those negative emotions have such undesirable side effects. But if the hate or fear or love ever subsides, actions motivated by such emotions often do too. How many former Adventists or former Christians have taken up smoking once they left the church? If they didn’t smoke because they loved Jesus (or the church), their motive didn’t have much staying power once the love faded.

Then again, love can involve a willingness to lay aside common thinking and judgment in order to do what someone else wants. 1 Kings 13 relates the story of a prophet who was fooled by someone else’s claim to be a prophet who was delivering a message from God. If we snap to attention and quit thinking as soon as we hear “God said this,” we risk being gullible. Con-men depend on people’s willingness to act with little or no evidence. The Bereans of Acts 17 were praised because they didn’t accept Paul’s teaching without doing some investigation.

Love can be a beneficial motive. It can provide motivation when I’m not so interested in my own welfare. For instance, if I don’t take care of my health, my family will suffer, so I guess I’ll work a little harder to keep from becoming a medical nuisance when I’m older. Even people who are not all that interested in exercise or getting enough sleep may actually make a little effort in such an area because of love. Maybe I exercise because my spouse wants company while she exercises. Someone seeing me running by on the street may give me credit for being devoted to exercise, not realizing that actually I’m just trying to make my wife happy.
Love is a good motive, but it often is not enough; it leaves us too easily ignorant or unthinking. I remember one missionary’s telling me about a country where he worked where church members knew not to drink tea or coffee. The church members may well have been told that if they loved Jesus they would avoid tea and coffee. But apparently the problem was not caffeine, because the coffee-avoiding members drank lots of Coca-Cola. Perhaps the love that led members to refuse to drink a certain beverage did not encourage investigation that might lead them to understand physical (not just spiritual) benefits of avoiding tea and coffee.

We can search the Bible for guidance, but few practices can be conclusively proved as right or wrong from the Bible. Someone who does not do X may want to convince you that you should not do X either. Warning you that you may burn in hell is losing some popularity as a method of persuasion, but many religious people have no concerns about using love as a motivation. So you’re told that you should not do X because Jesus does not want you to do it, and you will not do it if you love Jesus. That argument still does not pin down that Jesus does not want you to do X; it only pins down that your would-be persuader is convinced that Jesus thinks that. So the proponent is in effect saying that you won’t do that if you love her. Whatever. If I really am going to avoid doing X, I’d like to understand the benefit of avoiding it. In other words, why does Jesus think that doing X is not a good idea?

Related to the love-motive idea is “God said it, and I believe it, and that settles it for me.” People with that motto used to believe that the earth was flat and at the center of the universe. Eventually science showed that the earth is not flat, and that the earth is one of a few planets that revolve around our sun, and our solar system is part of a much larger galaxy that is part of . . . . So the motto would be better stated as “I think the Bible means this, and I believe it,” because understanding of the Bible often changes as science or society changes. Bible believers for centuries had no problem revering the Bible while treating women or minorities as inferior on a regular basis. Women and minorities fare better in many Bible-believing churches now, but society provided those groups with rights before many churches did. Love that was guided by the Bible didn’t seem to cause pangs of conscience for mistreating others. You might see why many unbelievers were not impressed by the Bible-believers who did what they did and claimed they were motivated by love.

You mean that the Christian life is just a calculated strategy? Live the way that seems most logical? Come to think of it, that’s what I’m advocating. Not in the sense that I recommend that someone propose to his girlfriend with, “I’d like to marry you, but not because I love you. It’s that I’ve figured out that you and I would make a very efficient team.” When I act because of investigation and understanding, though, I’m more likely to be acting freely, rather than because someone else has asked me to. Jesus words in John 8:32, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” seem to describe this. I don’t avoid Coca-Cola because it’s somebody else’s rule. I avoid it because I believe I’ll stay healthier if I do. If I avoid it only because another church member told me I shouldn’t drink it, I’m not really free. (Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 are for another column.)

