Inspirational Quote

“True faith means holding nothing back. It means putting every hope in God’s fidelity to His promises.”
- Francis Chan

Prayer - Petition - Praise

Prayer of praise for Gladly Lamour the 12 year old cousin of an Mdiv student from Andrews University Seminary that had been kidnapped in Haiti has been safely returned to his family.

Prayers for the family of Madison Baird a student at Walla Walla University who passed away after an accident with a pickup truck while on her bicycle. Read more...

Mount Vernon Academy: After earnest efforts and prayer from students, families, alumni, and supporters, Mt. Vernon Academy will cease operations after this school year. Read More...
Ministry Openings

**Cruise with a Mission Director:** This young adult annual gathering needs a CWM volunteer director. Those who have already contacted Ron Whitehead please do so again. Email pastorronwhitehead@andrews.edu

Ministry Movement

**Southeastern Conference:** Barry Bonner has been appointed as the new youth director for the conference. As youth director, Bonner will oversee youth, Pathfinders, Adventurers, young adult, and National Service Organization among many other areas. Learn More...

Adventist Resources

**Young Adult Life:** This is the official young adult ministry movement in the NAD. The new website will be a communication center for all young adult ministry teams in the NAD. Read More...

**Kids Ministry Center Newsletter:** This leadership newsletter provides excellent information for Children's Ministry leaders at the local church. Sponsored by NAD/LUC/CYE Read more...

**Academy Ministry Professionals (AMP) is a professional organization** that seeks ways to strengthen spiritual life on Academy campuses through chaplains, Bible teachers & campus pastors. For more information contact Stephanie Johnson, Amp President at 407-461-5751 or email johnsons@forestlake.org Sponsored by CYE/NAD Education.

**inSpire eNews -** Join in the conversation! Connect with other Adventist creatives. You are invited to join in the conversation and contribute ideas, songs, artwork, poetry, and more! Sign up now Sponsored by the Pacific Union Conference. For more information contact richdubose@gmail.com
**Youth Edition of Steps to Christ:** In this edition young people can find story illustrations that help make the themes in the book relevant to everyday life. For a free sample copy email dale@pacificpress.com

**The Leadership Summit:** An interactive summit and conference for all church leaders and members. Tracks include worship coordinating, musicians arena, praise team academy, and many more options. For more information contact Natasha Richards (407) 374-9450, email natal@me.com or email henoc.paulicin@floridaconference.com. Sponsored by the South Florida Ministerial Department. [Learn more...](#)

**ACF/Catalyst Information:** Watch this short clip on how young adults are impacting their peers at public university campuses.

---

**Non-Denominational Resources**

**2015 FEARLESS Tour** is a Christian conference that will take place in nine different cities across the U.S. Created with teenagers in mind, this highly engaging event encourages teens to share Jesus with others. [Learn more...](#)

**Children and the Gospel:** In his blog post for Christianity Today, Ed Stetzer shares insight on how to share the gospel with children, and not just good moralistic Bible stories. He also provides resources available for parents to help their children grow in Christ. [Learn more...](#)

**Pastor’s Conference:** Join pastors, elders, and ministry staff for a conference at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. This event will be held May 18-21, 2015. [Learn more...](#)

Adventist National / International Events

Cruise With A Mission 2015: Recharge your Young Adult spiritual batteries, and share a heart for service during this annual meaningful adventure. The ship sails from Seattle, Washington, July 26-August 2, 2015. Currently registering guests at www.cruisewithamission.org or www.cye.org. Sponsored by CYE/NAD Education Department.

Adventist Ministry Professionals (AMP) Meeting for: Bible Teachers, Chaplains, and Campus Pastors will meet in Ohio with the ASPA meetings March 15-18, 2015. For more information contact: Stephanie Johnson, AMP President at 407-461-5751 or email johnsons@forestlake.org

Children's Leadership Conference (CLC): Come join in some of the best Adventist speakers in Children's Ministry April 17-19, 2015 at Andrews University. Sponsored by NAD/LUC/CYE Learn more...

CALLED: NAD Pastors Kids Congress will be held in conjunction with the NAD Pastors "Called" convention, June 28-July 1, 2015 in Austin. Sponsored by the NAD Youth Ministries Department. Learn more...

NAD Youth Ministry Leadership (YPAC) Meetings: YPAC will meet from March 7-10, 2015 at Union College. Learn more...

West Point 2015: Adventist West Point is the premier training event focusing on innovative evangelism strategies and training for church growth. This event will take place April 5-8, 2015, at the Mission Valley Marriott Hotel in San Diego, California. For more information call (805) 413-7254 or visit www.AdventistWestPoint.org Sponsored by the Pacific Union
SONscreen Film Festival: This event will be held at La Sierra University, April 2-4, 2015. Attendees will have the chance to view some of the best films submitted by talented, primarily-Adventist film creators. Sponsored by the NAD Communications Department Learn more...

My Church Public Campus Ministry Involvement/Retention Summit will be held at Mohawk College, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada May 28-30, 2015. Sponsored by ACF Public Campus Ministries of the NAD and Ontario Conference Youth. Learn more...

