NEWS

Adventist Doctor Continues to Build a Campaign for the U.S. Presidency: The good doctor, Ben Carson, has plenty of competition coming up in the Republican primary, but he remains strongly positioned to make his voice heard--a lot...

The Emerging Church, Perils and Possibilities for Adventist Faith Examined by Panel: Scary portents of beastly ideas invading the Remnant rise with heretical overtones in the wake of the ominous phrase, "The Emerging Church." The story behind that phrase may offer some reassurance, however, as we look at a culture that simply refuses to stand still anymore....

Philadelphia Church Hosts Refugees from Congo: Big changes have come to Philadelphia's historic Ebenezer Adventist church, since 50 non-English-fluent refugees who attend Sabbath services began their transition to life in a new community....

Kenya's President Supports Adventist Education: As in First World nations some 70 years ago, Adventist colleges and universities are becoming primary points of SDA interaction with civic and cultural thought leaders in fast-
developing nations....

**Adventists and Muslims Resolve Violent Conflict in Ghana:** Adventists and Muslims locked in conflict in Ghana have found a way to trade land for peace....

---

**OPINION**

**Open Letter to Elder Ted Wilson:** Adventist scientist and guest writer, Robert T. Johnston, thanks the General Conference president for avoiding certain kinds of language in proposed modifications to Fundamental Belief #6....

**Two Faces of Adventist Education:** Even as the media gives the Adventist educational system strokes for excellence, the flip side shows that only about one-quarter of Adventist children and youth actually attend these fine schools. Chester Hitchcock wonders why....

**Psalm 22 chanted (DEVOTIONAL):** When Jesus was at one of his lowest points, he cried out words from Psalm 22. In keeping with the Lenten season and spiritual preparation for Easter, Debbonnaire Kovacs chants evocative sentiments from the famous chapter....

---

**FEATURE**

(Available to all logged-in subscribers; to apply for a free 30-day subscription, click here)

**Two Retired Women Spread New Life in their Community:** Though no longer young themselves, Merlene and Carol of Spokane, Wash., are ministering to seniors who...
want to escape physical and mental ruts and rediscover the joys of life....

POETRY & ARTS

I Almost Aborted My Only Child (PROSE): A professional Christian writer from Africa tells a fictional account of a young woman who failed miserably to abort her only child, and now praises God for her incompetence....

The Mountain of the Lord (VISUAL): Though God is with us everywhere, the snowy crags rising heavenward remind us spatially of our Lord, whose existence is from everlasting to everlasting and cannot be contained in buildings made by man....

Contact: Adventist Today
PO Box 1135
Sandy, Oregon 97055-1135
atoday@atoday.org
Adventist Doctor Continues to Build a Campaign for the U.S. Presidency

By AT News Team, Feb. 26, 2015: Dr. Ben Carson, a devout Adventist and retired brain surgeon, was the first speaker Wednesday morning (Feb. 25) on the opening day of the yearly Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). He was among a long list of speakers interested in running for president in next year’s American elections and ranked number two in a straw poll of the activists in attendance.

CPAC is not a political party but includes the grass roots of right-wing politics in America. Almost all of the speakers are affiliated with the Republican Party and the party leaders view CPAC as representing a key segment within their party.

The presidential preference poll of registered participants in CPAC gave the greatest support (25 percent) to Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, according to the CBS television network. Carson was supported by 18 percent of the participants while 17 percent supported Jeb Bush, former governor of Florida and the son and brother of two former U.S. presidents. Ten percent supported Michael Huckabee, a former governor of Arkansas and Baptist pastor.

Carson is the only African American candidate among a host of people who are interested in becoming the candidate of the Republican Party. A Gallup Poll in December ranked him as sixth among “the most admired men in America.” More admired were President Barack Obama, Pope Francis, former U.S. president Bill Clinton, evangelist Billy Graham and former president George W. Bush. In a tie for sixth place were Carson, Stephen Hawking, Bill Gates and Bill O’Reilly.

Carson has not formally announced he is running for president, but he has begun to hire a campaign team. Prospective campaign manager Terry Giles has announced that Houston businessman Jeff Reeter will serve as Carson’s national finance chairman and Amy Pass, who raised money for Newt Gingrich’s presidential bid, will serve as Carson’s national finance director.

“Reeter and Pass add to Carson’s growing political team,” reported The Hill. “Last week, Carson hired Mike Murray, the president and CEO of TMA Direct, a direct marketing firm, to serve as a senior adviser. Carson also has … a leadership PAC that has collected millions of dollars, and a movement to draft him as a candidate with a presence in all of Iowa’s 99 counties.” Iowa is the first state where decisions will be made about presidential candidates for 2016.

Carson is “getting close to that ‘first tier’ status,” stated the National Review. “He’s currently third in Iowa, second in PPP’s national poll, at 9 percent in Texas, which is good for fourth; 8 percent in California, which is good for fourth; and at 13 percent in South Carolina, which is tied for third.”

