### NEWS

**Southern Adventist University Locked Down in a Security Threat:** Security teams locked down the campus of Southern Adventist University as alleged threats were made by a disgruntled student.

**How Adventists are Responding to Legalization of Marijuana in the U.S.:** Will Adventist Church restrooms of the future provide ashtrays for medical marijuana smokers seeking quick relief before heading upstairs to "High Church"?

**Are Adventist Leaders Abandoning Contemporary Cinema Version of Ellen White Classic?:** One of the most exciting and creative ventures in promoting the central message of "The Great Controversy" may be terminated by denominational headquarters, which holds the copyright.

**Adventists Die in Political Violence, Civil Unrest in Central African Republic:** Adventists have been drawn into the civil unrest and political violence in the Central African Republic with tragic consequences.

**The Millennial Generation & Adventist Faith: Feb. 15 Panel will Explore (UPDATE):** Dr. Jon Paulien will be the closing speaker with a summary perspective.

### OPINION

**Personal Testimony about Death, Cancer and Life:** Monte Sahlin eloquently reflects on his experience last year with the light of his life, Norma and her illness. It's a journey he now travels without her, as he turns to God and his children and their families for solace and hope.

**To Live without God for a Year?:** What if we could compartmentalize God and cart Him out the back doors of our lives? Lawrence Downing writes that the task may well nigh be impossible—still, at least one prominent Adventist has publicly stated his intention to try.

**Who’s Missing from Your List?:** Writer Mark Gutman decries our tendency to pray selfishly, for our own selves and for the success of those we love, and urges us to wrestle with God on behalf of our enemies.

**Fuzzy Logic and Forgiveness Math:** Jesus expanded the definition of true forgiveness by a factor of 70, and here Harry Banks reminds us that only those who literally throw in the Christian towel will fail in the math of forgiveness.
at the end of an event featuring five young adults who will share their experience with the Adventist Church. Paulien is the author of several scholarly papers and books related to this topic and dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University. Monte Sahlin, a veteran Adventist researcher and writer, will serve as moderator of the event and conduct an interview with Ryan Bell, a former Adventist minister who appeared recently on CNN and NPR and in the Washington Post and other newspapers across America after he announced that he would take a year to "try atheism." The event will start at 3 p.m. on Sabbath, February 15, 2014 at the Damazo Amphitheater in the Centennial Center, Loma Linda University.

FEATURES, POETRY & THE ARTS
(Open to all logged-in subscribers; to apply for a free 30-day subscription, click here)

Warren Walikonis Memorial Exercise Trail (FEATURE): Warren Walikonis, a "home-grown Montana boy," loved his active life, so when it ended prematurely, his family decided his memorial should be an active one. Mt. Ellis Academy, in Bozeman, Montana, is Walikonis' alma mater, and is now the proud possessor of a new fitness trail in the shadow of the mountains he loved....

Darkness to Light (POETRY & THE ARTS): Has the light from Isaiah shined into your darkness and are you reflecting it on to others? asks inspirational writer Debbonnaire Kovacs....

The Hummingbird (POETRY & THE ARTS): What lessons can a disoriented and discouraged hummingbird, trapped in a garage, teach us about the motivating power of freedom?....

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Southern Adventist University Locked Down in a Security Threat

By AT News Team, January 23, 2014

Southern Adventist University and Colledgated Academy near Chattanooga, Tennessee, were both locked down for security reasons Thursday afternoon, January 23. The Chattanooga Times Free Press reported that the lockdown alarm sounded in Brock Hall on the campus, and the university safety alert said it was not a drill. WRCB-TV said an email was sent to students and faculty: "This is not a test. We have executed a campus wide lock down. Campus Safety is investigating a potential threat. Please remain inside and away from windows until a sweep of the campus. Please hold all phone calls. We will send more information as it is available. This is not a test."

The television station transmitted pictures of local police and other agencies on both campuses. Police told WTVC-TV they had received a "credible off-campus threat" and had immediately locked down the university and other nearby Hamilton County schools. By early evening, Chattanooga police told the television station they had taken a "person of interest" into custody at the nearby YMCA.

Collegedale Police identified that man taken into custody as James Gaines, a former student at the University who made threats to use firearms and explosives on the campus and said he was on the way to the campus. The threats reportedly happened around noon and Gaines was not on campus at the time.

"As far as we know right now, the suspect was upset over some delayed paperwork and made a specific threat against the campus," said Collegedale Police officer Tonya Saddler. While police were trying to locate Gaines, they received reports of shots fired inside of Talge Hall, a men's dormitory on campus. Police say they also received 911 calls from students who said they believed Gaines was located inside the dormitory. In the end, police didn't find Gaines in the dorm and there was no evidence of a shooting.

Many students told reporters that all of this was overwhelming. "It's definitely unusual, nothing like that really happens around here ever and it's usually pretty quiet and all of a sudden the swat team shows up so it's a little scary," says SAU student Derek Schutter.

WDEF television Channel 12, the CBS affiliate in Chattanooga, reported that the campus re-opened about 2:30 p.m. when the threat was resolved. There was no danger to anyone on campus, according to authorities.

By early evening, the administration of SAU announced a special worship service for 6 p.m. in the Colledgated Church where information and a question and answer time will be held after a short devotional. Counselors will be available there for any students who wish to speak with someone regarding the incident. Counseling services are also being made available. The statement indicated that SAU was alerted to the threat by officials from Chattanooga State Community College and expressed gratitude to SAU’s Campus Safety and local police for their assistance in keeping the campus safe.