General Youth Conference 2015 "Called, Chosen, Faithful" will be in Louisville, Kentucky, on December 30, 2015-January 3, 2016. Learn more...

Pathfinder Camporees

2019 Chosen International Camporee Ticket Sales: For more information www.camporee.org or call 269-471-8380 or www.cye.org


Inter-European Division Camporee: This camporee will be August 3-9, 2015 in Switzerland. Learn More...

Research and Surveys

Millenials and Media: According to the Kiplinger Letter (Feb. 2015) millennials will spend around $750 on various media forms in 2015. The most popular digital media resource is online streaming services for both video and music, and surprisingly millennials read more printed books than digital ones. How will this information
affect your ministry?

**Internet Ministry:** According to recent surveys done by the Barna group, and discussed in the February 2015 issue of Christianity Today, 47% of protestant pastors agree that at least some people will experience their faith through the internet within the coming decade. How will this information affect your ministry? [Read more...](#)

**State of the Bible 2014:** In a recent survey by the American Bible Society, and the Barna Group it was found that 88% of Americans say they own a Bible, 82% of Americans consider themselves knowledgeable about the Bible, and 43% of Americans can name the first five books of the Bible. [Read More...](#)

---

**Miscellaneous**

**Housing News:** According to the Kiplinger Letter February 2015 issue the number of young tenants is on the rise. The amount of 20-34 year olds will grow by 1.4 million over the next five years. Some of the most popular apartment markets are Atlanta, Dallas-Fort Worth, Phoenix, Houston, and Los Angeles. Many COR congregations are finding ways to help young adults find housing and a job. What is your church doing to take care of young adults who visit? Please share at pastorronwhitehead@andrews.edu

**Soup-er Bowl:** The Ronan SDA Church in Ronan, Montana hosted their sixth annual food collection challenge to raise cans of soup for the two local food banks. This is a great youth outreach idea to start at your church! [Read more...](#)

**Old Fashioned Movie:** In the making of this film several former students from Southern Adventist University helped work on the post production of the film. SAU offers film production through its School of Visual Art and Design. [Read more...](#)

**Safe Haven for Middle Eastern Christians:** The former congressman Frank Wolfe has offered a plan to help create a haven for Christians in Nineveh in northern Iraq, to escape persecution. What is your youth/young adult group doing for
persecuted Christians around the world? Read more...

**Why Your Church Should be on Social Media:** Find out how these three top social media apps can help you connect with church members in a different way. Read more...

**Why Black Churches are Keeping Millennials:** This article from the February issue of Christianity Today looks at how millennials in the African American community continue to be involved in church. Many reasons are rooted in history. Read more...

**Christian Journalist Beheaded by Islamic State:** The news of journalist Kenji Goto beheaded by the Islamic State made world headlines. But his family and church remembers him as a Christian who's passion was to help the less fortunate in war torn countries. Read more...

**Why Teens are Impulsive, Addiction Prone, and Should Protect their Brain:** In an interview on National Public Radio (NPR) with neuroscientist and author of the book The Teenage Brain, Dr. Frances Jensen shares how the teenage brain works. Read more...

**Family Christian Stores Bankruptcy:** The largest Christian bookstore chain in the U.S. filed for bankruptcy in an effort to reinvest in the stores, and restructure for the future. Christians must find a new business model first to stay effective online and beyond. Read more...

**Is Belief in God necessary to be moral?** Pew's Global Attitudes survey provided a selection of countries who were asked if belief in God was necessary to be moral. The following rank from highest to lowest: Indonesia 99%, Brazil 86%, South Korea 54%, United States 53%, Canada 31%, Britain 20%, and China 14%. Think about your world point of view on this topic.
WWU grieves loss of a special light

Madison "Maddy" Baird

[Wednesday, February 11, 2015 at 8:54 pm]

WWU President John McVay released the following statement:

We are saddened to inform you that Walla Walla University lost a treasured member of our campus family this evening with the death of Madison Baird. At the time of her death, Maddy was surrounded by family and friends who were singing together and sharing messages of hope from the hundreds who loved her. Maddy was a bright light on our campus and in our community, and our hearts are broken.

As we gathered during the last two days to pray for Maddy, we placed our trust in our Heavenly Father, and now we continue to look to Him in the blessed hope that soon, at the resurrection, we will see Maddy again.

We are grateful for the thousands of expressions of empathy from throughout the Walla Walla Valley and around the world. Prayers and words of encouragement have come from India, Taiwan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Australia, Spain, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Canada, Nigeria, Pohnpei, and across the United States. Walla Walla University is a strong family that has been strengthened further by your support.

Campus chaplains, counselors, and pastors are available this evening in Conard Chapel for students, faculty, and staff, and will be available as needed in the days to come. We will keep you informed about opportunities to celebrate Maddy’s life.

[Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2015 at 3:45 pm]

Madison Baird remains on life support and in a medically-induced coma at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. Her family is with her and regularly singing to her and reading to her Facebook posts and other messages of encouragement and support.