Summing up, love is not a bad motive. But people claiming it have used it as an excuse not to investigate, leaving themselves to be taken in by the inconsistent or nonsensical (drink one caffeine but avoid another), or the unkind (worship in church but keep women and minorities “in their place”). But it can also provide a motive when we don’t want to do what we know is best (healthful living, so we’re not a burden to our loved ones).

So don’t quit loving. But don’t use love for God or Jesus or anyone else as an excuse to quit studying. Blind obedience suits cult leaders, but is not a fitting lifestyle for those who follow a God who says, “let’s talk this over together” (Isaiah 1:18, CJB) and “test everything that is said; hold on to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, NLT).
“Love” can mean many things, and is often a catchall explanation of motive because we don’t know what else to say. But even actual love for God or a person can leave us with some disadvantages, as the column goes on to explain.

Sorry to pick on smoking, but it makes the point quickly. See my column, “Squeaky Wheels” (October, 2012), on the subject of health.
I Am His Joy

By Robin Sanchez

I Am His Joy

Created for His own pleasure.

I am my Father’s joy,

I am His heart’s desire,

His precious and honored treasure.

I am the apple of His eye,

His delight, His love am I.

I am the song that fills His heart.

I am His joy.

I am my Father’s joy.

Created to seek His face,

To hear the whisper of His sweet voice,
And long for His warm embrace.

And for His own to be enough.

He wants me to thirst for Him.

His desire is for my love,

I am His joy.

I am my Father’s joy.

He’s where my soul belongs,

The center of my wildest dreams,

The inspiration for my heart’s true song.

He wants to make me completely whole;

Wants me to search with my heart and soul,

Till I am His, and He is mine.

I am His joy.
Laila Mickelwait received a BA in Political Science & International Relations from the University of California Riverside and a Master of Public Diplomacy degree from the Annenberg School of Communications and the Dornsife School of International Relations at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in conjunction with the U.S. Department of State. She has spent time working with Habitat for Humanity, the United Nations (in Geneva, Switzerland), the World Federation of United Nations Associations Millennium Project in Washington DC, and the National Journalism Center in Washington DC. In 2006 Laila became keenly aware of the need to practically serve those suffering from poverty, disease and injustice and she founded New Reality International (NRI), a non-profit global missions organization. Laila subsequently joined Exodus Cry, an international anti-slavery organization, as the Director of Awareness and Prevention and later became the Manager of Policy and Public Affairs. Laila can be contacted at lmickelwait@newrealityinternational.org.

Jeff: You and your husband are involved with New Reality International. Tell me about this nonprofit.

Laila: We founded New Reality International back in 2007. Before that time I was deciding what I wanted to do with my life and I was really focused on being what the world would call “successful.” I was living in Southern California and I wanted to be an entertainment contract lawyer in Hollywood, make a lot of money and live in Malibu. I had a powerful encounter with Jesus at that time, during my college years, and became a new person. God really started leading me in a completely different direction, and as I sought Him and really began to devour His word in scripture everything changed. I started to read the words He spoke and to take them literally. I felt like He was speaking powerfully to me that He wasn't saying these things for people to contemplate as some abstract spiritual principles but He actually meant what He said when He told us to care for the homeless, the poor, to give water to the thirsty, to fight for the oppressed and to release the captives.
He wasn't just saying that for people to have a nice spiritual idea to ponder, but he really actually meant it. So I took that and asked God, “What do you want me to do?” He led me to found New Reality International. We began doing medical and dental outreach, because as most Adventist young people do, I had a lot of friends in the healthcare professions. We gathered a group of friends with the same heart, and we started going out and doing outreach projects around the world to the poorest of the poor, looking for the most vulnerable, those suffering from extreme poverty without any help.