The university is owned and operated by the Southern Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It has an enrollment of about 3,000 students.
How Adventists are Responding to Legalization of Marijuana in the U.S.

By Adventist Today News Team, January 22, 2014

Marijuana has recently become legal in Colorado and Washington, and voters may legalize it in Alaska, Arizona, California and Oregon by the end of the year. That would mean that the entire west coast of the United States and some of those states have long permitted medical use of marijuana. How are Adventists relating to this wave of change?

Nearly three out of four Americans say they favor legalizing medical marijuana, according to a 2010 Pew Research Center survey. And 41 percent think all marijuana use should be legal, up from 35 percent in 2008 and 12 percent in a 1969 Gallup Poll.

The Adventist movement from its earliest days has taken a position against the use of alcohol and tobacco, which are common practices in many cultures. The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, in the chapter on church standards of behavior (page 140, 2010 edition) states, "we abstain from all forms of alcohol, tobacco, and addictive drugs." This is part of the commitment that each person makes when they are baptized into membership. In the chapter on "Discipline," among the 13 items for which a member may be kicked out or put under censure is "The use or manufacture of illicit drugs or the misuse of, or trafficking in, narcotics or other drugs."

When marijuana is legalized, is it still an "illicit" drug? Is off-label prescription by a physician "misuse" of a drug? When the language in the Church Manual was originally crafted in the 1930s, these questions were likely not discussed because today's regime for regulating various substances did not exist. At least, a quick search of the online archives of the denomination did not find such a discussion.

Seventh-day Adventists with cancer are using marijuana in places where medical marijuana is legal. The widow of an Adventist who died in 2012 from cancer that included tumors in the throat told Adventist Today that it was prescribed by one of his doctors to help him deal with the pain and the discomfort of chemotherapy. He was also using other "natural therapies," as well as conventional medical treatment. She said that she really did not like it, it made him "talkative ... silly," but "we grasped at everything."

This cancer patient used a liquid form of marijuana that was injected into his feeding tube as were other natural supplements. "I didn't like that it was in the house," the widow said. "I was afraid we'd get in trouble even with his license. But, if it helped him, then it was fine with me."

Did her husband consult his pastor when he was making a decision about using marijuana? "No. He didn't feel it was an ethical issue. For him, it was a need to feel better and hopefully help cure him."

It is clear that many other Adventists have had similar experiences. Adventist Today talked to a number of pastors across the country who said they had members who have used medical marijuana. "There is basically no biblical reference to this issue," said one pastor from a state where medical marijuana is legal. "People make these things religious [issues], when in reality, they are not." It is "only the opinions of people who need to draw lines and make boxes."
"If I was dealing with chronic pain, I don't think I would personally use it because I would want my mind clear," said another pastor, also in a state where it is legal. "But, if I were dying of cancer and dealing with the side effects of chemo, I think I might try it."

Another pastor stated, "If we start monitoring our peoples' medical treatments, then we either need to ... start monitoring them all ... or realize that it's largely none of our business." Many pastors questioned their expertise when it comes to talking to church members about substances prescribed by physicians as well as the appropriateness of intervening in this area.

At the same time Adventist experts on substance abuse expressed deep concerns on the topic. "If it is a medicine," said Dr. Duane McBride, director of the Institute for Prevention of Addictions at Andrews University, "it needs to be integrated into the medical distribution system. ... Would you grow your own penicillin on bread at home if you need an antibiotic?" He pointed out that some users of marijuana, especially adolescents, have terrible consequences.

Dr. Mihran Ask, a board-certified internist and Fellow of the American Society of Addiction Medicine who heads the Addiction Medicine Fellowship program at Loma Linda University, told Adventist Today that THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, has been available in pill form through pharmacies for a long time, but he believes it has limited usefulness. It may be useful in some cases with AIDS or cancer patients who are underweight and have little appetite, or rarely for chronic pain or dementia. "This does not require any change in the law."

He sees the push for medical marijuana as a "ploy" by those who seek the legalization of recreational use of marijuana. He also points out that most people do not know that marijuana commonly available in the 1960s had a half percent to a full one percent of THC while "marijuana has now been bred to 12 to 15 percent THC" making it more dangerous.

"We need to keep educating people about the reasons to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and recreational use of mind-altering legal substances regardless of what they are," a retired church administrator told Adventist Today. "But I hope we do not get into the business of using church discipline to deal with cancer patients who use marijuana with the supervision of a physician. That would not be Christ-like. People who are seriously ill need compassion, not discipline, even if they make what we believe to be bad decisions."

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Are Adventist Leaders Abandoning Contemporary Cinema Version of Ellen White Classic?

By AT News Team, January 23, 2014

*The Record Keeper* is an 11-part film series that premiered in October based on the primary theme from the book *The Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White, one of the cofounders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It uses at least two new approaches to film; distribution on the Web and a “Steampunk” genre, as Adventist Today reported last year.

Now there are indications that denominational leaders may be thinking of abandoning the project before it is released despite the positive response to it. Release of the series was delayed until February and Adventist Today has been told that it is at risk of being shut down. The denomination's General Conference (GC) owns the copyright to the series and so it is free to block its distribution before it starts or have it deformed through directed edits.

The film series is very likely the first use of “Steampunk” in communicating the Adventist message. “Steampunk” is a literary genre and design aesthetic originating in the CBS Television series from 1965 into 1969 entitled *The Wild, Wild West* and a 1999 Hollywood movie by the same name. It focuses on 19th century technology (the steam engine being the central piece) and a type of science fiction or alternative history. The most representative recent literary piece of this type is a novel, *The Anubis Gates* by Tim Power, according to the Web site [www.steampunk.com](http://www.steampunk.com).