Messages may be sent to Maddy and her family at:
- The WWU Facebook post “Thoughts for Maddy” at www.facebook.com/wallawallau.
- Via e-mail to university.relations1@wallawalla.edu.
- To the Baird/Giebel family at PO Box 99, College Place, WA 99324.

[Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2015 at 10:40 am]

Madison Baird remains in critical condition this morning.

Walla Walla University student airlifted to Seattle hospital after being struck by vehicle while riding her bicycle.

Walla Walla University student Madison “Maddy” Baird was airlifted Tuesday evening, February 10, to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle where she remains in critical condition after being struck by a pickup truck while riding her bicycle.

[Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2015 at 8:54 pm]

WWU President John McVay released the following statement:

We are saddened to inform you that Walla Walla University lost a treasured member of our campus family this evening with the death of Madison Baird. At the time of her death, Maddy was surrounded by family and friends who were singing together and sharing messages of hope from the hundreds who loved her. Maddy was a bright light on our campus and in our community, and our hearts are broken.

As we gathered during the last two days to pray for Maddy, we placed our trust in our Heavenly Father, and now we continue to look to Him in the blessed hope that soon, at the resurrection, we will see Maddy again.

We are grateful for the thousands of expressions of empathy from throughout the Walla Walla Valley and around the world. Prayers and words of encouragement have come from India, Taiwan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Australia, Spain, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Canada, Nigeria, Pohnpei, and across the United States. Walla Walla University is a strong family that has been strengthened further by your support.

Campus chaplains, counselors, and pastors are available this evening in Conard Chapel for students, faculty, and staff, and will be available as needed in the days to come. We will keep you informed about opportunities to celebrate Maddy’s life.

[Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2015 at 3:45 pm]

Madison Baird remains on life support and in a medically-induced coma at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. Her family is with her and regularly singing to her and reading to her Facebook posts and other messages of encouragement and support.

Messages may be sent to Maddy and her family at:
- The WWU Facebook post “Thoughts for Maddy” at www.facebook.com/wallawallau.
- Via e-mail to university.relations1@wallawalla.edu.
- To the Baird/Giebel family at PO Box 99, College Place, WA 99324.

[Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2015 at 10:40 am]

Madison Baird remains in critical condition this morning.

Walla Walla University student airlifted to Seattle hospital after being struck by vehicle while riding her bicycle.
bicycle westbound on Whitman Drive in Walla Walla County.

Baird’s mother, Lisa Bjelland-Giebel, said Wednesday morning, “We made it through the night, and every breath is precious.”

According to the Walla Walla County Sheriff’s Office, the accident happened around 4:30 pm just east of Hampton Road, and low visibility caused by the setting sun likely played a factor. Baird was transported to St. Mary’s Medical Center where she was treated before being airlifted to Harborview.

“An experienced traffic collision investigator was on the site of the accident until around 7:30 pm evaluating the scene,” said John King, chief deputy for the Walla Walla County Sheriff’s Office.

“Our Walla Walla University family aches for Madison, and we’re keeping her in constant prayer,” says WWU President John McVay. “Through prayer groups and vigils last night and this morning, we’re signaling our support to her family and care team in Seattle.”

Campus Chaplain Paddy McCoy says “We are all heavy this morning with the tragic accident involving Madison, and we as a campus continue to lift her and her family up in our prayers.”

A campus prayer gathering will take place Wednesday, February 11, at noon in front of the WWU Administration Building at 204 S. College Avenue in College Place.

Baird is 20 years old and a sophomore at WWU majoring in Spanish and focusing on a preprofessional program of nutrition and dietetics. She graduated from Walla Walla Valley Academy in 2013.
Update on Mount Vernon Academy

Update by Ron Halvorsen, Jr., President
Published 2/11/2015

MVA Financial Benchmark Not Reached

Dear Ohio Conference Family and Friends,

It has been a hard journey for us as a conference and school family these last months. We had the monumental task of raising $3 million in a short time. Unfortunately, despite the earnest efforts of many students, families, alumni and supporters of Mount Vernon Academy (MVA), I’m sorry to report that we did not receive enough funds to meet the first benchmark. In fact, as of 5 p.m. on February 10, we only received $17,069.

A Brief History

Last month’s Mission Ohio details the research and process leading us to this point. Since we fell immeasurably short of the first financial deadline, MVA will have to cease operations at the end of this school year.

Since arriving in Ohio almost a year ago, I have learned a great deal about our history as a conference and academy.

During the last months, I have discovered that MVA has traveled this difficult road repeatedly for more than 30 years and even had a special constituency meeting about their future in 1984. I believed we had time to work out a solution; this was not the case. The situation worsened during the last few years, so severely that in August our academy could not make their first payroll. Upon learning this, the conference immediately took out a $700,000 line of credit to help the academy remain open while we explored options. Friends, we have no other credit available to us at this time, and our own conference finances cannot continue to support MVA beyond this school year, even if MVA tried to restructure itself at this late date.

What Now?.....READ MORE

COMMENTS POLICY: The Columbia Union Conference Visitor encourages quality conversation and welcomes your thoughtful comments. All comments are subject to approval but will not be edited. Please limit your comments to 500 words or less. Only one comment per person will be published.
Rejoice!

Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.