Although it is early in the two years of politics leading up to the election of the next president in the U.S., Carson clearly has a chance of becoming the first Adventist to hold that office. President Warren G. Harding, elected in 1920, had an Adventist mother, sister and brother, but was not a church member himself. He appointed his brother-in-law, Pastor Heber Votaw, a returned missionary from Burma and later a General Conference staff member, as the administrator of Federal prisons.
The Emerging Church, Perils and Possibilities for Adventist Faith Examined by Panel

By AT News Team, Feb. 24, 2015: A panel of scholars examined “The Emerging Church: Possibilities and Perils of Postmodern Adventism” on Sabbath afternoon, February 21, at Loma Linda University (LLU). The moderator was Dr. Charles Scriven, visiting professor in the School of Religion at LLU. The panel included Dr. Zane Yi and Dr. Eric Carter, both faculty members at LLU, and Dr. Maury D. Jackson from the H. M. S. Richards Divinity School at La Sierra University.

Scriven has served the Adventist denomination as president of Kettering College and Washington Adventist University, as well as senior pastor at Sligo Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. Since 2004 he has also been the board chair for the Association of Adventist Forums, the largest organization of Adventist academics and publisher of the journal *Spectrum*.

Scriven began by noting that postmodernism has brought at least three major issues to religion and American culture: the democratization of information, a new awareness of religious diversity and relativism. In contrast with postmodernism’s relativism, modernism was both overconfident and naïve about its ability to know things with certainty. Within religious contexts, this “overconfidence often led to doctrinal arrogance.” He quoted Friedrich Nietzsche’s argument that all human knowledge is entwined with the perspective of the individual and therefore not absolute. Postmodernism recognizes this reality and has a certain “epistemological humility.”

The democratization of information is associated with the digital revolution. The general public now has unprecedented access to information that was previously restricted to specialists. Because of this, the experts can no longer control the conversation and there is an undermining of any kind of hierarchy.

The new awareness of religious diversity makes it impossible to ignore the fact that those who sincerely believe that they know the will of God based on their own reading of sacred texts may be, in fact, not really proclaiming truth about God. They could be merely projecting how the culture of a given time and place determined views about the nature of God and other religious truths.

To illustrate a related point, Scriven noted that we humans, living in our different cultures, can be compared to fish living in water who do not notice the existence of the water. Later, Jackson elaborated on this point that, in considering the closest object one can see, many individuals fail to recognize that the closest object in their field of view are the glasses one uses to clearly see anything. This perspective indicates that no one can speak from God’s point of view, but only from one’s cultural context, the “glasses” through which one sees all of life.

Yi focused on evangelism. He observed that postmodernism holds that language, culture, psychology, history and economics contribute to our knowledge of the world, and therefore we possess no method for attaining absolute truth about the world. For all humans “truth is complicated. God knows the truth, but I’m not God.” We humans have no way of knowing the ultimate “Truth.” There is only “your truth and my truth.” Yi quoted Paul from the New Testament, “We see through a glass, darkly.”

For traditional Christian (including Adventist) evangelism, the implications of the ascendency of postmodernism in the Western world are threefold, said Yi. (1) We need to listen more and speak less. (2) We need to learn from others, not just teach “our truth.” (3) We need to practice what we preach. In Christian terms, this means to be “more Jesus-like; to live and act as Jesus did, practice hospitality, and take an interest in justice.”

Carter addressed the issues associated with postmodern spirituality, beginning with a quote attributed to Francis
Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.” He argued that in preaching the Gospel we exercise fidelity to the life and teachings of Jesus. In his view, the modernist separates the sacred from the secular while the postmodernist allows for no separation of these two domains. There is no special “sacred” space, just as there is no monolithic spirituality.

To illustrate the postmodern perspective on spirituality, Carter showed a drawing of a tree with a single trunk (labeled emergent church) arising from the ancient church. Among the branches and foliage are varieties of means for spiritual life. Illustrations of this include the neo-monastic groups, the house church, and the cyber church. In his view “emergent spirituality” involves that which occurs when theology starts “walking,” undertaking value-laden actions, and living out Christ’s example.

Jackson focused on “liturgy” in Christian worship. He observed that about every 500 years, Western Christianity has undergone a paradigm shift in its worldview, a “rummage sale” of prevailing beliefs and practices. One such “rummage sale” was the Protestant Reformation which resulted in the formation of denominations separate from the unitary Medieval church.

These “rummage sales” occur when “a common story” is lost and a new common story needs to emerge. Jackson suggested that the postmodern ethos is causing many parts of contemporary Western Christianity to radically reevaluate its life and practice. The Adventist movement is not immune to the current realignments caused by how the worship experience is being re-conceptualized.

