**NEWS**

**The Record Keeper: Why the Film Project Was Canceled:** The Church-underwritten drama intended to tell the old, old story in an excitingly contemporary way is apparently not to be, after months of production. *Adventist Today* autopsies the cancellation and finds new information....

**Giving is Up in the Adventist Church, Especially Outside North America:** Adventist members continue to give liberally to their Church, though the concentrations of giving are moving in surprising directions....

**New Mexico City Revises a Law Targeted by Adventist Legal Action:** A suit by the Texico Conference, on First Amendment grounds, has led to rewriting of an ordinance that could have affected Adventist members' ability to gather and worship freely....

**100th Anniversary of the Adventist Church in Kerala State, India:** A five-month period of commemoration by 40,000 SDAs is scheduled in Kerala State, India, to celebrate the centennial of local Adventism....

**OPINION**

**Professional Cuddlers?** Platonic cuddling for those in need of human touch appears to be a niche enterprise from which Adventists could learn. The cry for physical and emotional connection is a powerful human need, writes Lawrence Downing....

**What Now? Devotional:** When the crowd gathered outside the Upper Room, and one of the 120, Peter, preached to them, what were the other 119 doing? asks Debbonnaire Kovacs....

**How Does Your Spiritual Life Grow? (Part 1):** Guest writer Dan Appel writes that Christian life is complicated by members caught up in at least six different levels of spiritual life, some in very selfish phases of growth. How can Church members coexist amid such turbulence?...

**FEATURE, POETRY & the ARTS**

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**Lord, I’m Confused:** Poet Andy Hanson admits to some confusion as he meditates from the mountaintops and valleys of life....
Easter Celebrations Grow at Adventist Institutions & Churches:
Once taboo among Adventists, Easter celebrations are opening more and more doors for fellowship and community outreach throughout North America....

On Words:
Faithful contributor S M Chen offers a fun word game that also spiritually fulfills....

Good for Bodies; Good for the Planet (Feature):
Another Adventist vegan restaurant opens—one that adds lectures and classes in herbalism, massage, and hydrotherapy, and sees its role as an "influencer," helping people see that a healthier lifestyle is also healthy for the planet on which we live....

Nagim Lake, Kashmir:
A tranquil photo of Nagim Lake in Kashmir reminds us of mornings we can imagine Jesus may have experienced beside Galilee....
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By the Adventist Today News Team, April 20, 2014

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The scripts were vetted by several committees at the denomination's General Conference (GC), the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) and the Ellen G. White Estate. The original publication entitled The Great Controversy was written by White and published near the end of the 19th century, so it seemed natural to use a new genre called "Steampunk" that includes both Victorian and futuristic elements. It is currently a "hot" new media format, and last year the promotional film for The Record Keeper won one of the first Geekie Awards given in Hollywood. Pastor Ted Wilson, the GC president, gave his endorsement to the project and a pilot segment was shown to a number of the GC officers and staff.

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It is unclear whether this anonymous critique got to denominational leaders or not, but in December Wilson asked for a review of the project. It is evidently at about this time that another evaluation by staff members at the BRI was begun, presumably at the request of one or more GC officers. Adventist Today has not been told of nor seen the minutes, but the usual procedure for such a request is for it to be voted by an administrative committee in the GC office complex. It would be very unusual for it to come from an individual officer or staff member.

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"We worked very hard to make sure we were biblically accurate," he said. "These scripts went through committees. They were approved by the White Estate. A representative of the GC was on the set every day. ... If people think I am a rogue director, it's just not true. I feel very close to this material and want it told well."

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Clearly, Satterlund's motivation is rooted in the mission of the church. "Our goal was to reach outside the church," he said, "to speak to an audience that would never in a million years read The Great Controversy. I wanted to create something that my atheist father would want to ... watch. ... I could see the power of this story working on the set. ... Conversations were being started ... Lives were being changed. ... Our target audience was not children in the church; it was ... the outside world. We specifically chose things that would draw their attention like using Steampunk."

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A long-standing tradition in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, a collection for world missions taken on the last Sabbath of each quarter around the world. The offering exceeded a million dollars for the first time at the end of last year.

A portion of the offering goes to specific projects announced at the beginning of the quarter. Last year’s record-breaking offering will establish new congregations and support innovative evangelism in Europe, including outreach centers in Greece and Macedonia, the General Conference (GC) executive committee was reminded last week during a financial report.

Giving increased last year in a number of categories, the report told committee members. Tithe placed in the Tithe Fund in the denomination’s North American Division during 2013 was up 1.7 percent from 2012 and totaled $949 million. Tithe Fund income in the rest of the world grew 3.6 percent for a total of more than $1.4 billion during the same year.

Mission offerings from outside North America similarly grew, reaching approximately $64 million, a six percent increase from the previous year. But in North America giving to the denomination's mission offerings dipped about two percent, totaling nearly $22 million.

“Despite the recession and slow economic recovery in the U.S., the economies of most of the countries around the world have remained stable,” said GC treasurer Robert E. Lemon. That reality is reflected in the growth of tithes and offerings from outside North America, he added.

The GC is currently in a multi-year plan to scale down the percentage of the Tithe from the North American Division (NAD) that is used by the GC headquarters, and the increased giving overseas has helped this change to go smoothly without disrupting specific program budgets. The GC used eight percent of the NAD Tithe in 2012, and by 2020 this will be reduced to six percent, freeing up two percent to be used in the NAD.