Philippians 4:4 (KJV)

Banish the Four D's that Destroy Classroom Management

We've all been there. Sitting at the end of a Sabbath School class or a VBS meeting wondering...where did we go wrong? Whether it was a kid that had to be sent out or an entire class that was out of control, we've all struggled with classroom management on some level. So whether you just need a quick refresher or a full on intensive, here are a few tips to help you balance the deadly D's of:
1. Discomfort
2. Disinterest
3. Distraction
4. Disturbance

These four issues are the leading causes of Classroom Management problems and dealing with them is the key to having a fun filled program that keeps the kids on point.

**Banish Discomfort by Creating the Right Atmosphere:** This seems like a simple enough concept. You may realize that 30 degrees is too cold for a classroom, but there are other ways that children can feel uncomfortable. If children don't know anyone or don't have any friends in the class they will have a hard time feeling relaxed. Concerns about other basic needs like getting a good breakfast and making sure that kids' home lives are going ok can go along way. You can't fix everything a child is facing but just knowing that you care will help them feel more comfortable.

**Banish Disinterest by Mixing Things Up:** Remember that kids can't really give you more than a few minutes of attention at a time. If your story lasts for 20 minutes, you lost the kids half way through. Think of ways to involve kids in active learning and make sure to switch activities often to keep them on their toes. If you notice that you are losing kids (lost eye contact, fidgeting in seats) don't be afraid to stop what you're doing and have a quick active song to get the wiggles out. Get to know your kids so...
that you can include things they like to do or talk about in the lesson. Even if you don't talk about football every week, football fans will pay attention each week just in case you do.

**Minimize Distractions to Keep Kids Focused:** Let's be honest, you can't control the entire universe so that distractions don't happen. If the local marching band wants to practice on the street right outside of your window there isn't much you can do to stop them. Kids get sick, parents leave early, and random events are bound to happen. The key is to minimize these distractions to keep kids on task. In room decoration less is more. Having a brightly painted room with a few key posters and items prominent is better for keeping kids focused than having a room with every craft the kids ever did hanging on the walls. Making sure that the space is clean and that there are clear procedures in place for things like picking up and dropping off kids goes a long way to help kids stay on task.

**Banish Disturbances with Planning:** Remember the time you thought you'd come to class and "wing it"? It didn't turn out well did it. Often times our classes are interrupted because we failed to plan properly. It's true that some things can't be avoided. But that doesn't mean we should try. The longer it takes for you to find supplies, decide which songs to sing, or answer the question the Pastor popped in to ask you, the more likely you are to have issues with classroom
management. So be organized. Show up early to lay out everything you'll need for the day. Have a clear plan typed out and handed to each of your teammates before kids arrive. Communicate policies to all stakeholders (parents, kids, church personnel) so that they know what you expect. By planning you can minimize the number of unnecessary interruptions you have to face and the number of chances kids have to let loose.

Classroom management isn't easy. You may have 2 or 3 kids at home but very few of us are trying to parent 10-15 kids at a time. Don't beat yourself for times things don't work out but learn to do better next time. We can all grow and improve in making our classes a safe and happy place.

Lake Region Conference Training: Upgrade 2.0

Lake Region Conference Youth Ministries will be sponsoring a training November 22 & 23 for many areas of ministry including Pathfinder and Adventurer training. Guest presenters include Pastor Vandeon Griffith (South Central Conference Youth Director), Pastor Ron Whitehead (Center for Youth Evangelism Director), and Gene Clapp (Texas
Conference Pathfinder Director/NAD Pathfinder Bible Experience Coordinator). Training will feature the new AYMT along with Pathfinder and Adventurer training. For more information visit their website.

Websites We Love

Have 20 minutes to improve your work in Children's Ministries? Check out the Children's Ministry Talk Podcast. New podcasts are uploaded monthly and provide ideas and encouragement for Children's Ministries leaders. For more information click here.

Upcoming Events

Pathfinder/Adventurer Leadership Training

- Sponsored by Indiana Conference Youth Ministries
- November 7-9, 2014
- Timber Ridge Camp
- For more information contact Charlie Thompson

Hispanic Children's Sabbath School Quarterly Training

- Sponsored by Illinois Conference Hispanic Ministries
- November 13, 2014 @ 3:00 pm
- For more information
Cactusville Children's Church

- Sponsored by One Mustard Seed Inc.
- November 22, 2014 @ 5:00 pm
- Andrews Academy
- For more information contact Richard Aguilera

HIS CREATION

- Sponsored by One Mustard Seed Inc.
- January 10, 2015 @ 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm
- Howard Performing Arts Center
- For more information contact Richard Aguilera

Cactusville Children’s Church

- Sponsored by One Mustard Seed Inc.
- January 31, 2014 @ 5:00 pm
- Andrews Academy
- For more information contact Richard Aguilera

Who Would Guess?

Thank you to Patty Marsh, Children's Ministries Director of Upper Columbia Conference, for sharing this wonderful story with us!

A current story from the trenches . . .

