Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.

- Robert H. Schuller

April 28, 2013

**IN THIS ISSUE**

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Reading: "I'm just not being fed" - and why that may be OK
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Events & news: Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition

**"DONE OVER PERFECT"**

*by Rebecca Davis*, South Atlantic Conference

We all, in our ministries, at least most of us, want things done perfectly. However, more often than not, in our quest for "excellence" things don't get done at all. For example...you probably wanted to start a new video blog for your church. But because you didn't have the right Hi-Tec equipment or the perfect script, the blog was never realized. I mean... you tried videoing with your iPhone or iPad camera. You just never did anything with it thinking that the production could be better.

Now, while I do not believe one should just put out junk, especially in the name of ministry. I do believe we should not let "perfection" hinder us. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, in her book *Lean In* writes, "Aiming for perfection causes frustration at best and paralysis at worst." She also makes mention of how one of her favorite posters at Facebook declares, "in big red letters", "Done is better than perfect." I have modified the quote just a little for my own life and ministry-"Done over perfect." The concept separates attainable goals from unattainable goals. It's never going to be perfect! Your hair will probably be out of place! You will probably stumble over a few words! You may have to come back and regroup in the near future. You may learn you can't do it all and that you need a solid team. I want to suggest in this article that if you wait for all of your proverbial ducks to be in row things will never get done!

I want to make clear "Done" does not excuse common sense, thoughtfulness, process, strategy, planning, and certainly not praying. "Done" represents fulfillment, carrying out, finishing, and completing. Unfortunately, these are words that do not describe most of our ministries and ministry endeavors. When was the last time you carried something out? Was it the idea you had for prayer meeting? Was it the New Beginners class you were going to start? Was it the children's devotional you wanted to write?
The chorus of one of my favorite songs states, "I got a couple dents in my finder, got a couple rips in my jeans, trying to fit the pieces together but perfection is my enemy..." I can resonate with that and I am sure you can too. But let's press forward! Let's allow the words, "Done over perfect" to hang above our ministries!

Discuss with Rebecca on the Best Practices Facebook page.

Like us on Facebook

REAL ESTATE AND STEWARDSHIP

Church Buildings and the Larger Issues of Christian Mission and Ethics
By Monte Sahlin

Loren Seibold's piece in the last issue of this newsletter about a very small congregation that feels compelled to own a church building, even if it is inaccessible to members and visitors, has stirred up a lot of discussion. Let me address this topic from the viewpoint of an Adventist sociologist and ethicist.

John and Sylvia Ronsvalle are a Christian couple who have been doing research on how Christians use money since 1968. They have found that over more than four decades the average per member giving in Christian denominations has declined from a little over three percent of income to less than two-and-a-half percent of income. Of the total giving about 15 percent goes to outreach (including evangelism, community service and overseas missions) and 85 percent is spent on internal activities of the church. They include data from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in their reports and it is not much different (although I am uncertain as to the "translation" of our method of accounts into the Ronsvalle's calculations.)

What kind of witness does it provide to the world when the followers of Jesus spend so much of the billions of dollars given to churches on taking care of themselves? And so little on loving the outsiders that Jesus died for? Is our institutional body language consistent with the gospel values that we preach?

One of the big items that Christian churches spend money on is real estate; owning, constructing, maintaining, insuring or renting a building. Almost always it is a building that (1) is conspicuously a religious space, thereby assuring that nonbelievers will rarely enter and (2) is closed with nothing happening and no one available almost all the time. What is the point of raising large amounts of money for such use? Is it what Jesus would do? Will new generations of donors be willing to support it?

Decades ago in a large city where I was in charge of urban ministry for the Adventist Church, I went to a community meeting and was introduced as an SDA pastor. During the coffee break, a young man came up to me, introduced himself and told me he wanted to be baptized. He lived across the street from one of our churches and told me that he could not figure out how to make contact. He had gone there several times and it was always locked up tight; no one answered the door bell and no one responded to the business card he left in the door several times with a note asking for a phone call.

It turned out that, number one, he was stopping by on Sundays because somehow the "Seventh-day" part of our name didn't alert him as to when we might be there; and, number two, the church didn't use the front doors because they were not convenient to the parking lot behind the building. If you were a regular attender, you knew the secret to getting into the building. If you were an unchurched person living three buildings away, you had no clue.

When our denomination began very few local churches owned a building. Most met in the homes of members, some in rented space and others in city missions. What if we returned to such a plan? What if a church sold its building, put the money in an investment fund and used the interest (maybe $25,000 to $50,000 a year) as a perpetual source of funding for community service and evangelism? What would be the impact on the church and on the world?

What do you think? Discuss this with Monte on the Best Practices Facebook page.

Like us on Facebook

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO HAVE A FEMALE PASTOR?

By Arin Gencer

After more than 40 years attending Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, Jesse Spencer had seen pastors come and go and thought he'd heard it all. But he never imagined his next pastor would be a woman.

The elder bristled when he heard the news almost five years ago. One of his first questions: "Where is this in the Bible?"
"It was a learning experience for me," Spencer, now 72, said. "I hadn't studied the Word; I was just going on what people say."

For Spencer and many Adventists, female pastors remain the exception more than the rule. Some balk or go so far as to seek another church. Yet for others, the direct experience of a female pastor's ministry can make all the difference, turning the doubtful or downright opposed into staunch advocates for women in clergy.

**READING FOR PASTORS**

**Ever heard this one?** "**I'm just not being fed in church.**" Quote: "All of these criticisms imply that the church is supposed to revolve around you. ...Newsflash! The church does not exist for its members; it exists to bring the Gospel to others."

The church may have to rely increasingly on its wealthier members if this Pew Research Center finding is **accurate**. Quote: "Wealthy households boosted their net worth by 21.2 percent in the aftermath of the recession.... The rest of America lost 4.9 percent of household wealth from 2009 to 2011." Upshot: large churches and institutions may survive better than small churches and schools.

**The end of an iconic religious figure!** George Beverly Shea dead at 104.

Paper checks are **have been** the payment medium for churches - **and they're disappearing**. This could be a difficult transition for churches. Quote: "For the most part the church has not responded. In a 2011 study done by Lifeway Research only 14% of those churches surveyed offered online giving." But "42% of churches that do offer online giving take in less than 10% of their incomes through online gifts."