GC undertreasurer Juan Prestol told the committee that problems with the reduction in Tithe given to the GC would most likely be felt this year. “This is going to be the test year,” he said, “but assuming the faithfulness of our members … we anticipate that as this year moves along, we should be able to get over the hump.”

The report also informed the committee that GC continues to operate significantly below its budget. It was almost $7 million under budget last year. The committee also voted to approve several allocations recommended by the GC strategic planning committee: (1) $1.6 million for health and education initiatives in the Middle East North Africa Union Mission; (2) $600,000 for the denomination’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division to fund the launch of Hope Channel television in Indonesia; (3) $650,000 for theological education centers in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division; (4) $8 million to Hope Channel to extend the official Adventist television network’s satellite and DirectTV contracts through 2020; and (5) $2.8 million to the church’s 13 world divisions for a variety of projects and programs. Prestol said the divisions are “encouraged” to spend their portion of the $2.8 million Mission to the Cities projects, but that they can use the money “at their own discretion.”
The appropriation for Hope Channel comes from so-called "extraordinary tithe," a one-time private donation of $102 million in tithe to the Adventist Church in 2007. Prestol said church financial officers anticipate that Hope Channel will cover contract costs in its regular budget after 2020. More than $12 million of the extraordinary tithe is still being held in reserve to assist in the transition of projects that have been launched with these funds into regular operating budgets, Prestol told the committee.

The treasurer’s report also included an announcement about staff changes in the GC office. Verland Ernston, longtime controller for the GC, will retire in June. Current associate controller Eugene Korff will take on the role, Lemon said. Denise Greenough, an investment portfolio manager at the GC, has been appointed to the associate controller position. Also, the GC has promoted senior accountant Raul Nestares to the role of associate treasurer, replacing Dean Rogers, who recently retired.

Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.
New Mexico City Revises a Law Targeted by Adventist Legal Action

From ANN, April 24, 2014

The city of Las Cruces, New Mexico, has revised an ordinance that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination took to court with the accusation that it violated religious freedom. The denomination's Texico Conference filed a lawsuit last year in the U.S. District Court of New Mexico alleging that the city ordinance infringed on religious expression and unfairly targeted pastor-led faith groups, especially Latino churches.

The ordinance required churches to register with the municipal government and pay fees. A city spokesman last year said the ordinance was intended to gather information to support the city's obligation to provide citizens with fire and police protection. Adventist Church attorneys alleged that it violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The city changed the ordinance on March 17, six months after the lawsuit was filed, to no longer require non-profit organizations to pay registration fees. The Adventist organization then dismissed its lawsuit. "We're very happy that the new ordinance addresses both the city's legitimate fire and safety concerns and our concerns about governmental interference with churches," said Todd McFarland, associate general counsel for the denomination.

The original Las Cruces Ordinance No. 16-131, passed in 1997, defined a business as "any profession, trade or occupation and all and every kind of calling," including the work of pastors, priests, rabbis, bishops, imams and other religious leaders. The ordinance essentially required all pastor-led churches within city limits to register with the city, pay a registration fee and pass a discretionary review process before gaining approval to conduct worship services or provide pastoral care. Faith groups that are lay-led rather than clergy-led were not subject to the requirements, lawyers said.

Early last year, city officials threatened to take legal action against the Las Cruces Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church if it failed to comply with the requirements of the business registration ordinance. There are more than 100 churches within the Las Cruces city limits, but the ordinance, Adventist lawyers said, had been applied only to a small percentage of these churches and, according to the complaint they filed, "disparately applied to single out Hispanic and Latino churches."

In June, the city first notified the Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church that it had seven days to comply with the requirements or face "court action," according to a letter from the city's Codes Enforcement Department. However, the Las Cruces Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, a majority non-Latino congregation, received no such notice, McFarland said.

The Adventist denomination filed the lawsuit in September through its Texico Conference, headquartered in the Albuquerque suburb of Corrales. "I think it was great that we did what we did in challenging it," said Lee-Roy Chacon, president of the Texico Conference. "Now that it's overturned we can continue doing ministry instead of having to act as a business." The Texico Conference includes about 80 congregations in West Texas and New Mexico with a total membership of 12,000.

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100th Anniversary of the Adventist Church in Kerala State, India

By AT News Team, April 24, 2014

Today the Seventh-day Adventist Church begins a celebration of 100 years in Kerala State, India. The centennial activities will continue through the Sabbath at Vadakode and Dhanuvachapuram, according to a report from Express News Service.

Adventist leaders from across the state gathered this morning in the Vadakode Church, the first Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Kerala. Pastor Yovan Selvamony, president of the Southwest India Union Conference, the denomination's organization in Kerala, briefed the media during a new conference yesterday (April 23).

During the afternoon a torchlight march went from Vadakodu Church to Dhanuvachapuram as part of the event. Anil Kumar, the Deputy Superintendent of Police for Neyyattinkara, presided over the starting flag for the march. Off the rally. R. Selvaraj, Member of the Legislative Assembly from Neyyattinkara, will address the gathering.

The march reached the Adventist School in Dhanuvachapuram by late afternoon and Kerala state health minister V. S. Sivakumar welcomed the crowd that came together. A. T. Georgemony, Member of the Legislative Assembly, also addressed the gathering.

The centennial celebrations will continue through October 24 and 25 this year. On that weekend Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the denomination's General Conference, will speak during the ceremonies closing the centennial celebration at Al Saj Auditorium.