What

Adventist Community Church of Vancouver (WA) is currently involved with an Prophecy
DeCoded evangelistic series with guest speaker, Ron Clouzet, from NAD Evangelism Institute. Meetings will be at least 20 nights (2 sessions same topic each night). How I know is my daughter, Laura Pascoe, was asked to head up the children’s programming. What fun it has been dialoging with her about what could be done beyond the “same oh, same oh . . . .”

The Plan

Her children’s plan was approved with a modest budget (in comparison to what is spent for the adults). Part of this children’s budget includes honorariums for special guest speakers whose topics include:

- Exotic animals
- Mad Scientists
- Fun in the Kitchen
- And others

The cost of these excellent presenters ranges from $125 to $350 per double session. After the presentation a strong spiritual program follows for the children covering the evening’s topic.

Friday’s story

Last Friday evening the Reptile Man did an amazing presentation – 120 children and parents attended the children’s portion in the fellowship hall. At the end of the evening Pastor Roger Walter asked my daughter, “How much did you pay for this evening’s presentation?” This one was the most expensive at $350. He said, “Cheap enough . . . .” Why?
Because on the big nights offering an excellent special feature, the total attendance went up 100!

Advertising???

And how are these children’s features advertised? Only by Facebook and word of mouth (FREE!). On Thursday my daughter Facebooks to the 1,000 + God’s Closet contacts and her abundant friends. They in turn forward and forward more. You may have noticed – many of the younger generation do not plan too much ahead.

Last Friday night she counted 25 God’s Closet children at the first session plus some families who have not graced the doors of the Adventist church for many years.

Who would guess?

2015 VBS Coming Soon!

Destination Paradise VBS is currently in its final phases and we can’t wait to share it with you! But for now you can check out the trailer on the Kids’ Ministry Ideas website.
Take Me to Church? Half of Pastors Believe Faith Will Become Online-Only Experience

Barna survey examines how Protestant senior pastors use the internet today.

Morgan Lee

[ posted 2/13/2015 11:39AM ]

Barna Group

The key phrase Hozier sung at the Grammys last Sunday from his hit song, "Take Me to Church," will grow outdated for many, nearly half of Protestant senior pastors believe. Today 47 percent agree that at least some people will experience their faith exclusively through the internet within the coming decade.

Is the prospect a problem? Theologically no, according to the nearly 9 out of 10 pastors (87%) who told the Barna Group it is "theologically acceptable" to seek "faith assistance" or "religious experiences" online. Nearly 4 out of 10 pastors (39%) say they now do so themselves, according to Barna's recent survey examining the online actions and attitudes of more than 600 pastors.

By comparison, in 2000 only 78 percent of pastors felt online religious experiences were theologically acceptable, and only 15 percent used the internet for their own religious experiences.

Among Barna’s other findings:

- Roughly 1 in 7 pastors (13%) say the risks of the internet being used to "spread spiritual heresy and distort Christianity" outweigh its potential to "spread authentic Christianity." By comparison, 17 percent felt the same
in 2000.

- Half of pastors (55%) believe that churches will have to have a significant website or presence on the internet in order to remain effective. In 2000, only 1 in 4 (26%) felt the same.
- Half of pastors (54%) believe that developing a significant presence on the internet is a good investment of their church’s money. In 2000, only 1 in 3 (31%) felt the same.

Below are infographics with Barna’s full findings.

In 2013, Barna also examined pastors’ use of social media. Over half of churches (57%) reported using Facebook, while 1 in 5 (21%) used Twitter. Individually, two thirds of pastors (66%) reported being on Facebook, while nearly a quarter said they used Twitter or had a personal blog (23% and 22%, respectively).

The margin of error for both studies was ±4.0 percentage points.

CT frequently notes Barna research, including its recent reports on America’s most-Bible minded cities, the State of the Bible, the number of Americans observing Lent, and which Christians actually evangelize.

CT’s sister publication, Leadership Journal, frequently covers how churches relate to the internet including what social media’s explosion means for missions, seven ways to use social media in ministry, how email and blogs complicate conflict, if Jesus had a smartphone, if one ministry (LifeChurch.tv) should control all the .church url’s, and if Amazon Fire represented a new ministry frontier.
96% of pastors use a computer at church. 39% of those pastors use that computer to access the Internet (up from 24% in 2000). 

Pastors are most likely to use the Internet to:

- Find information: 97% in 2014, 78% in 2000
- Buy products: 88% in 2014, 46% in 2000
- Keep up on existing relationships: 80% in 2014, 64% in 2000
- Check out new music or videos: 71% in 2014, 19% in 2000
Take Me to Church? Half of Pastors Believe Faith Will Become Online—

Have a spiritual or religious experience
- 39%
- 15%

Make new friends
- 26%
- 9%

Play video games
- 11%
- 12%

In general, it is theologically acceptable for a church to provide faith assistance or religious experiences to people through the Internet:

- 87% (2014)
- 78% (2000)

People in my area would find it acceptable for my church to provide faith assistance or religious experiences to people through the Internet:
Within the next decade some people will have all of their faith experiences through the Internet:

- **Definitely**
  - 2014: 11%
  - 2000: 5%

- **Probably**
  - 2014: 36%
  - 2000: 20%

- **Probably not**
  - 2014: 34%
  - 2000: 44%

- **Definitely not**
  - 2014: 17%
  - 2000: 26%

- **Not sure**
  - 2014: 1%
  - 2000: 3%
Take Me to Church? Half of Pastors Believe Faith Will Become Online-... http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/february/how-pastors...
Ten years from now, how common will it be for people to rely upon the Internet to provide them with at least part of their faith experiences, activity and information?