The false logic of **"If just one person responds to this ministry, it will have been worth it."** Quote: “Suppose, for example, the outreach line item is for $20,000 and it is being justified on the 'If Just One Person' logic. But could there have been a far more effective outreach initiative which, for that same $20,000, could have seen 10 people come to Christ? Or 20? Or 100?"

I'm **so impressed by this ministry of taking church to the people.**

When religious beliefs become evil. Quote: "So how do you tell the difference between the healthy claims of absolute truth and the deadly? Scholars say to look at the results: When people start hurting others in the name of their religious truth, they've crossed the line."

**TO THE POINT: PATIENCE**

"Patience is something you admire in the driver behind you, but not in one ahead."

- Bill McGlashen

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day."

- A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*

"A waiting person is a patient person. The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us."

- Henri J.M. Nouwen

"Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing, fame is nothing. Openness, patience, receptivity, solitude is everything."

- Rainer Maria Rilke

"I am extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end."

- Margaret Thatcher

"It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you."

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

"The two most powerful warriors are patience and time."

- Leo Tolstoy

"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions"
- Rainer Maria Rilke

IDEAS, EVENTS, RESOURCES, ANNOUNCEMENTS

Just a reminder that articles from Best Practices for Adventist Ministry can be shared in your newsletter, website or Facebook page, with proper attribution to Best Practices and the author of the piece.

Love to see this: SDA’s on the front lines in helping victims of the Texas fertilizer plant explosion.

“Meet Hiram Edson,” a new video from Adventist Heritage Ministries, tells about the early days of Adventism rising out of the days of the Millerites and The Great Disappointment of 1844.

NAD Newspoints recommends this free guide to using Facebook for your church.

Previous resource links:
- eGracenotes mobile app
- New PlusLine at AdventSource
- NY13
- Pastor’s convention, NAD Ministerial Department
- The Seven Campaign to stop child abuse
- Family Ministries Facebook page
- Andrews University Press, Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church
- General Conference International Field School of Evangelism
- NAD Theology of Ordination Study Committee
- General Conference Annual Council response to ordination without regard to gender
- Jesus 101 Biblical Institute with speaker/director Elizabeth Talbot
- The ADVENTISTS – 2, by Journey Films
- The Great Controversy Project e-newsletter
- Real Family Talk
- Interactive health program on Hope Channel

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After more than 40 years attending Philadelphia’s Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, Jesse Spencer had seen pastors come and go and thought he’d heard it all. But he never imagined his next pastor would be a woman.

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For Spencer and many Adventists, female pastors remain the exception more than the rule. Some balk or go so far as to seek another church. Yet for others, the direct experience of a female pastor’s ministry can make all the difference, turning the doubtful or downright opposed into staunch advocates for women in clergy.

“Some of it is, I think, the unknown,” said Esther Knott, a pastor for more than 25 years, who works at Andrews University’s Pioneer Memorial Church. “I think the exposure to a woman [as a pastor] gives them even the willingness to look at it with different eyes.”

Spencer — unwilling to leave Chestnut Hill as others did when Tara Vincross was named senior pastor — turned to prayer.

“Lord, if this is the right thing to do, I want to keep my mouth closed and do what’s right,” he recalled saying. He asked questions about Vincross and studied “more than I ever have in my life,” mining the Bible, Testimonies for the Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Commentary for insight.

“Everything that I needed to have found about a lady pastor, the Holy Spirit showed me,” Spencer said. The texts that stood out most centered on Jesus’ resurrection, he said. While the male disciples “were afraid, shut up in a room,” the women waited at His tomb — and it was Mary Magdalene who announced the Lord had risen.

God’s message was clear, Spencer said: “I can use who I want to use.”

Brita Scribe experienced that revelation when she heard Pastor Paula Olivier preach at the Church of Oranges in New Jersey.

She’d always had male pastors, Scribe said, so “when I heard we were going to bring in the female pastor…I said, ‘No way, that’s just not biblical.’”

She pointed to verses in 2 Timothy that say women should remain quiet and not teach. She thought about looking for another church. But she was still at Oranges for one of Olivier’s first sermons.

“It wasn’t just her preaching; it was her whole demeanor. She had the spirit of God,” Scribe said. “I just fell in love with her.”

When Olivier left Oranges to be senior pastor at the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Montclair less than five miles away, Scribe followed.

“God has opened my eyes,” Scribe said, “and I don’t see any reason why women cannot be a pastor....If the spirit of the Lord is calling you, then that’s what it is. And I know for a fact that Pastor Olivier was called by God.”

Olivier’s arrival at the Montclair church thrilled Robinya Scurry, then a worship coordinator who now serves as an elder — particularly because Olivier was the first woman pastor she had ever had. But Scurry remembered a time when she did wonder whether women could handle such a role.

“She proved me wrong,” Scurry said of Olivier. “I’ve never seen her in a vulnerable situation. I’ve never caught her
off-guard.”
Olivier is downright tough, she added, and much more likely to tackle difficult issues head-on than some of her male counterparts.

“She doesn’t sugarcoat anything,” Scurry said. “She’s tough…tougher than some of the male pastors in some situations.”

At Chestnut Hill, Spencer has been similarly impressed with VinCross’ mettle and drive.

“I have never seen what is going on now in all of these 40-something years I’ve been there,” Spencer said. “People are coming in by leaps and bounds.

“God intended to allow me to be living to know that women had a great part to play in the end times,” he added. “I believe that with all my heart. I see how the women are just coming to the front.”

Spencer and Scurry are part of a growing number of church members who are lead by the 107 female pastors in the North American Division. Male pastors such as Walt Williams and Stan Patterson are elated to see the growth.

Williams believes that in some cases women can be more effective ministering to the needs of women. He also appreciates the unique perspective that women bring to preaching “When I have had the privilege of listening to a woman’s sermon I hear different perspectives of the nature of God of how a woman hears the message from scripture in her context.” This, he believe is refreshing to new generations:

“I would see also that a woman pastor would be able to communicate to a younger generation of the inclusiveness of the call of God; that it’s not specific to any race or nationality or gender.”

Stan Patterson believes that societal timing requires that we have more female pastors. “There was a period in the WW II generation post WWII generation when the pastor’s wife accompanied him in ministry. It was kind of a freebie for the church. But those days are gone.”