Today there are about 40,000 Adventists in Kerala among a population of 35 million. There are more than 200 local congregations and 13 secondary schools.
Easter Celebrations Grow at Adventist Institutions & Churches

By AT News Team, April 21, 2014

For Southern Adventist University near Chattanooga, Tennessee, it was the 19th year for the SonRise Pageant last weekend. More than 6,000 tickets had been given out ahead of time and actual attendance probably topped 10,000. A cast of 550 students and church members were in full costume and the weather cooperated perfectly this year.

From 8:30 a.m. Sabbath (April 19) until late afternoon groups left every half hour to walk through the six scenes portrayed in the event; the triumphal entry, the last supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, Pilate's judgment hall, the crucifixion and the resurrection. Six different actors played Jesus in the six scenes and some of the other roles were also repeated in different scenes with different actors. In addition to the cast there were hundreds of support staff who set up and tore down the outside scenes, helped with costumes, prepared a meal for the cast, delivered snacks, served refreshments to visitors, managed the extensive technology and communication gear, took tickets and oversaw parking.

At Andrews University in southern Michigan near South Bend, Indiana, the Easter event took the form of a musical production, “The Passion According to Matthew” on Friday and Saturday evenings (April 18-19) in the Howard Performing Arts Center. It was also free and open to the public. The play was set to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

“The story portrayed is essentially verbatim from the Bible,” explained Charles Reid, associate professor of voice and producer of the performance. He also stated that intermingled with the story are lots of meditation points; opportunities to dwell on the story in a personal way before moving on. “The idea of ‘stations of the cross’ is common in many other denominations, where participants take time to really think about different parts of the story of Christ’s death and resurrection and what they mean,” said Reid. “This is what the Andrews University annual Passion Play has strived to create as well. You get not only into what happens to Jesus, but how everything relates to the other characters in the story. It’s truly eye-opening.”

The University Singers had a key role in the storytelling alongside the evangelist or narrator played this year by David Ortiz, sophomore music major. Denelle Clark, a seminary student at AU, played the role of Jesus. Reid and his cast paid special attention to helping the audience connect with the characters and the deeply meaningful story. “We’re taking a lot of care to make the text into modern English so the audience doesn’t have to translate from King James English,” he said. “Instead of looking at the story of something that happened over 2,000 years ago, we’re looking at a story that’s relevant for now and we want everyone to look at it like it’s their story.”

Students have provided all of the personnel, technical know-how and other details necessary to the production. A joint venture between the vocal/choral and symphonic areas, “The Passion” is a major production of the music department. Stephen Zork, associate professor of music, conducted the choir, while Claudio Gonzalez, associate professor of music, managed the instrumental elements.

Reid was inspired by “The Passion” early in his career when he was at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York City. Director Jonathan Miller chose to perform this piece in a unique way. "Out of the hundreds of performances I've done over the years, that set of performances remains an emotional high point," Reid recalled. "I've never seen audiences so impacted in random ways. People realized things they weren't used to noticing and were open to the
story in a fresh way. That's what I hope to accomplish here as well.

"When you look at this story," Reid continued, "you see Jesus was very emotional. He actually got angry, afraid, frustrated, even angsty. Not things we usually associate with Jesus. So a piece like this, done how we're doing it in a more contemporary setting, can have a strong impact on anyone, Christian or not."

In New York City, *The Risen* was produced by the Greater New York Conference youth ministries department and went through four showings. Audiences could experience the outdoor passion play either morning or afternoon on both Sabbath and Sunday (April 19-20).

Presentations in both English and Spanish were included in the ninth annual Resurrection Pageant at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. There were eight rotations throughout the day on Sabbath (April 19), starting at 9 a.m. Two of the eight were presented in Spanish. More than 5,000 people attended, and 450 volunteers made up the cast and crew.

In southern California the drama ministry of the Redlands Seventh-day Adventist Church presented a play entitled "The Soldier" on Thursday and Friday nights (April 17-18), reported the *Redlands Daily Facts*. The play "is the story of Claudius who, as a boy, had built walls around his heart. He had no choice but to follow his father's footsteps into the life of a Roman soldier. His father had punished any sign of weakness, so Claudius learned to suppress anything that could be interpreted as such. He had anger and resentment simmering just below the surface ... until he met Jesus."

The Kelso-Longview Community Adventist Church in Kelso, Washington, continued its tradition of more than a dozen years, producing an Easter musical with a cast and choir of more than 100. Participants drove in from across Oregon as well as Washington. Rollyn Betts, who portrayed Jesus in the play, told *The Daily News*, "A lot of kids come up to Jesus afterwards. And they'll hug you and they don't want to let go of you. There's some sort of connection there." He told the reporter that it affects even the unchurched in the audience. "Journey to the Cross" was presented six times this year, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, April 11-13 and 18-20.

Easter celebrations are beginning among Adventists in the southern hemisphere as well as in North America and Europe. In Kenya more than 200 prisoners, including some on death row, sought forgiveness for their crimes through song and dance, and were then baptized by a team from the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. Pastor Pierre Mulumba led out in the event at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison as reported by *The Standard*. The baptismal candidates had been attending Adventist worship services inside the prison for some time.

In the Philippines the Adventist Blue Ambassadors Choral joined singing groups from six other religions in a televised national event organized by the United Nations and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. The Aawitang Handog Concert at the Skydome in North EDSA on Sunday was a benefit to raise funds for families devastated by Typhoon Yolanda.