Distribution of television dramas via the Web has emerged in the last couple of years and is becoming widespread with many major television channels maintaining web sites where viewers can see all of their programs. This may not be the first such programming by Adventists, although sources have told Adventist Today that it may be.

Principal photography began early last year by Big Puddle Films with funding from the GC as well as private donors, as reported by the official Adventist News Network (ANN) at the time. An independent youth ministry blog, [www.asabbathblog.com](http://www.asabbathblog.com), carried a link to a pilot episode of the series.

A blog has urged Adventists interested in encouraging creativity to write to Williams Costa, GC communication director, and urge the release of *The Record Keeper*. His Email address is costaw@gc.adventist.org.

"This situation presents a clear choice for denominational leaders," an Adventist academic who has taught courses on the media for many years told Adventist Today. "Are they really interested in communicating the Adventist message in contemporary contexts or is it more important to hold onto literary and artistic formats that are becoming outdated?"

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Adventists Die in Political Violence, Civil Unrest in Central African Republic

By AT News Team, January 21, 2014

News media have been reporting hundreds, perhaps thousands of people killed in the civil war that has broken out in the Central African Republic over the last few weeks. The Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, reported today that a number of Adventists are among the dead.

Emeryc Patrick Dalikouba (age 21), the son of an Adventist pastor, was gunned down on December 21 outside his father’s home. Pastor Jean J. Gueret, president of the Adventist Church in the country, said Dalikouba was “a young, vibrant man engaged in the movement of Adventist Youth.” Gueret said three other Adventist young adults were killed last April.

Adventists have not participated in the civil unrest between Christian and Muslim groups, Gueret said. Violence began in the former French colony in March a year ago after a mostly Muslim rebel coalition installed their leader, Michel Djotodia, as the country’s ruler. The move prompted attacks by Christian militia. More than 1,000 people have died just in the past six weeks, The New York Times has reported.

Since then, Djotodia stepped down earlier this month and a transitional parliament on Monday elected Catherine Samba-Panza, the major of the capital city of Bangui, as interim president, the nation’s first female head of state. More than 886,000 people have been displaced by the violence and some 86,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries, The Wall Street Journal has reported. The United Nations has designated the situation a humanitarian emergency.

“We are praying for the newly elected leadership of this country,” Gueret told ANN. “We are all wanting the violence to stop.” There are an estimated 20,000 Adventist adherents in the nation of approximately 4.6 million population. The denomination has about 50 congregations, but no institutions in the country.
Adventist Today


The Millennial Generation & Adventist Faith: Feb. 15 Panel will Explore

By Adventist Today News Team, January 16, 2014

A panel of 20-somethings from with a variety of relationships to and perspectives on Adventist faith will share their views on Sabbath, February 15, at 3 p.m. The event will be held in the Damazo Amphitheater in the Centennial Complex at Loma Linda University.

The speakers will include Alfredo Lee, Dr. Keisha McKenzie, Edgar Momplaisir, Pastor Courtney Ray and Syd Shook. There will also be time for questions from the audience. Moderator for the panel will be Ryan Bell, a board member for the AT Foundation. Monte Sahlin, a veteran researcher and executive director of the AT Foundation, will share a summary.

Alfredo Lee was born in Mexico to an Adventist family and immigrated to Los Angeles, California, sharing the immigrant experience of many in his generation of Adventists. He served as a pianist every Sabbath for his father's congregations until he left home for college. He identifies himself as a mystic and a queer man of color, and works for a child advocacy organization in Los Angeles.

Dr. Keisha McKenzie is originally from London and attended Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica before completing a PhD at Texas Tech University. She is engaged in research about the way scientific information is used in government communications, civic participation and organizational development. She is a consultant to nonprofit organizations, public sector groups and educational institutions. She worships both with a Seventh-day Adventist church and a Quaker group and cohosts weekly Twitter chats on religion.

Edgar N. Momplaisir is a writer and film director from northern California. He was born into an Adventist family in New York City and attended Adventist schools for most of his life. He is expecting to graduate from Pacific Union College in June with a BA degree in Film and Television.

Pastor Courtney Ray was first introduced to the Adventist faith as a student in Adventist school. She is associate pastor at the Tamarind Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in Compton, California. She completed an undergraduate pre-medicine program and later studied in the seminary at Andrews University. She has served as a pastor at Adventist churches in Baltimore, Maryland, and Hanford, California, as well as completing a master's degree in neuroscience and psychology at Loma Linda University.

Syd Shook joined the Adventist Church in 2010. Since then her church home has been the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church where she has served an elder and staff assistant. She is currently a graduate student at Fuller Theological Seminary and has worked in faith-based international development organizations for several years. She lives with her husband, the poet David Shook, in the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles.

A recent research summit convened by the denomination's General Conference revealed that more than a third of the people baptized in the Adventist Church over the past 50 years later dropped out. Several surveys have shown that about half of the children raised in Adventist families have disconnected from the Church by their mid-20s. The widely-held idea that the Adventist dropout problem is largely related to recent converts has proved to be a myth. It seems to have a stronger correlation with "second generation" church members.
The AT Foundation has organized this event not only to help Adventists gain a clearer understanding of inter-generational faith dynamics, but also to celebrate 20 years of publication of the independent news source. The first volume of the journal was published in 1993 and with 2013 it completes 20 volumes. It has grown into a multi-media operation with Web, Email and Facebook editions alongside the print magazine and book publishing activities.