Most pastoral couples can’t afford to live on one salary so the feminine touch of the pastor’s wife can’t be taken for granted. He points out that the majority of church members are female. This creates a challenge for male pastors to provide personal ministerial support to female parishioners without compromising ethical standards.

“I discovered that having a female pastor on staff answered many of the frustrations, many of the scheduling problems that I faced as a pastor working alone. She was able to do things without the stress of scheduling that I simply couldn’t do. I came out of that experience with a strong sense of if I were pastoring again, and I had one associate it would be a female.”

Hyveth Williams, professor of homiletics, believes that congregations would do well to hire a female pastor. Many times women do better in handling the ego conflict that sometimes occurs in congregations. Women tend to listen and weigh things out and avoid the ‘I’m in charge’ trap. “We wrap our arms around people and say ‘we’re in this together’.”

As North America churches now have gender choices Esther Knott encourages congregations to be open to a female pastor. “For some congregations, if they’ve never had a woman pastor or considered that, it’s a big deal, a very big step, and change in the way that people have thought before. But I’ve found that once people start entering into the process and they actually have a female pastor that they work alongside with, they said ‘this was a no brainer, why was this so difficult?’”

Hyveth Williams promises that “when a church hires a woman they are getting three times as much because we are fresh, we’re new, and we’re hungry to please God and please those who have hired us.” Williams makes congregations an offer. “I’ll guarantee that when you take the right called woman and place her in ministry she will give you outstanding professional accomplishments beyond your imagination.
I’m Just Not Being Fed (and Other Church Complaints)

Newsflash! The church does not exist for its members; it exists to bring the Gospel to others.

I drove past the big billboard next to a large church on a freeway each week for seven months and it bugged me every time. It said, “If You’re Not Growing Where You’re Going, Try Us.”

I think churches should advertise, but I think it should be targeted. This sign is targeted, but it’s targeted toward people who are already church members.

It seems to me that we should be targeting the unchurched.

Perhaps this church is located in an area where everyone goes to church and their only opportunity to grow is to pick off disaffected members of other churches, but I seriously doubt that. Aside from the fact that it seems less than honorable to intentionally try to attract church people who are not satisfied with the church they attend, chances are that any one you get that way will, after a brief honeymoon, be dissatisfied with your church too. (And probably become a pain in the neck or even lower.)

Yet we hear that sentence all the time. “I’m just not being fed.”

The question I always wanted to ask, and now that I am older, do ask from time to time is, “Why not? Why aren’t you being fed?”

Sometimes the answer is, “The pastor’s sermons are boring.”

That might be true, but rather than leaving, this person should pray for his pastor and support any efforts he makes to improve.

Sometimes the answer is, “The pastor’s sermons are too simple.”

Maybe his sermons are simple, but it may be that his sermons are simple to you because they are targeted at new believers.
Perhaps you find them simple because you need more challenging stuff. In that case, instead of complaining about simple sermons, you should pray for the people he hopes the sermons will reach, and ask him for guidance for ways you can go deeper. He would probably love to give you some direction.

Other times, the reason the person isn’t being fed is, “The music is not to my taste,” or “too loud,” or “for another generation,” or “I don’t like all the tech stuff,” or simply, “I don’t know the songs.”

Again, look at whom the church is trying to target. You might say, “Well, if I’m not part of the target, then I guess they don’t need me.” That is exactly wrong! The church needs you to be on the team, to be part of the effort to reach people who don’t know Christ.

All of these criticisms imply that the church is supposed to revolve around you.

It’s not! It exists to glorify God.

We glorify Him by obeying Him, and He has told us how to do that: Reach out to those who don’t know Him with His message of love, hope and salvation; grow up to be like Him in our actions and attitudes; grow together in love and fellowship; and lift up those in need without expecting anything in return.

Newsflash! The church does not exist for its members; it exists to bring the Gospel to others. Members of the church are supposed to grow up to take their places in helping make that happen.

Thom Rainer estimates that, “we only reach one person for Christ each year for every 85 church members in the United States.”

It’s time for all of us to be too busy to complain.

Churches don’t need to compete for members. A church that seeks to grow because Christians transfer to it from other churches is not building the Kingdom of God. There are enough unchurched people in America to fill all our churches several times.

Our competition is Satan, not the church down the block. Let us point our efforts at him.

A veteran pastor, Ray now is the administrator of Tina Houser Ministries, coaches pastors and consults churches. He is excited about helping churches that are plateaued get going again and seeing declining churches rebound. Ray believes there is hope for these churches, if they want to become agents of
God's love, hope and forgiveness in their communities. Visit his blog at rayhouser.blogspot.com, and e-mail him at ray.houser@gmail.com for more information.

More from Ray Houser or visit Ray at rayhouser.blogspot.com
Wealthiest Americans Only Winners in Recovery, Pew Says

By Frank Bass - Apr 23, 2013

The U.S. economy has recovered for households with net worth of $500,000 or more, a new study shows. The recession continues for almost everyone else.

Wealthy households boosted their net worth by 21.2 percent in the aftermath of the recession, according to the study released today by the Pew Research Center. The rest of America lost 4.9 percent of household wealth from 2009 to 2011.

Pew attributed the disparity to gains during that period in the stock and bond markets, benefiting affluent households, while the housing market’s decline hit others harder. The report underscores the nation’s growing income inequality, with the top 13 percent of households recovering their losses from the 18-month recession that ended in June 2009, and the rest of the country continuing to hemorrhage wealth.

“The results are entirely sensible, but depressing,” said Richard Fry, a Pew senior research associate and co-author of the study by the Washington-based organization. “It’s a stark story of two Americas.”

Average household net worth across all income levels increased 14 percent to $338,950 from 2009 to 2011, the latest figures available from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Pew report, based on the Census Bureau’s Survey of Income and Program Participation, reinforces a body of evidence that the U.S. is becoming a nation of haves and have-nots.

Widening Gap

One of the most common measures of income inequality, the Gini coefficient, has risen in the last generation. The coefficient is a number between 0 and 1, with a zero indicating that all income is shared equally and a one representing complete concentration of income.

Income inequality in the U.S. grew to 0.477 in 2011, according to the Census Bureau, a 20.2 percent increase from the 0.397 measured in 1967.