In hundreds of other events, Adventists remembered the death and resurrection of Jesus and invited large numbers of friends and neighbors to join them. Many Adventists still remember a time when the faith was uncomfortably silent on Easter or engaged in negative comments about the "pagan origins" of the event that almost all other Christians celebrate as central to their relationship with Christ. "Clearly, this is changing," a retired pastor told Adventist Today.
Professional Cuddlers?

By Lawrence Downing, April 21, 2014

I wondered if I had misunderstood the TV news story out of New York City. I thought I heard the reporter say the person he was interviewing operated a cuddling business. I listened with full attention. I had heard right! There was the interviewee, snuggled, in the classic “spoon” position, next to a man who had paid a fee to have another person cuddle him! Only in New York! Or is it?

Less than two weeks later, while attending a hospital chaplaincy meeting at the headquarters of Adventist Health-West in Roseville, CA, I picked up the April 4, 2014, Roseville & Granite Bay Press Tribune on the hotel counter and began to peruse the day’s news. On A2 was this headline: “

New business provides cuddling service.” A three-quarters page article included a full color picture of Kelly Peterson and Faviola Rodriguez, proprietors of “The Cuddle Connection,” welcoming any who are “in need of the human touch” to visit their cuddling business in Roseville. “‘We would like to take the stigmatization out of touch,’ CEO Peterson states. ‘We want to change the way people think about touch. It does not necessarily lead to X, Y, Z. (Our clients) are getting more out of safe, platonic friendship and trust than they even could conceive, and us too.’” The cuddlers market a growth industry? These people may be on to something.

I have to confess that my initial response was less than noble: “Yea, like you’re going to cuddle with someone for 45 minutes a couple times a month and nothing’s going to happen? Right.” My cynical side got into action: New ministry awaits the venturesome. Think of it, your very own cuddling outreach ministry. What a chance to witness! Get the person next to you, arms intertwined. What an opportunity to tell about the beasts and the real rest! Can you imagine the reports at the next evangelism council? (I’ll let your imagination have its way on this one.)

I shared the article with a few of the conference attendees. We had a couple good laughs and offered a few pertinent comments. “Here’s a cutting-edge approach to chaplaincy service: cuddle and get well,” or some such frivolous tag-line. All in good fun, you understand. However, as I began to reflect on the news article and the TV report, other ideas surfaced. What does the desire for cuddling have to tell us about human need? What does it tell us about our hi-tech world, where people communicate via punching letters on a keyboard and share thoughts with people plugged into a router whom they have never met and never will? We have all witnessed a group of people, or even two individuals, sitting or walking together, each absorbed in her/his phone, texting to someone far removed from the immediate context.

In our cities, people live in their self-contained, gated communities or behind locked-door high-rise apartments. The person living next door is given a nod or a muttered “Morning,” when passed in the hall, parking lot or elevator. The days of sitting in the rocker on the front porch sharing the day’s activities with those who happen by are long past. People today live in a world confined and defined by electronic media outlets. Communication is via faceless, emotionless words on a screen with now-and-again a happy or sad face thrown in to express the sender’s emotive intent. Within the context of a touchless, faceless-to-faceless world where people are extensions of their electronic devices, there is a place and need for direct contact with a living, breathing, present human being. Cuddling service, in this context, is a viable business plan. People do need people; a text or picture on a screen will not fly.
We in the church can learn from this marketing niche. I do not suggest that we have holy cuddlers. Let others fill that market. We in the church can live what we are uniquely equipped to do: demonstrate Christ's love by our “being with” another human being. Extend friendship to the people around us. Use our church contacts to full advantage. What an opportunity is ours to compete with Facetime, Skype and other wonders of our age. A personal invitation to another person to sit down with us and share a meal and conversation can make all the difference in the world. Activism like this, were we to practice it, has potential to short circuit the cuddling business, but the result of a genuine, eye-to-eye, person-to-person event has potential to be an effective way to provide what cuddling with a stranger cannot: to be a trusted friend. By any standard, such a friend is a priceless gift, and you don't need a business license to open shop!
What Now?

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted April 24, 2014

In Acts 2, there were 120 people in the upper room who experienced the filling of Spirit-Fire. When the crowd gathered outside wondering what was going on, one of those 120, Peter, preached to them. What were the other 119 doing? I’ve sometimes wondered if it might not have gone, in part, a little like this:

My heart is pounding as if I’ve run a Greek marathon. I feel as though I can hardly breathe, and as though I could run another marathon, both at the same time. We are spilling out of the house, singing and crying above the roar of Spirit-Wind, and I see there’s a crowd gathering, wondering what’s up. Of course, Jerusalem is crowded at all times, this time of year. By their clothing, hair, and voices, I can see the majority is not native…

Drunk? I frown, but then laugh. Now that you mention it, I feel like that, too! Who can blame them? Ah—good old Peter. He’s holding up his hands for quiet. He’ll get it, too; the roar is subsiding already. This should be interesting…

"Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!"

I grin again. Or did I ever stop? Maybe we’re drunk on life. I hope we always will be.

My grin fades and a deeper exultation grips me as I hear the old prophecy from the prophet Joel. …prophesy…see visions…dream dreams…I will pour out my Spirit…My hands seem to lift heavenward of their own volition, and I look to the sky—the sky where we last watched our Beloved One fade from us.