Not long after our founding in 2009, God led us to Haiti. This was before the earthquake happened. Before the earthquake, Haiti wasn't really on the map for most people. It is so close to us, but it's such a world apart from what we experience here. The desperate poverty and the extreme oppression is something that I haven't even seen in any of my travels in Asia, Africa or in Central and South America. And so we began working there and that developed into a project that we're very excited about now. We are currently building a sustainable Christian children's village for orphans, abandoned, exploited, and restavek children. Restavek children are child household slaves in Haiti, a very common practice. These children are physically, emotionally and sexually abused. According to UNICEF, 15 percent of Haiti’s population are orphaned children and a 2002 study for UNICEF found that there were 173,000 restavek children in Haiti, more than 8 percent of the population between the ages of 5 and 17. There is a very very strong correlation between orphaned and slave children in Haiti.

And we're not just focused on Haiti. We're beginning with these children's villages in Haiti and eventually we see us developing them all over the world. We’re also still doing medical and dental outreach to other places in the world. Regularly, we're visiting Nigeria and Guyana. We just started reaching out to Myanmar/Burma last year.

**Jeff:** Does the medical outreach still involve recruiting medical volunteers?

**Laila:** Yes. Since we do these on a regular basis, we're always inviting new people to get involved. And we not only have a New Reality International in the U.S., but we also have a Canadian branch, so Canadians can also get involved.

**Jeff:** Did the earthquake play any role in changing your focus in Haiti?

**Laila:** The earthquake brought a great deal of international attention to the nation. People from all over the world began contacting us to get involved. Right after the earthquake we were getting thousands of visitors to our website everyday and our volunteer database grew in a matter of weeks from a handful of people to literally thousands who wanted to get involved. Through that process several key people joined our organization who are in leadership roles today. It
didn’t take long for the world’s attention to turn from Haiti, but God brought us some very key people who are in it for the long haul. After the earthquake we continued our healthcare outreaches, provided emergency shelter, food and supplies, and then transitioned into building permanent homes for families that lost their homes in the earthquake. We always knew there was more God had for us to do in Haiti and we had been waiting on God to show us more of what the next steps were.

It took some time, but we got the confirmation we needed when we encountered a group of seven Haitian Christians in the north of Haiti. We didn't even know that most of them were Adventists when we first met, but later we found out more about them and found out it was a group of Adventists. These Christians saw the children in their own community being abandoned, living on the street, orphaned and in these restavek situations. There were no other organizations or outside help and the children were being left to fend for themselves. The seven said, “God, what do you want us to do?” The same thing God spoke to me when I first founded New Reality, God also spoke to them: “I didn't just say those things in scripture. I meant them and I meant them for everybody. Even though you're poor, that doesn't exclude you from obeying my word.”

So out of their own extreme poverty, they got together, seven of them, and they gathered as many children as they could and put them into a little rented shack, all they could afford. It had a leaky roof and a mud floor. Each day of the week, one of the seven would be responsible for providing food for the 25 kids they squeezed into the small space. And they did this for a long time, but after the earthquake there was an extreme rise in food prices and many more children were flooding in who needed care.

They got to a point where they could not buy food for the kids anymore, so they were having to make a mixture of hot water and salt just to satiate the children’s hunger. They got to a point of severe desperation and they didn’t know where to turn. So they decided to pray and ask God to intervene. They got all of the children together, and they prayed and fasted with the children for seven days. And then on the seventh day, there was a young man in Port-au-Prince who had just been baptized. He didn't know these people. He'd never been to this village before. But he woke up early that morning, and the Holy Spirit spoke to him to get on a bus and cross the mountains up to this village in the north—a 4 or 5-hour hot and uncomfortable bus ride in the dirt—to find the poorest orphanage he could find, and to help them. He had no money himself, so he had to borrow money to get the bus and had no idea how he could help but he obeyed. Since this was the only orphanage in the town it wasn’t hard for him to find.