The gap between rich and poor is most pronounced in the Bridgeport, Connecticut, metropolitan area, about an hour from Wall Street. The Gini of 0.535 measured there is approximately the same as the national rate for Thailand, surpassing the figures for Zimbabwe and Chile.
The U.S. Gini is equivalent to the figures for Ecuador, China and Madagascar.

The growing inequality during the past three decades is becoming a permanent fixture of the U.S. economy, according to a Brookings Institution study released last month and co-authored by Jason DeBacker, a Middle Tennessee State University economist.

‘Less Dynamic’

“From a number of different perspectives, there’s evidence that the U.S. economy has become a little less dynamic,” DeBacker said.

Carl Van Horn, director of the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, said the recession’s effects are still being felt because of the length and breadth of the downturn, the worst since the Great Depression.

Americans feel mired in a slump even though the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based National Bureau of Economic Research declared that the recession ended in June 2009, Van Horn said.

“From the standpoint of the typical American, the data used aren’t always very useful indicators,” he said.

The Pew report found that interest-earning assets such as U.S. government securities, municipal and corporate bonds boosted wealth among high-income Americans. The value of those assets, owned by 13 percent of U.S. households with net worth greater than $500,000, rose 389 percent during the two-year period to an average of $803,641.

“Very few households have those assets, but when they do -- wow!” Fry said. “The average values just skyrocketed.”

401(k) Plans

Tax-deferred 401(k) plans, owned by 65 percent of wealthy households, recorded the second-fastest growth rate of any asset class, climbing 57 percent to an average value of $119,799. Thirty-nine percent of U.S. households with net worth less than $500,000 reported owning 401(k) or thrift savings plans.

Real estate, which sparked a global financial crisis in 2008 when the housing bubble collapsed, remained a poor investment after the recession. The Pew study said average rental-property equity plunged to $370,013 in 2011, down 32 percent from the $547,462 registered in 2009. Home equity dropped 16 percent to an average of $127,290.

To contact the reporter on this story: Frank Bass in New York at fbass1@bloomberg.net

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Mark McQuillan in Washington at mmcquillan@bloomberg.net
George Beverly Shea, the booming baritone who sang to millions of Christians at evangelist Billy Graham’s crusades, died Tuesday after a brief illness. He was 104.

Spokesman Brent Rinehart of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association said Shea died in Asheville after a brief illness.

Shea was well-known as a gospel soloist before he and Graham met in the early 1940s. He joined Graham’s crusade team in 1947 and stayed until Graham’s declining health ended most of the evangelist’s public appearances nearly 60 years later.

Besides his distinctive voice, Shea was known for his trademark rendition of “How Great Thou Art” and his inspirational “The Wonder of It All.” He performed live before an estimated 200 million at crusades over the years and recorded more than 70 albums.

Graham said at Shea’s 100th birthday celebration in February 2009 that he couldn’t have had a ministry without Shea.

“I first met Bev Shea while in Chicago when he was on Moody Radio,” Graham said then. “As a young man starting my ministry, I asked Bev if he would join me. He said yes and for over 60 years we had the privilege of ministering together across the country and around the world. Bev was one of the most humble, gracious men I have ever known and one of my closest friends. I loved him as a brother.”
Music Association Hall of Fame and was inducted into the Religious Broadcasting Hall of Fame in February 1996. Shea was also inducted into the inaugural class of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists’ “Hall of Faith” in 2008.


Our prayers go out to the Shea family…

Todd

2 Responses to “George Beverly Shea Dies at 104”

1. Pastor Mickey says:
   April 17, 2013 at 10:47 am

   I remember him singing “His eye is on the sparrow” when I was a small child. Perhaps his longevity is a clue that singing praise to God is good for your health as well as your spirit.

   Reply

2. Leonard says:
   April 17, 2013 at 1:30 pm

   What a life and what a legacy, thank you God for this man.

   Reply
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George Beverly Shea Dies at 104

Posted by Todd Rhoades in on Apr 17th, 2013 | 2 comments

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Shea was the recipient of ten Grammy nominations, a Grammy Award in 1965, and was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Grammy organization in 2011. He was also a member of the Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame and was inducted into the Religious Broadcasting Hall of Fame in February 1996. Shea was also inducted into the inaugural class of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists’ “Hall of Faith” in 2008.

Our prayers go out to the Shea family...

Todd
Americans have changed the way they do commerce. Sit at your local Starbucks or McDonalds and you can see it. When was the last time you saw somebody writing a check? For that matter how often do you see anyone paying with cash? More and more Americans are turning away from the traditional means of payment towards plastic and digital commerce.

The Decline of Paper Checks

How many paper checks a month do you write in your family? You probably write few of any. The younger you are the fewer you write. In the last decade check writing has declined significantly. Consider the following facts from the Federal Reserve...

- Paper check usage declined from 61% of all payments in 2000 to just 26% by 2010.
- In 2011, the number of checks processed by the Federal Reserve fell at its steepest rate yet, down 17, a third of the volume processed 20 years ago.
- The average check size has approximately doubled, rising from an average of $879 in 2001 to $1,460 in 2011, as many smaller-value payments are transacted with debit cards or have been automated.
- Reserve Banks estimate that check volumes will have declined another 14 percent in...
2012, to about 5.5 billion items.

The Federal Reserve summary of why check writing is in decline stated, “One key reason for the decline in check writing is the public’s rapid adoption of new and convenient payments service technologies. Today’s payment technologies allow households and businesses to pay by cash, checks, automated payments through automated clearinghouse (ACH) payments networks, debit cards, credit cards, and prepaid cards.”

Commerce today is more digital than ever before and this trend is only going to continue.

**How The Church Has Responded to This Change**

For the most part the church has NOT responded. In a 2011 study done by Lifeway Research only 14% of those churches surveyed offered online giving. For the past few months I have been conducting a survey of churches and their online giving activity. You can take that survey by going here [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Onlinegivingstudy](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Onlinegivingstudy) While the results of our survey shows a higher percentage of online usage by churches, 58% of respondents say they offer online giving, none the less it reveals some startling facts.

- 42% of churches that do offer online giving take in less than 10% of their incomes through online gifts. Even churches providing this tool have a ways to go towards effective use.

- We don’t feel our people will use it. That was the number one response of churches that did not provide online giving.

- The cost is too much, was the second reason for not offering online giving followed close behind by, We don’t understand how it works.