No pre-registration is required to attend the event. No attendance fee will be charged, although a freewill offering will be collected. Questions can be directed to atoday@atoday.org by Email by phone at (503) 826-8600.

It is cosponsored by the Adventist Today Foundation and the humanities program of the university's School of Religion. It will be open to any interested individual or group.

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Personal Testimony about Death, Cancer and Life

January 22, 2014

“We haven’t read anything by you recently,” a friend e-mailed me a couple of weeks ago. There is a simple reason. The last year has easily been the worst of my entire life and it has been painful labor for me to write this piece. Hopefully it is not my last. My wife, Norma, died October 9 and her funeral was the day before our 39th wedding anniversary. It did not come as a shock. She had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer more than a year earlier and by the spring of last year our two daughters had told me privately, “Dad, Mom is not going to survive this.”

I could not come to terms with that reality. I acknowledged that the prospect was bad, but in my heart I held onto the hope that something would turn things around. Late in the summer, the oncologist told me, “It is only a matter of time.” Norma was accumulating fluid around her lungs and it was drained again and again, only to return more rapidly than the last time.

Cancer is a terrible, terrible evil. Too many of my readers know this from personal experience. Ovarian cancer is a particular evil because so little is known about what causes it. There are no reliable screening or prevention protocols, unlike some cancers. Norma and our family doctor thought that she had some kind of persistent bloating and indigestion when our younger daughter took her to the emergency room one day because she was in such pain. I got there as quickly as I could and I can still see the shock on her face when the ER doctor told her the diagnosis.

If you are ever tempted to think that there is no evil in the world, or that it is not personal, please hear and remember my testimony. I have seen evil in the face. Cancer is pure evil. Whatever your take on anthropomorphizing evil or not, I can tell you evil is personal! Cancer is terribly personal and intimate.

What makes it more evil is that we have not done more to overcome this evil. There are cancers that have been significantly reduced because of what has been learned about prevention, screening and treatment. Why are a number of women's cancers left behind in the science efforts? Despite the stellar competence and compassion of Dr. Thomas Reid and his team at the Women's Cancer Center at Kettering Medical Center, they simply didn't have enough information to save Norma's life. Let me challenge you, if you have any moral compass at all, to give more to cancer research and to vote against any politician who has voted to cut funding for cancer research.

I had promised myself that I would write this piece before the end of year, and I have spent hours at the keyboard attempting to do that. I simply could not grind this out any sooner. It is the most difficult thing I have ever written.

I still wake up in the night hearing Norma’s voice trying to wake me, as she often did the last several weeks when she needed help. Don’t read this like all those old stories about saints tricked into believing the ghosts of their loved ones talk to them. In an instant, I know the reality. Yet, often I cannot go back to sleep no matter that it is the middle of the night and I am exhausted.

I have been an Adventist minister for 44 years. I don’t know how many times I have been to the hospital to pray with people, often dying people, and their families. I have lost count of the number of funerals that I’ve conducted. Nothing from all of that prepared me completely for the deep sense of loss, the overwhelming emptiness.

Please don’t get me wrong! My hope in the promise of Christ’s coming New Earth, the resurrection and victory over the grave is stronger than ever. Perhaps I need it more than ever. Perhaps I’ve paid a higher price for hope than I ever did in the past. I don’t know and I don’t care to analyze it. My hope is in Jesus, our Lord and Savior, the one and only center of our faith. The rest of it—the institutional issues, the internal politics, the bickering among various sectarian factions, even the debates of scholars—do not mean as much to me any more.
I am very proud of my two daughters. They take very good care of me. They are both accomplished professionals and good moms and wives. I am proud of their husbands and especially my soon-to-be-four grandchildren. I want to pass on to them the love and hope that I shared with their “Nana.” They will be sixth generation Adventists, no matter what they choose to do as adults with that heritage.

The paperwork for my retirement is being processed. I have a couple of months to help a new president get started in the Ohio Conference—the 10th that I have helped staff. Then, I expect to catch my breath a bit and I have a long list of things I want to write, including some books as well as pieces that will appear here.

I cannot close without expressing my appreciation to so many of my readers that have taken the time to write me a note (by email or paper, some with a beautiful card, a few with flowers or fruit) and even more who have prayed for Norma and myself over the past 18 months. Your support means more to me than I can ever say. I apologize that I have heard from so many that my ability to respond personally to each one has simply broken down. I feel the support of people who have been friends and colleagues for years, including some I have not talked to in decades. I love you all!

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To Live without God for a Year?

By Lawrence G. Downing, January 21, 2014

My friend and ministerial colleague Ryan Bell has set himself upon a journey that has an uncertain end. You may have read about his proposed venture in the Washington Post or perhaps heard him interviewed Sunday, January 12, 2014 on Public Radio. His declared intent: to live without God for a year.

Living for a year without God is not a quest most people associate with an Adventist pastor, but Ryan is no stranger to challenging traditional expectations and practices. Were it otherwise, he would not have attracted and held the diverse congregation that is Hollywood Adventist Church. Under his pastoral leadership, a unique congregation had formed that I believe was unlike any other Adventist church in the world. A profile of the congregation on any given Sabbath looked something like this: a wide ethnic and racial diversity—typical of most metro Adventist churches. It is the composition of this eclectic mix that takes Hollywood into a realm few other parishes inhabit. One would have seen a smattering of street people—some dirty and smelly who talk to the voices in their heads. Expect one or two of this group to stand up during the service and move about, perhaps even wander onto the platform—on more than one occasion, attempting to give “God’s message” to the congregation. Deacons move in to gently escort the budding prophet back to the pew. There were other parishioners to notice, too.