He ended up arriving at the orphanage on the seventh day of their fast. This young man was so moved by their desperate plight, he did the only thing he knew to do. He immediately called an Australian couple he met in Port-au-Prince, and they came right away. They got their local church to help pay for food, education and to get the children out of the dirt and into a more
decent rented house. At the same time the government actually gave these seven Haitians seven acres of land to build a permanent home for the now 80-plus children who needed care.

I ended up in a miraculous encounter with the Australian couple and the seven Haitians, and God confirmed that New Reality International was the organization that was to build a sustainable children’s village on the seven acres of land. So that is why we call it Project 7—seven Seventh-day Adventist Christians prayed and fasted for seven days and were given seven acres of land for the orphaned children in their care. We can see God moving powerfully already through this project and we are very excited about the future. We shouldn’t be surprised that God has been miraculously blessing the project.

**Jeff:** For you personally, what is most exciting about NRI?

**Laila:** To me right now, I'm most excited about the project that we're doing in Haiti because I feel that it's something that we're going to be able to duplicate around the world. Being sustainable is something that we want to help the local people develop independence. We are integrating agriculture for a healthy sustainable food source, solar power, wells for water, vocational training, and income generating small businesses. Most importantly, the thing that motivates me beyond sustainability or charity, is that I feel convicted that God feels passionately about caring for the orphans. He says in scripture over and over and over to care for the widow and orphan, and He means it every time. And the reason He says this, I believe, is because they are the most vulnerable. Their covering of fathers and husbands are taken away from them. God knows how vulnerable the orphans and the widows are to exploitation and the hardship that they face.

We have the opportunity to be able to directly help the orphans have a loving Christ-centered place to live—a family. It's not going to be an institution. It's going to be little homes where the children actually have parents that live with them. These children can grow up in a Christian environment where they know God, and God can actually father them and heal all those places of rejection, all those issues that you'd have if you were abandoned and abused. That is the most exciting thing to me because I know that it is on God's heart. He is a father, and He wants to care for His children.

**Jeff:** If people want to support or get involved with New Reality International, what can they do?

**Laila:** First, they can go to the website—newrealityinternational.org. For our health missions, we need all kinds of health care volunteers. For the building of the children's village, we need specialists who can help us in areas like electrical, engineering, architecture. And prayer support. We believe so strongly in the power of prayer, that nothing is going to happen unless God moves and makes it happen. And of course we need financial support. You can contact us about any of
this and apply to volunteer through the website.

**Jeff:** You are a Sabbath-keeping Christian with a background in the Adventist Church. What in this upbringing prepared you to do the work you are now leading?

**Laila:** I think that one of the most important things that has been instilled in me is a reverence and appreciation for the Sabbath rest. When you look at Isaiah 58, those of us who work against injustice are all so familiar with the verses about fighting oppression—taking off that yoke of oppression, feeding the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your home. But many people don’t realize that Isaiah 58 concludes with the commandment to rest. As important to God as fighting injustice and oppression is Sabbath rest. God knows that you will burn out and you won't be able to do it long-term unless you enter into the Sabbath. I see a lot of people who get involved in fighting injustice and go into the darkness of poverty and disease and trafficking, and get burned out. You can get cynical. It can just be overwhelming sometimes.

That is one of the reasons God wants us to delight in the Sabbath day, to take that time to rest and to connect and abide in Him. Everything must come from that place of rest in Him. When you're coming from that place you can be so much more effective and actually do it for life, where if you're not doing that you can get burned out very quickly.

We need to make the relationship and the rest in God the first priority, not the needs of the poor or the injustice permeating every sphere of society. I heard someone speak about William Wilberforce, the man who abolished the historical slave trade in England. The speaker said that William Wilberforce's journals were all devotional. You would imagine that his thought life and his journals would be all about his fight against slavery, but they weren't. They were about his relationship with God. I thought that was a powerful insight. In the life of William Wilberforce, it wasn't about the injustice or the need, it was about relationship and rest and abiding in God. And then fighting slavery was a manifestation of or natural outflow of that.