Clearly the Church has a long ways to go to catch up with the rest of how society is doing commerce! Many that have online giving are not using the tool effectively. Those that feel their members will not use it should ask how many have automatic bill payments set up. As for costing too much, would WalMart or McDonalds offer plastic options if in the long run it did not pay for itself? Transaction rates are fractional and providing ease of use will increase giving which will more than pay for any costs. As for not understanding how this technology works did that stop you from buying a computer? It is the 21st century after all.

When we do not offer online giving then we are forcing those who attend our churches to adapt to our 20th century means of collecting money. Fewer of your attendees come to church with their checkbooks and they have little cash on their person. Could this be one
reason why giving to the church continues to decline?

What the Decline in Check Writing Will Mean for Your Church

This technological and cultural shift if not meet will have drastic implications for The Church including Your church. As your congregation gets younger by attrition you will see check writing become more infrequently used. **If we do not change our process for collecting the offering we will see our offerings decline!** The reason is simple.

The harder we make it for people to give the less likely they will give. If our only means of collection remains the traditional offering plate, people will put in the few dollars they have on their person. The percentage of what you collect will decline if it has not already.

**The Bible teaches us that we must give it does not say how.** The offering plate came into wide acceptance in the U.S. only in the late 1800’s to early 1900’s. It is not the 11th commandment that gifts be put in a basket or plate. The offering plate is a tool. It will remain for some time an effective tool for collecting gifts. However if it is your only tool and the demise of paper checks continues then you are in trouble.

**Smart churches provide multiple ways for people to give thus increasing their ability to receive funds.** Since check writing is in decline isn't it time you offered online giving?

Mark Brooks

Founder and President

The Charis Group and Charis Giving Solutions

PS. **My company, Charis Giving Solutions, can help set you up with an online giving platform that is cost effective.** To find out more go [here](http://charisgivingsolutions.com/)
Why “If Just One Person…” Reasoning is False & Dangerous

There is a growing trend among many churches to apply a false formula in many aspects of the budgeting process. I call it the “If Just One Person” false logic.

If you’ve found yourself falling into this trend you need to:

- Be aware of the trend,
- Recognize why the logic is faulty,
- Know how to respond.

1. Be aware of the trend
This trend typically unfolds in this manner. During the budgeting process someone will notice an unusually large dollar figure attached to a new or unproven outreach initiative.

   The defender of the line item will then apply this logic. “Hey, if even one person makes a decision for Christ, then every penny will have been worth it!”

   While I’m using outreach as an example, the same reasoning pops up in other budget discussions too, such as:

   - If just one person takes a big step towards God...
   - If just one person starts reading the Bible regularly...
   - If just one person invites someone far from God into their home...

2. Recognize why the logic is faulty
In reality there is a dangerous false economy at work here. Suppose, for example, the outreach line item is for $20,000 and it is being justified on the “If Just One Person” logic. But could there have been a far more effective outreach initiative which, for that same $20,000, could have seen 10 people come to Christ? Or 20? Or 100?
3. **Know how to respond**

When this logic is raised in your budgeting circles the key is to match the sincere value with a discussion of equally valid competing values such as the stewardship value and the wisdom value.

Have the courage to point out that even in an abundance economy (recognizing that God does indeed “own the cattle on a thousand hills”), there is still a leadership responsibility at play which requires a maximum return on each Kingdom dollar.

**Why is this a big deal?**

As a church leader you have a responsibility to ensure that each dollar is being applied for maximum Kingdom impact.

So be on the lookout for the “If Just One Person” false logic. If you speak into it in a timely, gracious but clear manner the Kingdom win can be huge.

**How do you respond to the “If Just One Person” logic?**
Mission Arlington is taking church to the people

by Jeffrey Weiss

Photo courtesy of Mission Arlington

Every day but Sunday, people come to Mission Arlington for assistance, both physical and spiritual.

April 23, 2013 | Management theorists talk about five elements an organization needs to effect significant change: vision, skills, incentives, resources and an action plan.

But the First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas, and Tillie Burgin, the resourceful leader of Mission Arlington, have stood that theory on its head for 27 years.

Burgin, 76, said she never envisioned creating a multimillion-dollar social services network when the church asked her to start a Bible class in a low-rent apartment complex in 1986. Resources, she said, tend to show up providentially when they're needed. And she consistently, even defiantly, insists that she's never had anything remotely like an “action plan.”

“If you can explain it, it's not of God,” she said.

She even denies that Mission Arlington is an organization in the traditional sense.

“It's not an organization,” she said. “It's an organism.”

But skills, Burgin has in abundance. And the powerful incentive that drives her and more than 40,000 volunteers each year emerges, she said, from John 3:16 -- with a special emphasis on “whosoever.”

Launched by First Baptist Arlington as an effort to take church into the community, that small Bible study in one woman’s apartment grew into what is today a $5-million-a-year nonprofit organization that provides an array of social services. More than just a social agency, however, Mission Arlington is still, as its tagline claims, “taking church to the people.”
Along with free medical care, emergency assistance, summer camps and other programs, the organization hosts a huge network of Bible studies and other small, churchlike groups. The 329 groups, virtually small congregations, meet weekly in apartment complexes, mobile home parks and houses, bringing together volunteer leaders with groups of up to several dozen residents for study and worship.

Though Mission Arlington doesn't keep precise attendance figures, it's safe to say that many more people meet in these small groups than the 2,600 or so that show up on an average Sunday at First Baptist Arlington.

**Questions to consider:**

- Do great organizations begin with an “action plan” or with good instincts and an act of providence?
- The Rev. Charles Wade wanted church members to “fall in love with our community before we got afraid of it.” What are the potential fears or problems that your organization might move to embrace?
- What does it mean to be “in control” rather than “controlling?” How can you better navigate the tensions between the two?
- To what extent does your organization operate as a “semipermeable membrane,” allowing people to retain their own identities?

**A healthy beehive**

Every day but Sunday, Mission Arlington’s main campus, located across the street from the church, hums like a healthy beehive. People file into the “Front Room,” where they are triaged for their spiritual and physical needs. Out back, dozens of volunteers accept, sort and distribute donations. The waiting rooms at the dental and medical clinics are full.