Jackson posed the question, “Are some versions of Adventism prohibiting some from being Christian?” He pointed out that a recent study of the membership history of Adventism has determined that in the past 50 years, more than 30 percent of those who were baptized later left the church. He contrasted the Adventist faith as a commitment to 28 fundamental beliefs with what Adventist Christians are actually doing in their worship and liturgy. Jackson concluded with the observation that if we don’t adapt to the new emerging worship reality, “we may go out of business.”

Following the presentations, there was opportunity for comments and questions from the audience. Some of the reactions indicated a clear discomfort with the nature of emergent Adventist faith. One person said the main controversy in the early church was whether Gentile converts had to become Jews in order to be Christians. He proposed that the same kind of issue is an important question today among Adventists: Must we become Adventist in order to be Christian?

Another person noted that historically Christianity began as a sect within Judaism, but then became a separate religion. Will the same thing happen to emergent Adventism or emergent Christianity? One panel member responded that there is only one tree, and emergent variations are merely branches on that one tree.

In conclusion, it was noted that the Adventist faith includes a combination of pre-modern, modern, and postmodern thinking. Jesus spent more time healing than preaching and contemporary Adventism does the same through its health ministry.
Philadelphia Church Hosts Refugees from Congo

From The Visitor, Feb. 26, 2015: Ebenezer Church, the oldest historically African American Adventist congregation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has welcomed 50 refugees from the Congo after a call for help from the Nationalities Service Center (NSC), an agency that assists the United States government in resettling refugees from war and disaster areas worldwide. The refugees had requested that they be placed with Adventists before they left for the U.S.

NSC located and contacted the closest Adventist church to the new community where the refugees were relocated. Similar requests for help may be made to other Adventist congregations across the country with refugees from many places who make the same plea to the NSC.

Ebenezer Church is responsible for providing for the spiritual needs of the Congolese. To accomplish this goal, the church purchased language translation equipment; transmitters and earphones so the group can hear worship services in Kiswahili, which many of the refugees can understand, even though it is not their native tongue.

Church members also secured the services of a translator who speaks Kinyarwanda, the native tongue of the Congolese, and obtained Sabbath School lessons in Kinyarwanda. The church will be starting classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) for the refugees. This is an essential step in helping the new arrivals find jobs and establish homes in Philadelphia.

Even with the immediate language challenges, the families from Congo are becoming actively involved in various church activities. The Congolese children participate in the Children's Ministries programs and sing with the Ebenezer children's choir.

Crystal Drake, wife of Pastor Charles Drake, is coordinating the efforts to make the new group feel welcome and help them with their transition to a new city. She has the assistance of a number of church members. “The church has rallied around these families. They have given so much in clothing and household goods until we had to ask them to stop,” she said. The church is also providing school uniforms for the children and conducting job-training seminars for the adults.

Ebenezer Church is located 18 blocks south of city hall in downtown Philadelphia in a neighborhood which was historically an African American community until the last couple of decades. It has become much more multicultural. Ebenezer has 318 members currently and was one of the first congregations in the denomination made up primarily of African Americans. Dr. Charles Bradford, the retired president of the denomination’s North American Division, belonged to this congregation as a child.

Contributors to this report included Michelle Bernard, editor of The Visitor, the news publication of the Columbia Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, and Dr. Robert Booker, communication director for the denomination’s Allegheny East Conference.

1
Kenya’s President Supports Adventist Education

From ANN, Feb. 25, 2015:  Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta visited the main campus of Adventist University Africa (AUA) on Sunday (Feb. 22) to support the construction of a new Health Sciences complex.

In a speech to a crowd of nearly 4,000, Kenyatta pledged his financial support for the initiative and commended the Adventist Church for being an “exemplary partner in transforming Kenya.”

“The Adventist Church has been a vital part of uplifting our communities, empowering our citizens and building our nation,” Kenyatta said, referring to the numerous churches and schools throughout the East African nation.

The Adventist University of Africa’s main campus is based at the denomination’s East-Central Africa Division, located in Ongata Rongai, a region on the outskirts of Nairobi.

Though based in Kenya, AUA is directly affiliated with the Adventist Church’s world headquarters. It offers Adventist graduate-level education throughout Africa. Doctoral programs are taught at the main campus, and other programs—such as theology and business—are taught with revolving faculty at other Adventist campuses on the continent.

Kenyatta, who was accompanied by Vice President William Ruto and other officials, additionally highlighted the Adventist university for having a progressive vision while occupying a niche as Kenya’s only university focusing solely on post-graduate studies. He also commended the Adventist Church’s educational system for its caliber and scale of educational services.

Kenyatta concluded his remarks by thanking the Adventist Church for demonstrating exemplary discipleship, compassion and philanthropy. “By touching hearts, improving minds and healing the sick you bring the word of God to life as a light to humankind,” he said.

Blasious Ruguri, president of the Adventist Church’s East-Central Africa Division, thanked the nation’s president for coming to show support for the project. Using the story of Jesus asking the disciples to find two donkeys to untie for use in the triumphal entry, Ruguri encouraged the audience to “untie their donkeys,” meaning to release some of their funds for mission.