On a given Sabbath were 50 or so young people who worked or sought employment in the movie industry. There were actors, camera operators, set designers, screen writers, comedians, and sound technicians. This is only a partial list. Name me another Adventist church with a congregation like this! Ryan's off-the-wall gifts (so defined by some) enabled him to provide some cohesiveness to this hodge-podge group, and, like the cat herder, now-and-again get them heading in a common direction. Was it a perfect and harmonious experience to be part of the Hollywood Adventist congregation? Probably not. So what else is new? This is not the important question! A better question is this: Did people hear the gospel? Did someone on a Sabbath morning address issues that confronted real people in real-life situations, and were they given biblical answers? From my personal observation, the few times I attended Hollywood, I answer yes. His voice to this congregation is now silent.

The catalyst for Ryan’s decision to set upon his precarious course (my evaluation, not his) appears to be related to the events that led up to his stepping down as senior pastor of the Hollywood Adventist Church. I am not well enough acquainted with the background events that led to Ryan leaving his pastorate to comment. I will let others untangle the conundrum of institutional polity. Ryan has stated on his blog and in the NPR interview that the two Christian educational institutions where he has been employed as a contract professor, requested that he resign his teaching position. The loss of his pastoral and teaching positions left him without gainful employment and put him on an uncertain financial course. He reported that his available funds would be depleted after two months without income. He expressed his desire to find work of any kind. He has a family to support.

Responses to Ryan’s decision to live for a year without God are varied. Ministerial colleagues I have talked with are puzzled why he would make, what in their view, is such a foolish and risky decision. It’s like playing with the devil, opined one pastor. Younger pastors who know Ryan are at a loss to explain his purpose in all this. Non-ministerial friends I have talked with about Ryan’s venture express concern for his soul and wonder if he's trying to make a name for himself. Few I have met think his trek will have a happy ending, hoping some good may come, but unsure what that “good” might be.

When I learned of Ryan’s decision to live for a year without God, questions began to float through my mind: How does one live like an atheist? Is there an atheist’s creed or an atheist’s guidebook for successful non-belief? When I brought these questions to a couple family members, one pointed out that living without God does not, in itself, equate with atheism. If one defines living without God as the absence of certain rituals and practices, one may continue to believe there is a God. The person for a time is incommunicado with God.

When a ministerial colleague, who knows Ryan well, and I were with a group of friends a discussion ensued related to Ryan’s
announcement to live without God. One of the persons observed that he understood Ryan would not read the bible, pray or participate in religious activities for a year. My clergy friend responded, “That sounds like many of my church members.”

As I reflected on Ryan’s announced decision to live without God for a year, an old story came to mind that tells of the man who advertised he had the formula to turn lead into gold. The prospective lead-to-gold transformers gave the man their money and he, in turn, gave them the magic formula. As he got to the last ingredient he looked the person solid in the eye and said, “Now listen. Here is the essential part. When you are preparing this formula you must not ever think of the red-eyed monkey. If you do, the formula will not work.”

The person who chooses to live without God for a year, or a day, a micro-second or a millennium—the time is irrelevant—where is the red-eyed monkey? How can the person who has brain cells that still function become so disciplined not to think about God? If one thinks about God, references God in any way, even in jest or curse, can one then lay claim to living without God? I don’t have an answer.

Let’s take Ryan at his word: He wishes to explore what it is like to live without God for one year. Then what? After 365 days will he have concluded life is better without the Divine? Listen for his shout to the world, “I proved I can live without God for a year.”

Suppose, for the sake of discussion, Ryan announces at the conclusion of his trial-run that he found he could not live without God. He discovered that, despite his removal from God, God, the hound of heaven that he is, could not live without Ryan. With this positive affirmation in tow, how will Ryan’s Adventist friends/believers respond should he wish to unite with them again? Will we open a place for him? Will he become the new-found celebrity on the camp meeting circuit, there to shout forth the folly of following a godless path? Like other mysteries, time may provide answers. Then again…

_________________________ Join in the discussion:

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In  Register
Is intercessory prayer unselfish? A recent Sabbath School lesson praised “intercessory prayer,” suggesting that it is less selfish than most other prayers. “Frequently, prayer assumes a self-centered posture.... Intercessory prayer, however, focuses on another person’s needs, thus removing the likelihood of selfish motivation.”

I remember hearing of a prayer consisting of the words:

Dear God, Bless me and my wife,
My son, John, and his wife.
Us four, no more. Amen.

That prayer hardly strikes me as altruistic, even if it is “interceding” for three of the four people referred to. Never mind that the word “bless” is nonspecific, except to imply positive. If my list of three other people expands to twenty-three or three hundred, does that make it less selfish?

If your prayers for others are really “unselfish,” I would think they should include a whole lot of your enemies. Over the years I have seen some long prayer lists in churches. I don’t remember seeing the pope or Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein on those lists. (I realize that the current pope seems to be of a different sort than many of his predecessors, but some still regard him as a very bad person because of papal claims.) Sermons and lessons on prayer use certain texts over and over, but they strangely seem to miss Luke 6:28: “Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you” (NLT). Phillips renders that as “pray for those who treat you badly.”