But Burgin is no sedentary queen bee. “Miss Tillie,” as she is often called, is likely to be climbing in and out of trucks of donated material or driving around Arlington visiting the apartments that are part of the network.

A thousand people a day come to the central campus for food, clothing, medical and dental care, furniture, emergency transportation, and even a little cash.

Are they Baptists? Do they even attend one of the Bible studies? It doesn’t matter. There are no barriers to entry.
The volunteers at the main campus and the Bible study leaders come from all kinds of churches, too: Catholic, United Methodist, Churches of Christ, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Bible Churches, and some with no denominational affiliation.

“They just love, love, love people,” said Lt. Patrick Jones, head of the Arlington Salvation Army. “If I disagree with you about the necessity of baptism, we can still work together to build the kingdom of God.”

Mission Arlington holds no fundraisers and has no marketing budget. But its 2011 990 form, the annual report that nonprofits are required to file with the IRS, says it collected almost $5 million in donations and had assets of more than $15 million — mostly buildings that were donated or paid for by specific donations. Charity Navigator gives Mission Arlington an unusually high score of 66.3 out of 70.

As its location suggests, Mission Arlington, though a separate nonprofit, remains closely associated with First Baptist Arlington. Burgin and her troops are largely autonomous. But Mission Arlington and its founding church still supply each other with resources, inspiration and ideas.

And that’s all fine with First Baptist Arlington’s pastor.

“My view of the church is that it is a partner with God in accomplishing the restoration God intends for his creation,” said the Rev. Dennis Wiles. “I believe that our church has bought into the fact that we’re called to be agents of restoration.”

When Wiles was called to the church more than 11 years ago, the search committee made it clear that support for Mission Arlington was not negotiable. The church continues to be a vital source of volunteers and financial support, currently providing more than $400,000 a year for the nonprofit.

**Planting the seed**

So how did it start? Why has it succeeded? Observers give two people credit for planting the seed: Burgin and the man who was the pastor at First Baptist Arlington in 1986, the Rev. Charles Wade.

Arlington is a city of 370,000 — about the size of Raleigh, N.C., or Cleveland — set between Dallas and Fort Worth. Then as now, it was a town with plenty of poverty and lots of low-rent apartments. According to the most recent census data, more than 15 percent of the residents and 22 percent of the children live below the poverty line. Conditions weren’t
that different in the 1980s.

Wade and his church had been searching for a way to reach out to the apartment dwellers and invite them into the successful and mostly affluent church.

“I was hoping we could fall in love with our community before we got afraid of it,” he said.

Then, at a meeting sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Wade heard another pastor explain how his church had set up a chapel in a nearby apartment complex.

“It was like a light went off in me,” he said.

Wade knew just the person he wanted to run the project.

Burgin grew up near the church. She and her husband had been missionaries in Korea for 10 years before one of their sons got so sick they had to come home. She had been a schoolteacher and the personnel director and employee relations director for the Arlington school district. And she was running two very successful study groups for the church -- an adult ministry and a weekly meeting targeting women who were about her age and older.

Wade’s proposal matched exactly what she’d thought about ever since returning from overseas: “If we can do missions in Korea, why can’t we do missions in Arlington?”

But like much of what she’d seen and done overseas, his idea to take the church into the community was easy to talk about, harder to do.

The woman Burgin asked to host that first Bible study had neither furniture nor money to pay her utilities. Although Burgin solved those problems, the people who attended the Bible study brought their own urgent needs with them. That pattern was repeated in apartment complex after apartment complex.

“We started with a Bible study and then discovered there was a physical need,” Burgin said. “You can’t say to a person, ‘We’re going to pray for you. Hope you get better.’ You have to connect with that need.”

The need quickly outstripped the church’s financial ability to meet it. To help attract donors beyond the church, First Baptist spun the organization off into a separate nonprofit, one of several the church has since established for various ministries.

As with all the nonprofits the church has established, Wiles tries to keep a light touch, staying aware of the operations without interfering.
Tillie the traffic cop

Burgin’s leadership style is more about setting an example than cracking a whip. She shows up six days a week for a series of staff meetings at 5, 6 and 7 a.m. Although she has an unmistakable influence on her employees, she makes relatively few decisions -- her experienced staff, she said, needs little of that. But her cellphone constantly buzzes with messages keeping her informed.

“I’m the traffic cop. I want to know everything,” she said. “But there is a difference between controlling and being in control. I don’t want to control. But I want to be in control.”

While Burgin gives her workers plenty of freedom, if someone shows up with an ego, Burgin is likely to assign him or her to sweeping the driveways, Wade said.

“If they do that faithfully, she’ll give them the chance to do other things,” he said.

Over the years, Burgin has gathered stories about the work at Mission Arlington and uses them to inspire others to join her work. (For a great example, watch the talk she gave in 2001 at the Duke University conference “Faith in the Future: Religion, Aging and Healthcare in the 21st Century.”) The stories are tied together with phrases and key sentences that she still uses word-for-word.

Mission Arlington 2012

The nonprofit served

- After-school program 3,600
- Bible studies/congregations 12,000
- Christmas toy distribution 33,925
- Rainbow Express Bible club 39,347
- Medical clinic 9,462
- Tent revivals 1,800
- Recorded spiritual decisions 1,960

One of those words is “indigenous.” Burgin and others say one reason for her success is that she is native to the area -- and so are her volunteers. She adds new apartments by approaching complex owners, many of whom own other apartments Mission Arlington
already serves.

Once the owner has signed on, she finds a specific location for the Bible study, such as the vacant apartment that one owner is providing for the newest study group. Then she finds a team of volunteer leaders, drawing from members of other apartment congregations or elsewhere in the community. Rookies are teamed with more-experienced leaders.

Jerry McCullough, a volunteer group leader since September 2012, exemplifies how well-connected the nonprofit is in Arlington. Until he retired last June, McCullough was the superintendent of the Arlington school district.

McCullough isn’t a Baptist, but that’s not a problem. Mission Arlington creates its own study curriculum that avoids most of the hot-button theological issues that can block cooperation. McCullough was happy to get with the program.

“The mission goes back to John 3:16. We just focus on that,” he said.

**Semipermeable membrane**

As the Rev. Andy Mangum, pastor of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arlington, described it, Mission Arlington operates as a sort of “semipermeable membrane” that allows people from different churches to go in and out without losing their own identity.