President Kenyatta was the first to donate, contributing more than 2 million Kenyan shillings—nearly US$22,000—toward the Health Sciences Building project. Hundreds of government and Church leaders also contributed to the project.

Philanthropist Simeon Nyachae also addressed the crowd. While introducing the President, he praised the Adventist Church for saving the life of his mother through a surgical procedure she received at an Adventist hospital in 1942. Nyachae said she lived to be 102.

NOTE: President Kenyatta’s speech can be accessed on his official website.
Adventists and Muslims Resolve Violent Conflict in Ghana

By AT News Team, Feb. 26, 2015: The Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Atebubu, Ghana, has resolved a land dispute with the local Muslim community, according to the Ghana News Agency (GNA). In an effort to mend relations after a violent confrontation in mid-February, the Adventist Church has given the disputed land to the Muslims.

The initial investigation revealed that twelve Muslim youth "spearheaded the misunderstanding between the two religious groups," reported GNA. The Daily Guide described the destruction of property on February 13, reporting that a crowd of more than 1,000 Muslim young people "stormed the SDA church premises near the Atebubu Government Hospital on Friday afternoon after the mid-day prayers with guns and offensive weapons." The crowd then "set the newly built mission house ablaze and further brought down the walls around the church and demolished the temple."

The destroyed mission house "accommodated close to 20 teacher trainees who are doing their teaching practice in the school. They lost valuable items such as laptops, cellular phones, books and certificates, among others," reported Ghana Nation.

To resolve the on-going conflict, the regional security council facilitated a dialog, which lasted more than five hours. At the conclusion, the two religious groups signed a peace pact, according to GNA. "We forgive our brothers who destroyed our property," said Adventist pastor Paul Amo Kyeremeh, president of the Mid-North Ghana Conference of the Adventist Church. Kyeremeh continued, "We have surrendered the piece of land behind the controversy to you, our Muslim brothers and sisters, to end the rift."

In response, "Alhaji Gyasi Ahmed Dauda, the Regional Board Chairman for Muslims in Brong-Ahafo, expressed his contentment that the misunderstanding had been resolved and gave the assurance that the Muslim Community would live peacefully with the other religious organizations in the Region," reported GNA. Dauda stated: "We are very sorry about what happened and our position is to build a new mission house for the church."

Despite Kyeremeh’s statement of forgiveness, the regional security council has ordered the arrest of the twelve suspects accused of inciting the February 13 attack.
Open Letter to Elder Ted Wilson

by Robert T. Johnston, Feb. 23, 2015: I am writing to thank you and fellow denominational leaders for preserving ambiguity in the proposed revision to Fundamental Belief #6 (FB6). As a Seventh-day Adventist scientist who rejects the fundamentalist view of a literal 6-day creation of our world and life upon it approximately 6,000 years ago, followed by a world-wide flood that produced the geologic column and earth’s major geographical features as we find them today, I was initially concerned about the proposed revision (“clarification”) of FB6. However, having read what was voted at the recent Annual Council meeting, I am relieved that the church—while adding some unfortunate extra-biblical language with which I disagree—has at least retained ambiguity in one of the most critical areas, thereby supporting those Adventists who believe life has existed and developed on this planet for billions of years.

The adoption of the term “recent” instead of a more specific term such as “6,000 years” provides important clarification indeed. First, by using such an indefinite time descriptor, the church has left room for those who believe the age of the universe is approximately 13.8 billion years, the earth 4.6 billion years, and terrestrial life in its earliest forms approximately 3.6 billion years. Since we believe in an eternal God, we know that in His timescale even 13.8 billion years is indeed “recent.” Thus, we can agree with the language of this proposed revision even if careless readers might think it teaches a short chronology.

Second, by avoiding the “6,000 years” language that Ellen White used explicitly and repeatedly for the age of the earth, the church is tacitly admitting that it does not wish to be bound by White’s word on this matter. It appears that the church doesn’t agree with her writings about geology or is embarrassed by them and reluctant to subject itself to ridicule by upholding teachings that so clearly disagree with evidence from multiple scientific, historical and textual-critical sources.

This must have been a difficult concession for those who uphold a 6,000-year chronology and believe Ellen White’s words to be directly inspired by God, but it is a breakthrough for reason. We can count far more tree rings on bristlecone pines and layers in ice core samples than 6,000, and archaeological evidence points to civilizations older than 6,000 years. Avoiding Ellen White’s clear teaching on this subject not only leaves room for those of us compelled by radiochemical and fossil evidence to accept a “billions of years” chronology for life on earth, but it also clearly demonstrates how the church intends her writings to be used. That is, Ellen White’s writings are not authoritative in a final sense, but must be understood in the context of her life and times, and must be tested against other authorities such as archaeology and science. Thus, we may attribute her “6,000 years” to Ussher’s chronology written in the margin of her King James Bible, rather than direct, explicit revelation from God. Likewise, we may attribute her statements about coal-burning as the mechanism of volcanism—or the alleged discovery of human remains twice current size—to her dependence on human sources, rather than actual information communicated to her in vision. Otherwise, one might be led to question her entire body of work!