- **Very common**
  - 55%
- **Somewhat common**
  - 26%
  - 35%
  - 47%
- **Not too common**
  - 9%
  - 21%
- **It will not happen at all**
  - 1%
  - 3%
- **Not sure**
  - 2%

Image: Barna Group

**The Virtual Church**
Take Me to Church? Half of Pastors Believe Faith Will Become Online—http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/february/how-pastors...
Now there are just as many Americans skeptical of the Bible as there are engaged with the Bible. According to the fourth annual State of the Bible survey, 19 percent said that they were skeptical of the Bible. This number is up from 10 percent in 2011.

This trend is even more pronounced among the Millennial generation (who range in age from 18-29). According to the State of the Bible report, Millennials are

- Less likely to view the Bible as sacred literature (64 percent in comparison to 79 percent of adults),
- Less likely to believe the Bible contains everything a person needs to know to lead a meaningful life (35 percent in comparison to 50 percent of adults), and
- More likely to never read the Bible (39 percent compared in comparison to 26 percent of adults).
BIBLE LOVERS AND SKEPTICS

19% ENGAGED*
19% SKEPTICS†

*Bible engaged are those who:
1. Believe the Bible is the actual or inspired Word of God with no factual errors,
or believe the Bible is the inspired word of God with some factual errors, and
2. Read the Bible daily or at least four times per week.
† Bible skeptics are those who selected the most negative or non-inspired view of the Bible from five options, saying they believe the Bible is just another book of teachings written by men, containing stories and advice.

BIBLE OWNERSHIP REMAINS STRONG,
BUT READERSHIP REMAINS WEAK.

88% of households own a Bible.
4.7 Average number of Bibles per household
37% of Americans read it once a week or more.

MILLENNIALS* ARE LEADING THE SHIFT TOWARD SKEPTICISM

* Ages 18-29

WHILE 50% OF ALL ADULTS BELIEVE THE BIBLE HAS TOO LITTLE INFLUENCE IN SOCIETY, ONLY 30% OF MILLENNIALS* BELIEVE THIS. * Ages 18-29

19% of Millennials believe no literature is sacred
13% of all adults believe no literature is sacred

“The Bible contains everything a person needs to know to live a meaningful life.”

35% of millennials agree

50% of all adults agree

Non-readers

39% of millennials never read the Bible

26% of all American adults never read the Bible

Methodology:
State of the Bible, 2014: 1,012 telephone interviews from Jan. 8-Jan. 20, 2014 (including interviews via cell phone) and 1,024 were surveyed online from Jan. 28-Feb. 5, 2014.
Commissioned by the American Bible Society | AmericanBible.org
Roughly equal number of interviews were conducted online and by telephone (including cell phone interviews).
Conducted by Barna Group | Barna.org

All percentages reflect all U.S. adults, unless noted.

American Bible Society
Barna Group
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>View Now</th>
<th>View Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
<td><a href="#">View Now</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Soup-er Bowl helps hungry

Megan Strickland

Volunteers wheel a mountain of soup from the Ronan Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Issue Date: 2/11/2015
Last Updated: 2/11/2015 6:22:33 PM | By Megan Strickland

RONAN — Super Bowl festivities are traditionally a time of feasting on a smorgasbord of good eats, but one local church spent the month of January focusing on ways to make sure those who go without food day to day will be provided for.

The Ronan Seventh Day Adventist Church’s sixth annual Soup-er Bowl Challenge smashed the parish’s previous record for total number of cans of soup collected for its January food drive. The church, which has between 80 and 100 members, split into two teams to raise enough money to buy 5,568 cans of soup that went to the Ronan Bread Basket and Polson Loaves and Fish food pantries.

The lively competition divided the church into two groups: the Jackson Jackals, led by Dale Jackson and Billee Collins, and the Adams Ant Eaters captained by Aric Cooksley.

The Jackson Jackals managed to squeak out enough dough to purchase 3,135 cans of Campbell’s Soup from Walmart Supercenter in Polson that provides the bounty at a deeply discounted rate. The Adams Ant Eaters only had 2,412 cans purchased at last count, but they emerged victorious after a last minute anonymous $600 donation. The cash and the cans were split evenly between the local food banks.

“We have a giving heart,” Community Outreach Coordinator Russ Jenkins said, “that is inspired by Matthew 25:40: ‘I assure you that what you are doing for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you are doing it for me.’ Over the past six years we have been blessed to share over 15,000 cans of love.”

The fundraiser has become a staple for the two local food banks that have seen their needs swell exponentially since the recession hit in 2008. Bryan River said the food bank never seems to have enough donations of soup.

“We have to buy it,” he said.

Not having to buy the soup helps get the pantries through winter, which is usually the toughest part of the year after...
holiday donations dry up.