The fact that my “prayer list” is limited to people I know does not strike me as selfish in the sense that I do not have time to meaningfully focus on everybody. To major in one or two subjects in school so that you can master them, you’ll probably have to give up mastering most other subjects. To spend quality time with Bob or Mary and get to know them well, I have to limit time with almost everyone else. In conversation with God as a friend, I can most meaningfully talk with God about people I know something about, which rules out most people on the planet. If you hand me a prayer list, I suppose I can talk about the people or concerns in it, but I can’t talk with God about secondhand matters nearly as meaningfully.

If I am going to talk with God about my enemies, what is my guideline? The forgiving words of Jesus on the cross and Stephen as the rocks started hitting him? Or might I do a slight rewording of Psalm 137:9? “I’m sick of the way Fred (my hypothetical enemy) treats me. I hope someone bashes his head with a sledgehammer!” Is it okay to follow the example of those psalms that are given the impressive adjective “imprecatory”? Or am I supposed to be “nice” when I pray for Fred? After all, the Bible says, “Don’t rejoice when your enemies fall; don’t be happy when they stumble.”

Okay, most people agree that it’s not nice to pray that Fred will suffer some kind of tragedy or pain. But just praying that Fred will see things my way is still a “make ME happy” prayer. Praying for bad things to happen to Fred—expressing the anger I really feel—can at least help me see that I have a lot of anger that I need to find a better way to deal with. Besides, what is unselfish about praying that God will help me be happy by changing someone else? “Someone is in my way, God. Please move him.” For some of us, isn’t that what prayer is all about? Getting God to change the weather or my health or my boss or my spouse? Or the availability of parking spaces?
Wait a minute. I can benefit from talking with God as I perhaps seek to understand why Fred is my enemy. Maybe I’m misinterpreting his words or actions or motives. He might be shocked to learn that I think he’s my enemy. Even if there’s no question that Fred is out to get me, maybe I need to understand where he’s coming from. I may remind him of a cruel teacher he had, or maybe he thinks I don’t like him, or perhaps he thinks my theology is dangerous. If I mull over where he’s coming from, I might be able to turn him into my friend. At least I can lessen my fear or anger and be more clearheaded or creative in dealing with him.

This year I’m tackling procrastination. When I work on a certain task, I ask myself what about that task I’m tempted to put off. When working on that task, I can also ask if I am putting off something else more important. So when I talk with God, I can benefit from checking to see which people I am not talking about. Why am I not talking about those people? Too painful? All the more reason to include them in my conversation with God. Maybe I’ll start thinking about how I have perhaps helped worsen or even caused the situation. (What’s that line? Be nice to your enemies; you made them.) It’s also possible that I talk with God about a person but never mention the underlying problem (the “elephant in the room”). If my prayer is meaningful, I will talk about what really matters. Hard feelings toward someone else matter.

Next time we congratulate ourselves for being so selfless when we pray for others, let’s take a look at (1) whom we’re praying for, (2) whom we’re leaving out, and (3) if we are simply hoping to feel better because our friends feel better. Don’t forget that the friend who is having problems may need to learn some lessons that require some hard times. Your wanting the friend to miss the hard times may overlook the fact that growth usually comes through struggle. People who run a marathon have run many miles of practice to be able to run the big one. My praying for a friend may be very selfish, in that I want the friend to enjoy all the benefits of struggle without actually having to struggle.

Prayer as conversation with God offers us a golden opportunity to deal with skeletons or elephants or hidden wounds. The longer we fail to take advantage of the opportunity, the more damage we allow. I can fill a visit to the doctor with pleasant chat about my exercise and good eating, while never mentioning the symptoms or habits that drove me to the doctor in the first place. Instead of filling our prayers with asking God to smooth the path for us and our friends, we’ll likely accomplish more good if we talk about matters we’re more uncomfortable with.

Prayers are self-ish in that they grow out of what is important to us. Talking with God about our struggles and the people we’re tangling with may not be the most thrilling work we do. But it will be more helpful than asking God to be a Santa Claus for all our friends.

1Invoking judgment, calamity, or curses—most notably, Psalms 69 and 109, but see also parts of Psalms 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54, 56, 58, 79, 83, 137, and 143.
2Proverbs 24:17, NLT. If I pray that my friends won’t stumble but I don’t include Fred in my friends list, am I by default praying that Fred will?
3I don’t think that’s what prayer is intended to be, even if it does describe how we pray. See my columns “Moving a Cruise Ship.” “Talking With a Friend” and “From ‘Gimme’ Monologue to Conversation” in 2012.
Fuzzy Logic and Forgiveness Math

by Harry Banks, January 23, 2014

Exactness is sometimes a characteristic which is assigned to computerized information. On October 17, 2011, through the collaboration of Alexander J. Yee and Shigeru Kondo Pi a world record was calculated of 5 Trillion digits in 90 days. They started at 6:19 p.m. (JST) May 4, 2010, and finished at 1:12 a.m. (JST) August 3, 2010.

Since I come from the age of slide rules where you usually only had two, three or maybe four digits of accuracy, imagining the detail of 5 Trillion digits of accuracy is ... well ... astounding. But in this world of diversity, change, variety and uniqueness, sometimes we just want to know if something is big or small. As a programmer, there are times I have been asked to define vague values for relative comparisons when the size of the sample and the range of values are unknown. So how do you program unknown relative values? Well in 1965 Lofti A. Zadeh introduced "Fuzzy Sets" into our computational language. Without going into his technical explanation, I will give you a simple description of my view of fuzzy logic.