I understand that a majority of Seventh-day Adventists subscribe to a literal 6-day creation about 6,000 years ago and to a universal flood, but most Adventists have been heavily indoctrinated towards this view and have limited exposure to alternative interpretations of the biblical and natural evidence. By avoiding—after years of careful study—the “6,000 year” language of Ellen White, the church sends a message that there is room in its fellowship and institutions for pastors, teachers, theologians and scientists who, while deeply respectful of inspiration, allow natural and historical evidence to inform their interpretation of inspired writings.

Not all the new revisions are as positive as the adoption of “recent” over the specific “6,000 years” language of Ellen White. “Historical,” for example, places God’s creative activity in the past, a view more in line with Deism and not in accord with biblical evidence. Revisions to some of the other fundamental beliefs are also surprisingly poorly
worded. For example, “final” in FB1 rejects Ellen White or the work of the Holy Spirit. The term “bodily” in FB9 ignores Adventism’s traditional soul = body + spirit formulation. FB20 replaces “beneficent” but in doing so substitutes a word (“grace”) with a different meaning so that now God rested the seventh day to bestow unmerited favor on man. FB21 tries to use more inclusive language but in the process introduces referential confusion (a better phrasing might be, “Stewards rejoice in the blessings their faithfulness brings to others.”).

There are several other such issues, but I won’t belabor them here. The primary purpose in writing is simply to thank you for using the term “recent” instead of the “6,000 years” language of Ellen White. It gives me hope to see the church take at least one step forward for every two steps it takes backwards.
Two Faces of Adventist Education

by Chester Hitchcock, February 26, 2015: How thrilling it was to watch the PBS special called “Blueprint” that highlighted the reality of Adventist Education’s being superior to that of the public school system. As a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, I am delighted when we get such positive reviews in the public eye. What was even better was that it was not one of our own Public Relation efforts but was a result of an outside evaluation. The program was produced by Martin Doblmeier, an award-winning director of PBS documentaries, seeking only to document the facts about educating the young people of our day. Hopefully, this kind of publicity will have a positive effect on our schools as people look for better systems of education for their children.

Meanwhile, Mount Vernon Academy in the Ohio Conference is facing the difficult possibility of ceasing operation as have so many other Adventist schools in the past. While the statistics may clearly demonstrate that our schools provide superior education and the graduates, in turn, have a better chance of entering college and being successful in the future, there are unfortunately other statistics that we cannot rejoice in or proudly promote to the world. For instance, statistics show that only 30% of the Adventist families who have school-age children send their children to Adventist schools, and this is not something new. Sadly, many of our schools are suffering from low enrollment because only 26% of Adventist families have school-age children. When only 30% of those children attend our schools, we have far less enrollment than we did when 66% of our families had school-age children.

Hence, we have at least two faces to Adventist Education. One is that of a superior education that even outside evaluation can discover, and the other is that of only educating 30% of our own children for generations. Could it be that the Adventist system needs to reexamine our Christian education plan if 70% of Adventist children have been missing out on it? Now there is a trend where the enrollment in many of our schools consists of more non-Adventist children than Adventist. While there are varying opinions on the pros and cons of this trend, ranging from being evangelistic to our schools being too influenced by non-Adventist children, the fact still remains that 70% of Adventist children are not getting an Adventist education, and that is the way it has always been, even in “the good ole days.” Furthermore, while evangelism of non-Adventist children is important, we are losing the children that we have and Adventism is an aging denomination.

These topics are difficult to discuss because our schools are so precious to the history of our church. That being said, I believe that everyone would agree that our children are more precious than anything else. It is also a difficult conversation to have because no one has come up with an answer to the problem. However, our failure to address the fact that our education system misses 70% of our children while our church has been losing the children that we have, often to churches without any school system, is troubling.

Another aspect that makes the conversations difficult to have is that some of our church schools seem to be flourishing but depend heavily on the financial support of a retired generation and/or government tuition assistance plans, such as the one in Ohio called “Ohio Ed. Choice.” When the enrollment is good and the finances strong, no one wants to talk about what will happen when the retired generation is no longer around or the government assistance changes in a way that is not consistent with our beliefs. Unfortunately, those who urge for such conversations are often viewed as lacking faith, or being against Adventist education. However, in the November 2007 edition of Ministry Magazine, Nikolaus Satelemajer writes in the Editorial: “Colliding spheres of church and state”: “Government has a legitimate function to perform . . . The church also has a legitimate function to perform. While the church needs to have the freedom to fulfill its mission, it should not depend on government to do this. When the church depends on the government to accomplish its mission the function of the church become compromised. If the church is faithful to God, the mission will be fulfilled.”