I notice confused and questioning looks on the faces of a few people near me. Peter has gone into the retelling of the story we’ve told each other a hundred times in the past few weeks, the horrible story, the glorious story, the everlasting Story of all time to come, and I see two people start to cry.

The exultation slides effortlessly into compassion, welling up as if those are my own children, and I move toward them. “Were you there?” I ask quietly.

The woman nods, and her face crumples. “I was—I shouted—“ She can’t finish, and the man by her side puts an arm around her and says, “We screamed ‘crucify him!’ We—I can’t—"

They both break down, and I move closer, putting my hands on their shoulders. “Shhh. Listen.”

Peter’s voice swells. “But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

The woman’s wet face lifts from the man’s shoulder. “What?”

I can’t help it—the huge smile is all over my face again. “He’s alive! I’ve seen him myself!”

For a second they just stare, then their faces begin to move from alarm to horror and I add intensely, “Were you there
all the way to the cross?"

The man lowers his gaze and shakes his head, but the woman says, “I was. On the road, when I watched him, I started to feel sick about my—my part in it, and he looked right at me. Right at me! I was there…I saw his mother…” Her face crumples again, and sobs swell.

“Then you heard what he said.”

She looks at me.

“About forgiveness, remember?”

After a second, she whispers, “Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they’re doing.” But—he didn’t mean me—us?

“He meant all of us!” I assure her with all the power I can infuse into my voice. If there’s one thing I’m sure of, this is it. “All of us!” I repeat.

There is a moment of silence, and I hear Peter say, in a voice I’ve never heard from Peter before, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

The whole multitude stands in a momentary pool of silence and I realize others of our group are scattered through them, doing the same thing I’ve been doing. A loud voice, the one that was yelling about drunkenness—apparently the self-declared spokesman all crowds seem to have, calls out, “Brothers—what shall we do?”
How Does Your Spiritual Life Grow? (Part 1)

By: Dan M. Appel, April 22, 2014

One of the most commonly recognized ideas in science is the notion that all living things develop in stages and that each stage, and how it is successfully negotiated, affects the subsequent ones. Humans develop physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and psychologically in stages. The whole point of human development is growth from one stage to another.

Researchers such as Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget established that each stage, and the developmental work or tasks or growth in that stage, is an important step in the development of a whole, healthy human being. Each stage sets the stage for the next stages.

Erik Erikson showed that there are important tasks or developmental processes in emotional maturation that must occur at each stage if a person is to successfully transition to the next stage.

If a person is stymied in mastering those tasks, he or she can become emotionally frozen at that stage of his or her development. We have all met people who were physically older adults, but who were as emotionally immature as a six year old. They are in a state of arrested emotional development.

The same kinds of dynamics occur in the spiritual realm. There are clearly observable stages of spiritual development. The point of the stages of spiritual development is just that: the development of spiritual maturity until, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:13, “we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” He goes on to encourage us to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15-16).
We often talk about, but rarely describe in detail, how spiritual growth happens in our lives. Just as there are stages of growth in the maturation of corn or roses or children, so there are stages of growth in the life of a Christian. Spirituality, just like our physical, mental, emotional, and social development, occurs in defined stages. Each of these stages of spiritual growth is important—each is a prerequisite for developing a mature spiritual life.

—but when people fail to progress beyond a stage, when they stop their growth at any place on the ladder of growth, when they become frozen at a particular stage of their spiritual development and fail to grow beyond it, their arrested development leads to spiritual atrophy and eventually spiritual death—either the rigor mortis of legalism or the decay of secularism.

What does that growth process look like? How can I determine where I am in the process?

There are six possible stages in a Christian’s spiritual maturation. Just understanding them often helps us to understand where others are and to determine where we are in our spiritual growth.

Stage One and Stage Two Followers of Christ are Focused on Themselves

Stage One

Baby Christ-followers, just like baby children, begin their spiritual journey centered mainly on themselves. Their focus in this infant stage of their development is obedience:

“How can I avoid punishment?” Their predominant theme is the direct negative consequences of their actions or attitudes on themselves. They measure the degree of good or bad by the amount of punishment that accompanies what they do. They defer to those of superior power or prestige or experience when defining right and wrong.

Because the focus is on avoiding punishment, people at this important beginning stage of their spiritual life see everything in black and white. There is very little abstract spiritual thought, the issues are very simple—is this right or wrong? People at this stage can draw up lists of rules, delineating what is acceptable and what is not for a Christian, and their Bible knowledge consists mainly of proof-texts defending their positions.

Spiritually, people at this stage are inclined to “create God in their own image,” and to define what God wants or likes in terms of their own likes and dislikes, or their own definition of what is right and wrong, or areas where they have been victorious and areas where they have not.

When it comes to God, they relate to him primarily based on how he will react to their disobedience; they are primarily concerned with punishment if they do not obey Him. God for a person at this stage is most analogous to Santa Claus, who watches see if they are naughty or nice and will bring them spiritual coal if they are naughty.
When the Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God, they slipped back to this very elementary stage and suddenly were most concerned about getting punished for their transgression (so they hid), afraid of God's reaction to their rebellion.

While this first stage is a great starting place—"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10)—people who fail to grow beyond this point remain severely stunted in their spiritual development. The medical term for this is a "failure to thrive." As long as people remain at this level of development, their spiritual life will be a burden, an obligation, not a joy or a pleasure. It is something that is done because they have to or are afraid not to, not because they desire to.