Suppose I want to define tall and short people. When I start collecting my information, I measure six people. The shortest one is five feet six inches and the tallest of the six people is five feet ten inches. Based on those six people "tall" would be five-ten and "short" would be five-six. Not very different, but they would be the extreme values that we had sampled.

As the years go by and we collect more data, we might come to a time when we have collected data from one million people. Now we might find that the shortest person is two feet and eight inches and the tallest person is seven feet two inches. So now the value of both "tall" and "short" have changed because we have more information on which to evaluate our idea of "tall" and "short." But at all times while we were collecting our data we could always say that based on our current sample we knew what "tall" and "short" meant in absolute measurements.

Today in our "In His Steps Community Fellowship" which meets Sabbath mornings at the phone company office, we noted that the disciples initial forgiveness data set was rather small (7). Jesus tried to raise the maximum number with his "70 times 7" (7 squared times a power of ten). Someone noted that it was "more forgiveness than you can imagine."

How do you do your forgiveness math? What kind of forgiveness data set do you have? Is it a fixed, finite data set? Or is it a divine, near infinite data set?

As a college instructor I have an opportunity to observe failure and success. When faculty discuss the issue of cheating one surprising observation is that when the instructor uses failures to focus efforts to work toward mastery of the knowledge or skill, the issue of cheating become a non-issue. Students soon realize that the only way to fail is to stop filling in their knowledge deficit with changes in what they know or to stop improving their skill.

Some of my friends in recovery tell me their formula for forgiveness and starting over is the number of failures plus one. So all they have to
remember is one. Start over one more time than they have failed. Their forgiveness data set is always expanding. Not only does their data set expand from their personal story but as they watch their friends and families grow they see each one has an opportunity to start over one more time.

So the trick question is ... (I call questions that make me thinking of things from a different point of view "trick questions.")

So the trick questions are: How do you do your forgiveness math? How big is your data set? What is your formula?

**Expanding the forgiveness framework:** Programmers develop algorithms to solve complex problems. One of the definitions of an algorithm is "a step-by-step problem-solving procedure, especially an established, recursive computational procedure for solving a problem in a finite number of steps." So, I would push the forgiveness math idea one step further: How does your forgiveness math algorithm include God's grace? How do you implement Forgiveness Math in your life?

_______________________ Join in the discussion:

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Warren Walikonis was a “caretaker.” That’s how his widow, Dawn describes him. “We were his everything - I never heard him utter a swear word, take the name of the Lord in vain; he loved us and everyone unconditionally. He was humble, methodical, meticulous and never had to be the center of attention. Everything was cared for in our home—he was not a procrastinator and was very active—as the saying goes, ‘He never let grass grow under his feet’.”

Describing her husband’s career in a recent speech, Dawn said, “Warren faithfully served his church for nearly 30 years. He began his denominational career as the accountant for the Manitoba/Saskatchewan Conference in Canada. During his eight years of service he rose to the position of Treasurer. In 1990 Warren joined Adventist Risk Management, as the manager, and then Associate Director of the Field Service. He was self-disciplined, a motivated self-starter. President of Risk Management Bob Kyte said that he had never met anyone who had the integrity of Warren, and that he was liked by all who came in contact with him.”

The fact that Walikonis was a very physical, athletic man made the shock that much greater when Warren suddenly passed away in his sleep on December 21, 2011, at only 53 years old, and for no reason that autopsies could discover. Out of her grief, Dawn Walikonis wanted to do something—to somehow make something positive come from this, and make sure that Warren’s attitude of love and caring went on beyond his death. She and her two daughters, Janelle and Stephanie, began to discuss what that might be.

Darren Wilkins, then principal of Mt. Ellis Academy in Bozeman, Montana, had taught the
Walikonis girls at Loma Linda Academy a few years earlier, and he called the family when he heard about the death. Since Warren Walikonis was “a Montana boy” who was born in Culbertson, grew up on the family farm in Reserve, and attended Mt. Ellis, his family wanted to do something for his church family there. They bought a new furnace for his tiny home church, but that wasn’t enough.

According to Dawn, “For the rest of Warren’s life after leaving Mt. Ellis Academy, he would go home to the farm every chance he could to help put in crops, harvest, fix fences or whatever else needed to be repaired or done, and in later years he came home to help with the shearing and lambing.” He loved the country, and he loved activity. Somehow, his memorial should exemplify that.

Principal Wilkins and director of development Kevin Emmerson talked it over and called the family back to propose a couple of projects. Dawn chose one that she knew her husband would have loved—a fitness trail. "Warren was so active,” she explains. "He liked sports, basketball, volleyball, etc., and the trail just seemed something unique that would fit his personality. If this trail can help enhance the physical component [of education] and continue to help future generations of students, so much the better."

Prior to this, at Mt. Ellis Academy, the path the students had for walking or running on ran close to the freeway. Today they have a nearly one-mile fitness trail that runs around campus, through the fields Walikonis loved, with a gorgeous view of the mountains. It was opened in September of 2013, and Dawn says, “I’m told there’s constantly someone out there using it or running on it.”

According to Emmerson, although the trail is not receiving much use in the January snows (5-7” at this writing), it was used by the physical education classes in the fall, will be again in the spring, and sees fairly regular use both by students and by members of the surrounding community, who very much appreciate the new trail.
The one thing Walikonis might not have agreed with is the name—The Warren Walikonis Memorial Exercise Trail. He didn't do the things he did for recognition. But Emmerson says, “The Walikonis family is certainly a storied family here on campus.” The trail will be officially dedicated in April at MEA’s Alumni Weekend, and the Walikonis family will be there. There is no easy way to get over the death of a beloved one, especially the shocking and unexpected death of one so young and strong. But the Walikonis family takes comfort in knowing that the memory of their husband and father will live on in the shadow of the mountains he loved.