For the sake of Adventist education and Adventist children, I feel it necessary to express my concern and broaden
my plea that churches, schools and conferences actively get engaged in conversations that address the fact that historically we have failed to educate 70% of our children. Furthermore, some of our schools that are surviving have become dependent on government assistance and the support of a retired generation. While we are blessed with the generosity of the retired generation, and while the government is cooperative with our teaching practices, it might be nice if we had conversations about how to become less dependent on the two.

Our churches have a lot of bright people who if given the chance and challenge to brainstorm ideas might, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, come up with a variety of innovations for financing Adventist education as well as ways to be involved in the education of Adventist children who remain in public schools.

For instance: Just as children receive classroom awards, incentives, and kudos for attendance, academic achievements and behavior in our schools, what if our churches instituted similar practices for all children who attend church? What if from birth to high-school graduation children could earn Adventist educational material for church attendance and participation? This would be hard to measure with statistics compared to enrollment in our schools, but if these types of things were developed that slowed the steady loss of our kids and increased their participation in church and understanding of our beliefs the results might be “out of this world.”

This is only one example, but if we entertained conversations for brainstorming without judging those who think outside the box as lacking faith, we might have much better ideas to consider.

A voice on behalf of the 70%

Pastor Chester Hitchcock

- 1
Psalm 22, chanted

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, Feb 25, 2015

For the weeks of Lent, I'll be singing the psalms here each week, using an ancient method of half-chanting, half-singing that's been in use at least since the early centuries of Christianity.

This week's psalm is Psalm 22, the one from which Jesus quoted when he was at the lowest point of his life, in agony on the cross. I believe he said the words he did both to express his suffering and sense of despair and to comfort himself with the rest of this Messianic psalm, which, like any good Jew, he most likely knew by heart.

If you, too, are suffering, listen to this psalm and hear God's voice comforting you.

Audio Player
00:00
Use Left/Right Arrow keys to advance one second, Up/Down arrows to advance ten seconds.
00:00
Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.
Two Retired Women Spread New Life in their Community

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, Feb. 25, 2015  Earl, 82, could hardly walk. He used a cane to shuffle slowly along, very bent over. Now, though still slow, Earl stands straight, walks with stability, and uses no cane.

Doris, late 60s, heavy and diabetic, was never seen without her cane. Now she doesn’t even bring it with her.

Mary, who has bad knees and is limited by severe tremors, said this week, "I weigh five pounds less in one month, and I wasn’t even trying to lose weight!" She’s lost inches, too. Her confidence is much improved, and many things she didn’t think she could ever do, she does now.

Janice, early 40s and heavy, said “I have so much more energy now! Before, my boss was saying, ‘You are walking slower and slower.’”

What do these diverse people (and dozens more) have in common?

In part, the changes have come about because they are friends with two Adventist women: Merlene Olmstead and Carol Matlock. A year and a half ago, Matlock had, by her own estimate, become a hermit. Since her husband had died of multiple cancers a few years earlier, she “just sat at home and read.” Now she is busy and happy and says she can’t believe how much her life has changed. Olmstead described herself to me as a one-time pew-sitter. In the 1980s, teaching at Walla Walla University, she sat in the big church and “no one asked me to do things, so I didn’t. Well, we did take students bicycling, backpacking, things like that, but I didn’t help out in any divisions or anything.”

When she moved to New Mexico to teach in a university there, she vowed she would never be a pew-sitter again. Her discipline used to be called Home Economics, but when its name changed to Family and Consumer Sciences, “for some reason, that suddenly rang a bell with me. We could do so much for families! In fact, at this public university, our mission was ‘to be a source and a voice for families.’ We did so much with students, and they really stepped up to the plate. We got them involved throughout the state!”

When Olmstead retired back to Washington State, she said she’d gotten too used to sunshine to go back west of the Cascades, so she settled in Spokane. But she knew she wanted to stay involved. What could she do?

Meanwhile…

Spokane County Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich did a live radio segment in which he detailed needs in the community that were not being met, and suggested that “churches and other people of faith” might “work together with community leaders for the common good.” The sheriff was speaking to former Methodist pastor and Spokane Valley Council member Ian Robertson, and Robertson thought that sounded like a great idea. He held a Faith Summit at Whitworth University to launch a Christian Service Team. People from many faiths—according to Olmstead, over 900 of them—came to that meeting, and more than 80 congregations have said they want to be a part of it. (I heard from two individuals that Mormons and Adventists have been especially involved.)

Since that time, they are developing a five-year plan to work on four particular areas of concern: at-risk youth, neighborhood safety and security, homelessness, and wellness/health equity.