**Stage Two**

The next stage in the development of a person's spiritual maturation also revolves around the external consequences for their actions, but now the question is "What's in it for me?" There is little or no interest in the needs or interests of others, but a focus on his or her own needs and interests. He has very little patience with those whose interests or development are different than his own.

While *Stage One* is characterized by fear, *Stage Two* is built on greed. The emphasis is on what is mine or what will be mine. An analogy would be a toddler who obeys because Mom or Dad promises him or her a cookie or a dish of ice cream if he or she does or doesn't do something. When playing, she wants the toys, all she can get, and she is not terribly interested in what others want.

God, to people at this stage, is somewhat like a spiritual "favorite grandfather," who will reward their good behavior. The only time they are really interested in the opinions or needs of others is when it might further their own interests or support their own position. The person at this stage has very little empathy or concern for the struggles of others, and is impatient with those whose spiritual development or interests are different than his own. His understanding of spirituality is lock-step, everyone all alike, like Oreos in a package.

If you don't see or do things just like me, then you are wrong or at least in some way spiritually inferior. He knows what it takes to get to heaven, and he is certain that he is going to make it because of what he does or does not do.
Where *Stage One*

is focused on the consequences of sin,

*Stage Two* focuses on the rewards of being good/obedient.

When it comes to the motivation for spiritual actions and attitudes,

*Stage One* is focused on the “Lake of Fire,”

while *Stage Two* is focused on heaven.

**The Second Major Transition in Spiritual Maturation**

*Stages Three and Four*

are more identified with the group. People at this stage of spiritual maturation judge the morality of their actions by comparing them to the church’s

(corporate or local) views and expectations. They define right and wrong by what the important group, in this case the church they identify with, thinks is right or wrong. Rather than being concerned with the consequences to themselves for obedience or disobedience, they are concerned with what the group will think of them and how the group defines right and wrong—

determining whether or not they are orthodox in their beliefs and actions. Doctrines, statements of beliefs/creeds and rules are adhered to rigidly with little thought of whether they make sense or are fair or appropriate.

*Stage Three*

In *Stage Three*, a person’s position as a church member becomes very important, and she judges rightness or wrongness based on the approval or disapproval of those in the particular church or denomination she is a member of. Her definition of a good follower of Jesus is how well he or she fits into the church’s expectations of its members. The relative morality of what a person does is evaluated by how it will affect the person’s relationships with the rest of the group—whether he or she will respect me or not.

*Stage Three*

followers of Jesus want to be liked and well thought of by other members of their church.

They realize that not conforming or obeying the norms or rules or living up to their expectations affects how others feel about and accept them.

Also, the place they find themselves in, the hierarchy of the group, is determined by how well they conform to their particular church’s ideas and norms.
As long as the individual is seen as meaning well and desiring to conform to the group’s expectations, he is generally accepted.

Therefore, appearances and appearing to be sincerely trying to conform even when a person is struggling are very important to a

Stage Three Christian.

Stage Four

In the fourth stage of spiritual maturation, the group, or in this case the church, doesn’t just influence the person, they become more important than the individual. Obeying God’s commands as understood by the church, the traditions developed by the church, creeds and statements of belief, extra-biblical authorities and church leadership become the predominate motivating force. The “good of the church” and conforming for the good of the larger group, good, and mission become most important. The individual’s needs become subservient to the group’s needs and good. Statements of belief, creeds and traditions, and church policy prescribe what is right or wrong.

Group response to behavior or action is focused on protecting and preserving the church. Violation of the church’s norms becomes “right” or “wrong” rather than a matter of preference, and people are labeled as “bad” or “good” accordingly.

It is a tragic fact that many churches prefer to keep their members in the early stages of spiritual maturation because they are easier to influence and channel and control at this stage. Rather than encouraging, sustaining, promoting and protecting the individual’s personal relationship with God, for a whole plethora of reasons, the tendency is to keep them beholden and subservient to the group. There is often far less stress for the leadership and for more giving if we can keep people in this stage. All too often, the church and its leaders want to be seen as the dispensers of God’s grace, the source of the only valid information about him; we want to be seen as the way, the source of truth, and the means of eternal life. In fact, without that identity, many

would question the reason for their existence.

Mazhar Mallouhi describes this as being like a person selling bottled water on the bank of a river. His only hope of success becomes based on not letting people see the river so that they will buy his water. We forget that we are called by God to lead people to the water, not to be the only conduit from which they can get the water.

God never designed the church to be an ar

k—if you were in it, you were saved, and if you were outside of it, you were lost. Rather, the church is called by God to be a party of messengers, leading lost people to the source of life and safety and love. Our role as followers of Jesus is to personally and intentionally meet people who are spiritually hungry and searching, and then to walk together with them on the journey toward God.
In the next installment of this series, we will look at the last two stages of spiritual growth.

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Lord, I’m Confused

http://www.atoday.org/article/2448/poetry-the-arts/poetry-prose/lord-i-m-confused

by Andy Hanson
Submitted April 18, 2014

Lord, I’m confused.

_Sometimes, when tragedy strikes,
I feel like a motherless child,
a long way from home._

But on Easter Sunday on Table Mountain,
surrounded by golden poppies and purple lupine
I feel right at home.

_Sometimes, when I see starving children on TV,
I am grateful that this world is not my home
I’m just a passing through._

But when I hold Claudia in my arms
and she smiles and kisses my lips
Heaven can wait.