For more:
www.mtellis.org
Darkness to Light

http://www.atoday.org/article/2278/poetry-the-arts/devotional-thoughts/darkness-to-light

by Debonnaire Kovacs
Submitted January 23, 2014

[Bass] “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,
[Add tenor] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,
[Add alto] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!
“Those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them light has shined!
[Soprano] Jesus, our Morning Star, Light of the world. Glory be to God on high!”

We’re singing the J. S. Cool arrangement of this in my choir. I tried to find a link on Youtube so you could hear what it sounds like (not us, mind you, but some choir somewhere!) but all I could find was Handel—also wonderful, but not the same thing.

So you’ll just have to imagine each line getting louder and more exciting, a little higher in pitch, until the sopranos cry out the last line in joyous praise.

In the multidenominational church I attend, there is a worship committee who meets and plans all aspects of the worship service to mesh together in one great act of communal worship. The sermon, the music, any readings, the altar and church art, the picture on the bulletin, even which stole the pastor wears, all reflect the theme of that week. It takes work. But the people here have the idea that all—visual people, auditory people, even kinesthetic people—should gain the greatest blessing possible. They’re willing to work prayerfully so that can happen.

And of course, all of us need all of those components, no matter which is our preferred means of processing the world.

This week, one of the lectionary texts is the Isaiah 9 passage from which these words come. One of my favorite things about it is that it’s written (spoken) in present tense, several centuries before the birth of the Light of the World. Today, we sing "the light has come" when speaking of the first Advent of Christ into the world, and we can also sing "the light has come" when referring to a yet-future, much-awaited, deeply longed-for event—the second Advent of Christ, this time for final reconciliation and an end to all suffering. We are the souls beneath the throne, crying, "How long, Lord?"

I’ve spent a fair amount of time in deep darkness. I’d be willing to bet you have, too.

Has the Light shined?

Are you reflecting it on?

All we have to do is receive, then turn outward so that the beams reflect away from us and onto
those around us. The Sun of Righteousness does all the rest.
The Hummingbird

http://www.atoday.org/article/2279/poetry-the-arts/poetry-prose/the-hummingbird

by S M Chen
1993
Submitted January 23, 2014
Photo: Anna's Hummingbird on a Twig, by hummingbirdpictures.net; used by permission

One particularly hot, muggy Sunday afternoon, the kind to be endured more than enjoyed, the double garage door was open, as it is wont to be during various nameless projects.

Upon entering the attached garage from the house, I suddenly noticed a small bird perched on the crossbar of the motorized garage door opener. I approached slowly and with caution, expecting it to fly away as I neared.

It did in fact leave the perch when I came within a few feet, close enough to recognize it as a hummingbird, about the size of a ruby-throated adult. However, rather than flying out, which would have required a descent below the level of the now horizontal open garage door, it flew upward, toward the side and rear of the garage, the latter being the highest point.

It seemed to have lost sense of direction, as if it had sipped some bad nectar (is there such a thing, I wondered) or perhaps was delirious from heat prostration. It flew around the space like a moth, only to return time and again to a crossbar of the garage door opener or to the electric cord paralleling the bar.

I became concerned not only for its safety, but its survival. I tried to coax it with a hummingbird feeder, which I conveniently happened to have, containing colored sweetened
water; I hung the feeder near the bird with a hastily rigged wire hanger. No luck. On an aluminum stepladder I climbed within touching distance of the bird. It appeared to breathe with labor through open mouth. I had never been so close before to a live hummingbird.

It was clearly not tame. As I reached to grasp it, it flew off, leaving a few tiny feathers which wafted slowly to the concrete floor. I did not want to injure it, so sought other means of facilitating its exit from the garage. I left the garage door up and reentered the house, hoping my absence would encourage its departure.

A few minutes later I returned to the garage. There was no bird visible, but I couldn’t be sure it had left. I climbed a wooden ladder mounted on the rear wall of the garage. My dominant wrist was still in a soft brace because of recent surgery, so my climb was slower and more tentative than usual.

As I reached the top of the ladder, and looked right, I saw the bird on a wood platform, within arm stretch. Its mouth was open, its breathing rapid and possibly labored. It seemed too weary for fright. As I reached for it, I realized the precarious position I was in. I feared being struck by the bird less than injuring it, either during an attempted grasp or my descent down the ladder with only one free hand.

It moved slightly as my fingers closed around it. Rather than encircling its body, as I’d intended, my hand grasped one wing. It fluttered as I went down the ladder as quickly as I dared. It did not try to hurt me with its rapier beak.

I rushed out of the garage. The late afternoon sun was aglow, low in the west. Forcefully, I tossed the bird into the air, hoping it had the energy to fly. I expected it to leave horizontally, perhaps weakly, to some nearby bushes or trees.

Instead, it rocketed straight up, perpendicular to the horizon, phototropically seeking the sky. I watched in awe, wondering at the expenditure of energy I thought only moments earlier it lacked.

Finally, as it became a mere speck against the panoply of skylight, at least several hundred feet up, it veered horizontally and disappeared from view. I felt a thrill akin to what British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins likely experienced when he wrote, in a different context about a different bird, “The Windhover.”

Won’t you consider helping someone who, like the hummingbird, has lost his way and needs a boost so that he can rise from the miasma of despair into the freedom and light intended by the One who made us all?