Olmstead and Matlock were at that meeting, and have also been a part of ongoing meetings. They were drawn to two of the areas: at-risk youth, and senior health. They each became a mentor to a grade-school student. Olmstead said, "This is not an academic mentorship. It’s about developing a relationship with the kids.” They go once a week at the child’s lunch hour and draw or color or paint. Olmstead says that over time, the kids especially started opening up to Matlock.
Meanwhile, they both wanted to help seniors. “We are seniors ourselves!” said Olmstead with a laugh. Her sister-in-law, a nurse, knew a woman in Seattle who had written the original SAIL program, so she made the contacts, and Olmstead then called the local director of Spokane’s SAIL, A. J. Sanders, who held a training the two women attended.

Sanders told me that SAIL is “an evidence based senior fitness/wellness program, focused on 65+ but beneficial for any age. It focuses on balance, strength, and flexibility, and has mandatory components of exercise. Trained instructors can add aerobics or other creative things as long as they do the mandatory elements. What sets us apart is that we also do fall prevention and tips, conversations about things they can do in day-to-day life to maintain independence, medication review, vision checks, and even home safety modifications.” Sanders says the program began as a research project in Washington, funded by the Centers for Disease Control, and took several years to develop into the program that it is now, which is beginning to move to other states as well (possibly not under the same name).

What now?

Matlock and Olmstead were now trained, but what should they do next? Olmstead was new in the area, but Matlock had lived there her whole life. She talked to someone she knew and asked, “How can we find out how to help seniors?”

They were told, Parks and Recreation has a weekly meal; go ask. They had permission to ask people individually what needs they had that were not being met in the community. “We ended up with three pages of stuff!” she said.

Besides the SAIL classes, just a few of the things that came from that include:

- Trips to various interesting places such as the Cat Tails Zoo (cattails.org), where big cats that have been kept as “pets” can be rehabilitated and cared for, the arboretum, craft and art museums, and Manito Park, which has “fabulous gardens from early spring to late fall!”
- A plethora of activities like bird watching, Christmas caroling and going to see light displays, and community gardening
- Simple things like singing songs after meals, and walking
- Writing and acting in their own Christmas play

Parks & Recreation says this is the biggest and best-attended program they’ve had in their history, and City Council begged Matlock and Olmstead to join the Council, giving them an office and a budget, and creating a Senior Commission, of which Olmstead is now president.

But it’s the stories that matter. The growing trust on the faces of the two women’s second- and third-grade mentees, the excitement of the people whose anecdotes began this article, and the new life they themselves have experienced. Olmstead says, “I truly believe that I am following “Christ’s method that brings true success”: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” Ministry of Healing, 143.

Adventist Today thinks so too!

Learn more about SAIL

Learn more about the Christian Service Team
I Almost Aborted My Only Child


I looked at the newborn baby boy the nurse had handed to me and shed tears. I had tried to abort him three times yet he had been born healthy and strong. I named him Victor because he had overcome my attempts to abort him and I named Mutuku because he was born at night. As the nurse left the room I whispered to the boy that he was lucky and blessed.

I remembered how I conceived Victor. I was working at Mirema Drive Estate, Kasarani, when I met Johanna Mweu. I was new in the area. The place had very few people and the only people close to me were two elderly men who worked for my boss. I mostly felt lonely and in need of company.

To minimize my loneliness I took long walks in the evenings after work. My work was simple; I cooked for my boss, a white man who lived alone. I could walk all the way to Thika Road, Zimmerman or Githurai and come in time for my supper.

I was employed in June 1982. In July, new occupants came to a vacant house next to mine. One of the newcomers was a young man who spoke Kikamba, my mother tongue. For some time, we lived as if neither noticed the other, though I could hear him sing Kikamba hits across the fence. We by-passed one another several times in the evening as each took a walk.

The young man had a voice that comforted me. He would sing for hours without a break, and at times I laughed alone at the way he mixed up tunes.

Then one day, as I was going to the shops, I found him standing in the middle of the path we used as a short cut to the dukas. He seemed to be concentrating on something. I greeted him and was about to pass by when he warned me, “Don’t step on that snake!”

On the mention of “snake” I stopped instantly. Right ahead of me was a snake. It was black with yellow spots; I had never seen a similar snake. Beside it were six baby snakes. Again I had never seen baby snakes accompanying an adult one.

“What kind of a snake is this one?” I curiously asked the young man.

“It is a Kali one,” he joked and laughed. “I too have never seen another like it but nyoka ni nyoka, a snake is a snake and should be avoided.”

We did not attempt to kill the snakes. Instead we took a different route to duka. As we walked we introduced ourselves.

“I am Jane Mweni from Iveti,” I told him.

“I am Johanna Mweu from Makueni,” he replied.

From that day we start talking whenever we met. As time went on and our closeness grew, Mweu began coming to my room. He would sing for me. I would serve the meal and escort him to the gate. I did not pay back his visits, but we began missing one another when we were apart.

When December came our bosses left the country and allowed us to spend our time as we wished as long as we
did not leave the compound. On the eve of Christmas I was alone in our compound because the old co-workers had
gone to look for local beer. I felt a strange sort of loneliness and decided to check on Mweu, I found him cooking
chicken soup. He was surprised to see me. It was my first visit to his room and it was at night. He welcomed me in
and we talked a lot about Christmas and its accompanying merriment.