_Sometimes when injustice rules
and the innocent suffer,
I’m a poor wayfaring stranger._

But when a friend honors me with a hug
and a student tells me I’ve made a difference,
Here is where I belong.

_Sometimes when the mindless horror of tsunamis
and earthquakes and tornadoes make me crazy,
I wander in exile from home._

But even as I pray for deliverance
In the darkness of grief and despair,
I glimpse a star of wonder, star of night.
_A Grace Connection_
Words have always been a source of fascination and not a little entertainment (Scrabble, crossword puzzles, etc.). For they are the medium by which we communicate, comprehend, and are enlightened.

I’d like to suggest a little word game. Play along with me, if you will.

Consider the short, three letter word LIE. As a noun, in its most conventionally understood sense.

It has cosmic implications, for it is the basis by which sin insinuated itself into the universe.

Pride and envy (not coincidentally, two of the seven deadly sins) were integral to the ‘mystery of iniquity,’ in which Lucifer, once an angel nonpareil, sought a more elevated position. But it was a LIE that he used to convince a third of the angelic host to side with him in his insurrection against the Almighty.

And it was a LIE that seduced Eve to partake in the Garden of Eden of the forbidden fruit.

And paradise was lost.

There are few things God cannot do. He cannot, according to Holy Writ, LIE (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18).

And lying, which is intertwined with so many other sins, is an abomination to Him.

The antonym of LIE, truth, shall set us free (John 8:32). The implication of our not being free if we lie is a truism that needs no elaboration.

Let us add a V.

We now have EVIL.

Which, in its noun form, is what separated man from God, and whose natural consequence was death.

And, since Eden, man’s initially pristine nature, a tabula rasa, has degenerated. So rapid and deep was the initial descent that it took only ten generations from the creation of man for his
EVIL to fill the cup of God’s wrath, and He chose to largely destroy Earth by The Great Deluge.

The battle between good and EVIL, initiated in an unseen celestial place before our earth’s inception, and witnessed by beings in the universe of whom we are but dimly aware (and that only by faith), has waged for millennia, resulting in untold suffering and death, including, most importantly, that of the Son of God.

Incidentally, the same letters that comprise EVIL also form VILE. This is a rare example of an anagram also being a virtual synonym.

Let us now add a D. And we have DEVIL. Which is what Lucifer transmogrified into after he was cast out of heaven. The first and, for cosmic purposes, the greatest Fall. Along with his cohorts, the third of the angels who sided with him and became fellow demons, he was given Earth as his kingdom, as its subjects, our first parents, had indirectly declared allegiance to him in Eden when they choose to believe him rather than God.

And he is determined to take as many as possible with him to that place from which there is no escape. It is only by God’s grace that we are able to resist and overcome the wiles of the EVIL one (James 4:7). Thankfully, the Almighty is mightier than the DEVIL. Were it not so, we would indeed be without hope.

Let us add an E, to make another word: VEILED. What the Most Holy Place was, before Christ’s crucifixion and atonement. At which time it became no longer separated from the Holy Place, because the reason for that separation no longer existed. God has always, in mercy, VEILED Himself from us, for we are told no man can see His face and live.

However, He has, throughout history, manifested Himself in various ways—to the Israelites, by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. In the many miracles wrought on their behalf both before and during their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness. In His creative power, by creating the universe and everything in it ex nihilo. In the still small voice of conscience. As my father, a scientist, once wrote: 'from the infinite (the universe) to the infinitesimal (the subatomic).'

And, today, in ways that make sense to those who believe in the unseen world and in miracles—the miracle of birth, of fine classical music, of great visual art, of the wonders of nature, and most of all, of the gift of grace and salvation.

Let us add an R. We now have the letters for DELIVER. Life begins when a woman is DELIVERed of a child, and we are born. And our parents, if we are fortunate enough, seek to DELIVER us from that which they know is not good for us. But, once we are able to make intelligent decisions on our own, they, like God, allow us to choose. And, even if we make unwise decisions, they still love us.

We have no closer analogy for God’s love than the parent-child relationship. We are indeed privileged to be considered the children of God, and to be permitted to call Him “Our Father.” It follows that other humans are also God’s children, and therefore our siblings. So,
rather than Christ saying, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” He might have said, “Love your brothers and sisters as yourself.” If it makes it easier to love one another, I see no harm in interpreting the second great commandment this way.

And the ultimate hope is that, at the time Christ returns to claim His own, we will be DELIVERed from a world of sorrow, pain, disease, calamity, and death to one where there will be no more suffering, and Eden will be restored. And there will be no need of the sun, for the light of the Lamb will illuminate all.

Paradise regained.

Game over.

And the universe, once again, may hear these words uttered, this time in triumph, not in anguish, "It is finished."

A new world order begins.
Good for Bodies, Good for the Planet

http://www.atoday.org/article/2454/features/articles/good-for-bodies-good-for-the-planet

by Debbonaire Kovacs
submitted April 24, 2014

It was the article in the Charlotte (Maine) Observer that caught our eyes. The headline said, “At Adventist Restaurants, Meals are Good for the Body and Good for the Planet.”

LEWISTON, Maine On a main drag dotted with fast-food joints, a new church-run restaurant is breaking the mold: It offers vegan fare as a healthy alternative in a low-income neighborhood.