As with any organization, success breeds success. Scale has its benefits, Mangum said.

“They’re large enough and have enough resources that they are able to take just about whatever you’re willing to give,” Mangum said.

Some organizations have restrictive hours, he said. Others will accept only certain kinds of donations or volunteers. Mission Arlington opens early, stays open late and accepts pretty much anything useful.

Mission Arlington is, in part, a family enterprise. Tillie Burgin’s husband, Robert, an associate dean at Dallas Baptist University, helps out with the mission, and their son Jim handles some administrative duties, particularly those that are not his mother’s favorites. Like her, Jim Burgin rejects traditional models for understanding the mission’s operation.

“We’ve just pushed back against the corporate overlay that has been pushed onto the church,” he said. Often, the organization makes decisions that at least initially seem to go “against the flow,” he said.
For years, for example, the organization held a traditional charity Thanksgiving meal that served 1,000 hungry people. Though popular with volunteers, the event was regarded less fondly by the people who queued up to be fed.

So Mission Arlington did away with the “soup line” and replaced it with full Thanksgiving meals delivered directly to individual families, Jim Burgin said. Last year, the program fed more than 22,000 people, who were able to enjoy the holiday in their own homes.

“It protects people’s dignity,” he said.

**Change, and stillness**

His mother warns against getting too locked in to particular patterns. Even success doesn’t mean change isn’t needed. This year, she’s moving to create small “Front Rooms” in some apartment congregations that have space to store and distribute clothing and food.

“You never want to get into ‘this is the way we’ve always done it,’” Tillie Burgin said. “Things change; people change; hearts change. If we can get a little bit closer to people, reach more people, that’s what God keeps pushing us to see. But I don’t want to run out ahead of him.”

At the same time, it’s dangerous to change for the sake of change, she said. Wait, she said, to discern God’s will.

“Many times, it’s just, ‘Be still. Be still. Be still,’” she said.

Over the years, thousands of visitors have come to Mission Arlington to find inspiration and maybe an idea or two to take back to their own churches.

But can they create their own version of Mission Arlington without a Tillie Burgin — either a clone or at least someone with her special passion, energy and skills?

It’s not easy, said Carol Childress, a Dallas-based church leadership consultant.

“Tillie models better than almost anybody else I know what it means to be a disciple of Christ and to live that out every day,” she said.

Childress was working at the Baptist General Convention of Texas when Mission Arlington was born and has watched it thrive. She’s not aware of another operation that has done so much for so many for so long. But that doesn’t mean Miss Tillie’s success can’t be repeated, she said.

“[Management expert] Peter Drucker used to say that all you need is one working model to
demonstrate that something can be done,” Childress said. “She is the one working model.”
When religious beliefs become evil: 4 signs

By John Blake, CNN

(CNN) – An angry outburst at a mosque. The posting of a suspicious YouTube video. A friendship with a shadowy imam.

Those were just some of the signs that Tamerlan Tsarnaev, accused of masterminding the Boston Marathon bombings, had adopted a virulent strain of Islam that led to the deaths of four people and injury of more than 260.

But how else can you tell that someone’s religious beliefs have crossed the line? The answer may not be as simple you think, according to scholars who study all brands of religious extremism. The line between good and evil religion is thin, they say, and it’s easy to make self-righteous assumptions.

“When it’s something we like, we say it’s commitment to an idea; when it’s something we don’t like, we say it’s blind obedience,” said Douglas Jacobsen, a theology professor at Messiah College in Pennsylvania.

Yet there are ways to tell that a person’s faith has drifted into fanaticism if you know what to look and listen for, say scholars who have studied some of history’s most horrific cases of religious violence.

Follow the CNN Belief Blog on Twitter

“There are a lot of warning signs all around us, but we usually learn about them after a Jim Jones or a David Koresh,” said Charles Kimball, author of “When Religion Becomes Evil.”

Here are four warning signs:

1. I know the truth, and you don’t.

On the morning of July 29, 1994, the Rev. Paul Hill walked up to John Britton outside an abortion clinic in Pensacola, Florida, and shot the doctor to death. Hill was part of a Christian extremist group called the Army of God, which taught that abortion was legalized murder.

Hill’s actions were motivated by a claim that virtually all religions espouse: We have the
truth that others lack.

Those claims can turn deadly when they become absolute and there is no room for interpretation, Kimball says.

“Absolute claims can quickly move into a justification of violence against someone who rejects that claim,” Kimball said. “It’s often a short step.”

Healthy religions acknowledge that sincere people can disagree about even basic truths, Kimball says.

The history of religion is filled with examples of truths that were once considered beyond questioning but are no longer accepted by all followers: inerrancy of sacred scripture, for example, or the subjugation of women and sanctioning of slavery.

If someone like Hall believes that they know God’s truth and they cannot be wrong, watch out, Kimball says.

“Authentic religious truth claims are never as inflexible as zealous adherents insist,” he writes in “When Religion Becomes Evil.”

Yet there’s a flip side to warnings about claiming absolute truth: Much of religion couldn’t exist without them, scholars say.

Many of history’s greatest religious figures – Moses, Jesus, the Prophet Mohammed – all believed that they had discovered some truth, scholars say.

Ordinary people inflamed with a sense of self-righteousness have made the same claim and done good throughout history, says Carl Raschke, a theology professor at the University of Denver in Colorado.

The Protestant Reformation was sparked by an angry German monk who thought he had the truth, Raschke says.

“Martin Luther’s disgust at the worldliness of the papacy in the early 1500s inspired him to become a radical revolutionary whose ideas overturned the entire political structure in Europe,” Raschke said.

So how do you tell the difference between the healthy claims of absolute truth and the deadly? Scholars say to look at the results: When people start hurting others in the name of their religious truth, they’ve crossed the line.
2. Beware the charismatic leader.

It was one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Japanese history. In March 1995, a religious sect called Aum Shinrikyo released a deadly nerve gas in a Tokyo subway station, leaving 12 people dead and 5,000 injured.

Two months later, Japanese police found Shoko Asahara, the sect’s founder, hiding in a room filled with cash and gold bars. Kimball, who tells the story of the sect in “When Religion Becomes Evil,” says Asahara had poisoned the minds of his followers years before.

Asahara demanded unquestioned devotion from members of his sect and isolated followers in communities where they were told that they no longer needed to think for themselves, Kimball says.