“We really count on it,” Ronan Bread Basket Director Sherri McDonald said. “It lasts us until April, usually, but each year we have more people coming in, so it might not last as long. It is wonderful. Everyone can eat soup, even the kids.”

Tags

Ronan
A return to 'Old-Fashioned' romance

While "Fifty Shades of Grey" got an R rating from the Motion Picture Association of America in part because of "unusual behavior," members of the crew that helped make the film "Old Fashioned" laughingly point out their that romantic comedy also features "unusual behavior."

In their case, it's a man and a woman falling in love and treating each other with decency and respect.

IF YOU GO

"Old-Fashioned" opens Friday and is showing at East Ridge 18.

"Old Fashioned," which opens this weekend just like "Fifty Shades" -- and no, that's not a coincidence, is a movie that deals with romance and second chances based on Christian principles. And it’s a movie about a man and a woman who attempt to do something sort of strange by trying to enter into a courtship based on some outdated ideas.

Read more

Fifty Shades' (maybe more) of excitement

"It is really a special human drama," says Zach Gray, the film's executive producer. Gray is on the faculty in the School of Visual Art and Design at Southern Adventist University and was one of 15 people affiliated with the Collegedale school that worked on the movie.

"Old Fashioned" was written, produced and directed by Rik Swartzwelder, who also stars in the film; he is longtime friends with Southern Adventist professor David George, who worked as director of photography on "Old Fashioned."

Swartzwelder plays Clay Walsh, a former hard-partying frat guy who finds religion and moves to a small town where he becomes notorious for openly sharing his high-minded and outdated theories on love and romance. He meets Amber, played by Elizabeth Ann Roberts, a free spirit who is surprisingly attracted to Clay's "unusual" ideas. Over time, the two find common ground and romance blossoms. But unlike "Fifty Shades," romance doesn't rise from a regimen of bondage, discipline or sadomasochism.

POLL: Will you see "50 Shades of Grey"?

Love is something that affects us "spiritually, emotionally, physically," Swartzwelder told TheBlaze.com. "I categorically reject the idea that hookups are exclusively physical."

He started writing the screenplay almost nine years ago, so creating an answer to "Fifty Shades" and its racy story line was not on his mind. But the marketing campaign for "Old Fashioned" takes full advantage of the film's release
alongside "Fifty Shades."

The trailer, for example, opens with the words "Based on the bestselling book 'Fifty Shades of Grey'" appearing on the screen, only to have a big red "not" drop on top of them. There is more wordplay throughout the trailer, with things like "sexy corporate mogul" drawn through and replaced by "sincere small businessman."

The film is being released by Freestyle Releasing, which also handled "God's Not Dead" and Nicolas Cage's recent remake of "Left Behind."

"Opening the same weekend as 'Fifty Shades,' there's definitely a David v. Goliath comparison," Swartzwelder told Variety. "They will have more screens, more money, more hype ... but we're hopeful that we are not alone in our belief that there are others out there who desire more from love -- and the movies -- than objectification or domination."

George says the film is more about creating conversations on love, romance, how to compromise and how to communicate than it is about offering a how-to on dating.

Southern offers film production through its School of Visual Art and Design and, along with Gray and George, several former students also worked on the film, which was shot primarily in Ohio two years ago. Melody George was the production designer and Bryan Fowler and Chris Stiles were behind the camera; Daniel Wahlen served as a digital imaging technician. Much of the post-production was done at Southern.

Fowler has worked on several film and commercial projects and was impressed with the level of detail and care given to each shot and scene of "Old Fashioned."

"I still teared up at some scenes and I was there to shoot them," he says. "I knew it was coming and I knew the lines, and I still teared up."

Contact Barry Courter at bcourter@timesfreepress.com or 423-757-6354.
Frank Wolf Calls for Safe Haven for Mideast Christians

International; Religious Freedom

Former congressman offers six-point plan. But killing continues as ISIL-linked terrorists behead 21 Christians in Libya.

Timothy C. Morgan and Ruth Moon

[ posted 2/16/2015 08:32AM ]

Video screen shot of kidnapped Christians before their deaths.

Over the weekend, a terrorist group with links to the Islamic State (ISIL) released a video, showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya. On Monday, Egypt and Libya launched warplanes in an air assault on Darna in eastern Libya, where the group is based.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said, “This wanton killing of innocents is just the most recent of the many vicious acts perpetrated by ISIL-affiliated terrorists against the people of the region, including the murders of dozens of Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai, which only further galvanizes the international community to unite against ISIL.”

All those beheaded worked inside Libya, and terrorists kidnapped them in December. In the video, an English-speaking terrorist said, “Safety for you crusaders is something you can only wish for.”

Last week, President Obama asked Congress to endorse his plan to use the military to defeat and destroy the Islamic State. So far this year, the terror group has killed hostages in Syria, including Japanese Christian journalist Kenji Goto and American aid worker Kayla Mueller.
Frank Wolf, the recently retired congressman, urged six additional steps to protect Christians and other religious minorities from genocide, including creation of a safe haven in Nineveh, northwest Iraq.