But for Seventh-day Adventists, who opened The Ark in a former Pizza Hut, the project is no first. Adventists established meatless restaurants as early as the late 19th century in a bid to encourage healthy living.

Now, after decades of lackluster interest, the tradition is being revived. Eager to rekindle urban ministries, Adventists are feeding growing numbers of city dwellers hungry for meals that are good for both the body and the planet.

http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2014/01/11/4599663/at-adventist-restaurants-meals.html#.U1gbDPldXUU

A story about a vegan restaurant run by Adventists is no news to most of us, but this writer, G. Jeffrey MacDonald, apparently was so interested that he didn’t just write about this restaurant, he got into the health history of Adventists. He noted different cities and countries where Adventists have opened vegetarian or vegan restaurants, and quoted both patrons and workers, including a volunteer chef whose day job is forklift driver for Walmart, on the benefits not only of healthy eating and living but on the friendships that develop. Then MacDonald entered territory many Adventists would be uncomfortable with—he got into environmentalism.

Eating meat taxes the environment more than a plant-based diet does, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Methane from livestock and their manure does as much to accelerate global warming as 33 million cars, the center says. Livestock production also strains resources: 41 percent of irrigated U.S. farmland goes for livestock feed production, and 4,500 gallons of water are required to produce one quarter-pound of beef.

Some patrons of The Ark are rethinking how they relate to the natural world and other creatures—even if they aren’t signing on to Adventism, which encourages but does not require a meatless diet.

I got curious, and looked for more information online about this restaurant. Its website (www.lewistonark.com) is well done and engaging—imagine a graphic of a meat-filled subway (or hoagie, or gyro, or grinder, depending on where you’re from—grinder, most likely, in Lewiston) made to look like an alligator, with green olive slices for eyes and bits of onion rings as teeth, and the phrase, “Is what you’re eating, eating you?” (Or better yet, go on over and see for yourself.) There’s a page for the restaurant, one for classes, one to meet their herbalist, and a blog. And the manager told me that a new donation has made it possible for them to upgrade
their website further, so stay tuned.

When the Charlotte Observer ran their story in January, The Ark was open three days a week for lunch; now it’s open five for lunch or brunch, and two for dinner. The menu made me hungry: Portobello steak and potatoes? Eggplant Arrabiata? I don’t even like eggplant, but it sounds good!

Classes vary. Right now, they’re offering some on vegan cooking and nutrition, but they also cover smoking cessation, hydrotherapy, and therapeutic massage. This past winter they did a series on herbs to “warm you and help ward off winter chills.”

According to Don Ball, the associate pastor whose “church” is this ministry and the team that runs it, they save Monday and Tuesday evenings for their lecture series. Doctors from nearby Parkview Adventist Medical Center (whose Lifestyle Choices website is also linked at the Ark) help out, and a nurse practitioner comes weekly.

The Ark’s herbalist, Jane Kuntz, seems like someone I’d like to meet. Growing up in the Yorkshire Dales of England, Kuntz has traveled in Scotland, Ireland, Morocco, Italy and Greece, mostly with the Peace Corps, but also, once she took up her interest in herbs, working at a natural healing center in Norway. In her words, “After a six-month apprenticeship with a local herbalist, there was no turning back. I tore the brush and briars off a neglected bank, and planted an herb garden. I enrolled with Clayton College of Natural Health and spent three years completing their ‘Family Herbalist’ and ‘Consulting Herbalist’ certification. I have spent the last three years studying with East West School of Herbology where I have learned to incorporate the best of several herbal traditions, and have just completed their “Professional Herbalist” training.”

The blog is really more like a listing of offered services, mostly classes in such areas as raw foods, herb use, depression support, diabetic cooking, and Lyme support.

Ball explained that the ministry is older than the restaurant. The original vision, he says, belongs to Rick and Jane Kuntz, the senior pastor of the Auburn church and the herbalist. They called Ball in. He has no official pastorate, but is paid a stipend by the Northern New England Conference. They began with a group meeting to study what Ellen White had to say about health ministries, and began doing doctor counseling, cooking classes, and so on, in January, 2013. By June of that year, they were ready to open their restaurant, in an old Pizza Hut that Atlantic Union loaned them money to buy. The Union is not requiring payment until three years, and Ball says business is good, and will be able to support itself once the mortgage is paid. They do have donors and supporters, besides their team of around fifteen volunteers (one couple of which may put in up to 50 hours per week!) If you would like to join in their support, they would be delighted. There is a Donate button on the homepage. Or if you live in the area, volunteering is also more than welcome.

“The Lord is really blessing,” said Ball, “and if anything stands out, it’s the team. We meet weekly to study and pray, on Tuesdays. We feel we’re ready to move to a whole new level.” He has preached one evangelistic series, and they will do another this October. They also are using yet another donation to hire two young women who have done medical missionary work. For
four months, they will work in the Lewiston area, helping people in their homes, inviting them to the meetings and classes, and in general, trying to live as Christ lived in his community.

“If they don’t become Christians, that’s fine,” Ball said. “We’re just here to love, to bring peace, to bring joy to the community. I mean, that’s what Jesus did.”

www.lewistonark.com

http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2014/01/11/4599663/at-adventist-restaurants-meals.html#.U1gbDPldXUU
Nagim Lake, Kashmir

http://www.atoday.org/article/2455/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/nagim-lake-kashmir

photo by S M Chen
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"Oh God, thy waters are so great and my boat is so small."
- based on Breton Fisherman's Prayer