When the soup was ready we took it and then leisurely began sipping some sodas. Mweu switched on the record
payer. The music got us into dancing around the room. At first we danced separately but after a while we held one
another and danced in a slow motion. Suddenly, the electricity failed.

As if Mweu was afraid of darkness he held me very tightly around the waist. I tried to push him away but his grip was
too tight. I felt him trying to kiss my mouth and turned away. Then I pushed him violently. He slipped and we both fell
onto the stool on which the record player was placed, breaking some of the records.

We struggled on the floor but Mweu did not let me go. I tried to scream but he slapped me hard on the face and
placed his hand on my mouth. Finally he raped me violently without taking into consideration that I was a virgin. It
was very painful.

When he was satisfied he released me and ordered me to go to my house. Before I left I took a stool and hit him on
the head with all the force I could muster, then I slipped away to my house. I thought I heard him groan but I wasn’t
concerned. He had behaved like an animal to me.

Back in my room I thought of ringing Muthaiga police station to report. But what would I say I was doing at a man’s
house at night? I dropped the idea.

For many days that followed, I did not hear Mweu sing. I was happy because I hated the very voice that used to
entertain me.

Then I was told by one of Mueu’s work mates that he had been admitted to Kenyatta National Hospital with head
injuries. Mweu’s work mate claimed that thieves had broken into Mweu’s house, stolen his goods and beaten him. I
knew it was a lie but I did not reveal the truth. I pretended to sympathize. The only thing I wished was that Mweu
would not die as I would have hated to kill a man.

Even as days went on, the shame I had suffered in the hands of Mweu did not leave me. Self-pity overwhelmed me
but I did not share my feelings with anybody. Then in January. 1983, my boss returned from abroad and gave me a
two-week leave. At home I began feeling tired and vomited often. I thought the change of climate was the cause but
even when I reported back to duty tiredness and vomiting did not stop.

When I came back from my leave I found Mweu’s boss had moved away and a new mzungu had moved into the
house. With the new mzungu came a young man who worked for him. The name of the young man was Peter. He
was sociable and hard-working. He cleared his master’s compound and planted vegetables. Soon we were buying
from him. I became friends with him and one day when I needed some money, I went to his house and asked him to
lend me some.

“I don’t lend money to pregnant girls,” he replied.

I denied I was pregnant.

“But even a child can know you are pregnant,” he insisted.

Two days later as I was ironing, my boss asked me whether I was pregnant. I lied, telling him I was not, but I could
tell he was not convinced. By then I knew a number of ladies in the area and I thought they would help me. That
evening I visited a lady who operated a hair salon at Zimmermann and disclosed to her that I was pregnant. She felt
my belly and confirmed my fears. “You are about four months pregnant,” she said.
I was alarmed. I did not want to be a single mother.

The following weekend I traveled home to Iveti Hills to a girl I knew had aborted a year before, to seek help. She said she could help if I paid a small fee. I paid and she put a straw into my private part and blew in air. She instructed me to wait for some hours and the child would come out. I waited but nothing happened. After one week I went to a lady at Githurai who put a plastic pipe into my private part and told me it would allow air to go in and destroy the fetus. After two days nothing had happened. Then I tried an overdose of malariaquine. I went to three different dukas and from each fought four tablets which I later swallowed.

After a few minutes I began sweating and vomiting, then I fainted. I must have shouted because some people from the neighboring plots who were having a fellowship rushed to my room. They looked for a car and took me to a city clinic.

At the clinic they gave me medicine that made me vomit all the Malariaquine I had swallowed. I kept vomiting and taking water for many hours. My stomach and head ached terribly. I was later taken home and I slept just before dawn. The following day I was taken to the clinic again. When the nurses saw I wasn't as seriously ill as the previous day they mocked, abused and insulted me, calling me a prostitute of the first order.

They warned me never to try abortion again. When I finally recovered, some believers led by Peter kept coming to my house and sharing the gospel with me. I was convicted of my sins and accepted the Lord Jesus as my Lord and Savior and asked Him to forgive me. Believers nursed my young faith and gave me a lot of encouragement. In September 1983, I took a leave and went to Machakos General Hospital where I gave birth to Victor Mutuku.

Three years later I met John, an evangelist from Nairobi. We loved one another and got married. It is ten years now since we got married and we have not been blessed with a child. Now I realize I could have aborted the only child that God is likely to give me. I do not hate Mutuku because he was conceived through rape, as I had feared. I thank God for saving Mutuku’s life and giving me the joy of being a mother.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm a freelance writer in-Kenya with my works published in South Africa, Kenya and USA. I'm blind in one eye and must use very large font to write.
The Mountain of the Lord


“The mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord, this Sinai, at the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel.”
Judges 5:5