Any religion that limits the intellectual freedom of its followers, he says, has become dangerous. “When you start to get individuals who are the sole interpreters of truth, you get people who follow them blindly.”

Charismatic leaders, though, often don’t start off being cruel. Jim Jones, who led the mass suicide of his followers in South America, was a gifted speaker who built an interracial church in San Francisco that did much good in the community. Few people at the beginning of his ministry could predict what he would become.

As time went on, though, his charisma turned cruel as he tolerated no questions to his authority and became delusional.

“Charismatic leadership is important, but in healthy religions, there’s always a process where questions are encouraged,” Kimball said.

Weaning followers away from corrupt charismatic leaders and bad religion can take years, but it can be done if one knows how to speak their language, says Ed Husain, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt will often deploy imams to reach out to young men in prison who have adopted “Islamism,” or extreme forms of Islam sanctioning violence against civilians, says Husain, who has written about Muslim extremism.

These Muslim clerics know the Quran better than the extremists and can use their knowledge to reach extremists in a place that logic and outsiders cannot penetrate, Husain said.
“The antidote to extremism is religion itself,” Husain said. “The problem is not to take Islam out of the debate but to use Islam to counter Islamism.”

3. The end is near.

In 1970, an unknown pastor from Texas wrote a book called “The Late, Great Planet Earth.” The book, which linked biblical prophecy with political events like Israel’s victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, predicted the imminent return of an antichrist and the end of the world.

Author Hal Lindsey’s book has sold an estimated 15 million copies and spawned a genre of books like the “Left Behind” series. Many people are fascinated by the idea that the heavens will open soon because the end is near.

That end-times theology can turn lethal, though, when a follower decides that he or she will speed up that end-time by conducting some dramatic or violent act, says John Alverson, chairman of the theology department at Carlow University in Pittsburgh.

“A religious terrorist mistakenly believes that God has ordained or called him or her to establish the will of God on Earth now, not gradually and not according to the slow and finicky free will of other humans,” Alverson said.

Yet this impulse to see God’s intervention in human affairs now and not in some distant future can also be good, he says.

There are vibrant religious communities that teach that political and economic injustice must be addressed now. Liberation theology, for example, was a movement among pastors and theologians in Latin America that called for justice for the poor now, not in some future apocalyptic event, Alverson says.

“Hope is a good breakfast but not much of a supper,” Alverson said. “We can’t just live on the hope that justice will happen; we have to actually experience justice from time to time so that our hope can continue.”

4. The end justifies the means.

It was one of the biggest scandals the Roman Catholic Church ever faced, and the repercussions are still being felt today.

In January 2002, the Boston Globe published a story about Father John Geoghan, a priest who had been moved around various parishes after Catholic leaders learned that he had abused children. It was later revealed that Catholic officials had quietly paid at least $10
million to settle lawsuits against Geoghan.

Kimball says the Catholic scandal revealed another sign that a faith has turned toxic: Religious figures start justifying doing something wrong for a higher good.

“The common theme was trying to protect the integrity of the church,” Kimball said of some Catholic leaders who covered up the crimes. “You get all of these rationalizations that we can’t let this scandal bring the whole church down, so we have to pay off this family and send the priests off to rehab.”

Religion is supposed to be a force for good. Still, it's common that everyone from suicide bombers to venal church figures finds ways to justify their behavior in the name of some higher good.

Those rationalizations are so pervasive that religious movements that avoid them stand out, scholars say.

Jacobsen, the theology professor from Messiah College, cited the civil rights movement. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his fellow activists renounced violence, even as they were attacked and sometimes murdered.

“They were willing to lay down their lives for what they believed in, but what’s incredible is, they practiced not retaliating when they suffered violence,” he said. “Those people really believed that God created everyone equal, and they were committed to the point of death.”

In some ways, it's easy to say we would never adopt a form of religion that’s evil. But when we use the word “evil” to describe those who kill in the name of their faith, we're already mimicking what we condemn, Jacobsen says.

In his new book, “No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education,” Jacobson writes that calling a religion evil is dangerous because “bad or wrong actions can be corrected, but typically evil needs to be destroyed.”

“To label someone or something as evil is to demonize it, putting it in a category of otherness where the rules of normal life do not apply, where the end often justifies almost any means,” Jacobson writes.

And when we do that, we don’t have to read about radical imams or look at angry YouTube videos to see how easy it is for someone to drift toward religious extremism, he says.

We need only look at ourselves.
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists® : 4–22–13 ACS DR
Response to West, Tex. Fertilizer Plant Explosion

Operations include receiving center and Mobile Distribution Unit

Sherry Watts is assisting survivors in West, Tex., with clothing packets, personal hygiene kits, blankets and sheets with the Mobile Distribution Unit in the background [Photo by Joe Watts]

Texas Adventist Community Services Disaster Response (ACS DR) deployed following the West, Tex. Fertilizer Plant Explosion. At the Hillsboro Outlet Mall ACS DR, in cooperation with Hill County Emergency Management, operated a receiving center for disaster relief supplies. Personal care items, diapers, paper products, first aid supplies, school supplies, food, clothing, pet food, and other items were collected, sorted, and sent to a staging area for use by the survivors.

A mother and her young son brought some items for the survivors, including a Toy Story sleeping bag. When asked if he had outgrown it, she replied that it was one of his favorite things, but he wanted to share with a child who had lost everything in the explosion.

SWU students volunteering at the collection center, where they are loading donated goods from the collection center into a truck to be moved to the storage facility. [Photo by Sherry Watts]
The Mobile Distribution Unit, a semi filled with pre-packaged outfits of clothing, personal care kits, and blankets, was deployed to West, Tex., to serve the survivors of the Fertilizer Plant Explosion. Other agencies were also at the same location, offering various services. As the goods from the ACS DR truck were shared with them, some told of their miraculous experiences surviving the blast. Friends would see each other for the first time since the explosion, would hug each other, share experiences, talk about those who lost their lives, and inquire about friends and relatives.

A group of students from Southwestern Adventist University (SWU) enthusiastically volunteered to assist at the receiving area in Hillsboro, as well as help with the mobile distribution unit in West.

The motto for Adventist Community Services is "Serving Communities in Christ's Name."

Sherry Watts Texas ACS DR Assistant Director