In a letter to Congress on Feb. 11, Obama said, “If left unchecked, ISIL will pose a threat beyond the Middle East, including to the United States homeland. I have directed a comprehensive and sustained strategy to degrade and defeat ISIL. As part of this strategy, US military forces are conducting a systematic campaign of airstrikes.”

Yet, on the same day, Wolf in a statement said Christians and other groups are on the “edge of extinction” due to terrorism and policy-makers must do more.

“If the Islamic State is not defeated and ultimately destroyed, there will be no future for these ancient faith communities who now face an existential crisis and genocidal onslaught in lands they have inhabited since antiquity,” Wolf said. The retired Virginia congressman recently co-founded the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative and accepted an appointment to a newly endowed chair for religious freedom at Baylor University.

In January, Wolf and several others from the Wilberforce Initiative traveled to northwest Iraq to meet with refugees from the region. The Wilberforce delegation said they were within 1.5 miles of the Islamic State frontline. They spoke with dozens of Christians and Yazidis (another at-risk minority group) and met with top officials in the Kurdistan Regional Government, religious leaders, and humanitarian groups.

On return, the Wilberforce group developed six proposals to secure the future of Christians, Yazidis, and others:

- Create the Nineveh Plains province in Iraq to shelter Christians and other minorities.
- Establish the Nineveh Protection Unit, a defensive National Guard. (This is already in formation.)
- Allow faith-based relief and development groups to operate openly in the region.
- Require the return of property, especially churches and monasteries, confiscated by the Islamic State.
- Require the Kurdistan regional government to insure religious freedom for all groups.
- Prosecute terrorists for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and if needed, for genocide.

“A decade ago, Iraq’s Christian population numbered 1.5 million,” said Randel Everett, Wilberforce Initiative president and former Texas pastor. “Today, roughly 300,000 remain, and most have no jobs, no schools, and no places of worship. The Nineveh Plains had been one of the last relatively safe havens for Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, Turkmen and other minority groups. With the fall of Mosul and surrounding areas last summer, Iraq’s minorities want to remain in their homeland, but have no place to go.”

**Wolf’s New Role**

In the new position at Baylor, Wolf will be responsible for outreach on Christianity’s role in addressing social issues and will collaborate on international projects and how to integrate religious freedom in foreign policy. Funding for the new job came from Jerry and Susie Wilson, a Dallas couple who donated $2 million to the school in December.

“Congressman Frank Wolf has been widely recognized as the ‘conscience’ of the Congress and a champion of religious freedom in both US domestic and foreign policy,” said Baylor president and chancellor Ken Starr. “This appointment represents a remarkable opportunity to advance the study and protection of the essential right of religious freedom and to vigorously address the profound issues of religious liberty and Christianity’s contributions to human flourishing throughout the world.”

CT previously noted how Wolf, then 74, announced in 2013 that he would not seek reelection after serving in Congress for 34 years. He was lead sponsor for the Religious Freedom Act (which led to the creation of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom) and ambassador-at-large and special adviser for international
religious freedom in the State Department. During his time on Capitol Hill, Wolf traveled to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to raise awareness of religious persecution and human rights abuses, Roll Call reports.

Wolf called on the US church to advocate for Iraqi Christians in a 2008 CT interview. He later articulated his thoughts about the role American government should play in human rights and religious freedom in a 2011 interview with CT:

“I think America has lost much of its influence partially because our leaders aren't articulating human rights as a driving issue… Our Declaration of Independence and Constitution should stand as a covenant not only between American citizens, but also between America and a Chinese dissident in Beijing, a Coptic Christian in the upper Nile, or a Chaldean who is being gunned down in Iraq. By maintaining economic ability to deal with issues of persecution, America can still be the dominant power to defend human rights and religious freedom.”

That same year, he challenged Gary Locke, the President's nominee for ambassador to China, to “publicly identify with the persecuted” by visiting an unregistered house church in China.

“I am looking forward to working with colleagues at Baylor University to advance the case for religious freedom,” Wolf said in a press release from Baylor. “I have been involved in promoting religious liberty for many years in Congress, and now I look forward to collaborating with scholars, religious leaders, and the laity in what I believe is one of the most important struggles of our time.”

CT has covered Wolf extensively, including his 2013 call for the federal government to support technology breaching Internet firewalls established by authoritarian regimes.
Why Your Church Should Be On Social Media Right Now

Social media is the new town square. Study the culture, and connect your church with your community.

Ed Stetzer

LoboStudioHamburg / Pixabay

My mother-in-law is on Facebook, which can be, well, fun. The same is true for my teenage daughter.

Actually, about three-fourths of online adults are on some form of social networking.

This means that for the sake of the gospel and the mission, your church needs to have a voice there as well.

Social Media is the New Town Square

Throughout history, people of all generations have gathered in town squares—public spaces where the local community gathers for social and commercial purposes. In the old days, it used to be a literal "town square," and it still is in some places. Until social media came around, town squares were shopping malls and other social areas.

Social media is the 21st century town square.

The Apostle Paul preached in open squares where the people gathered. In Acts 13 it was to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia. In Acts 17, it was to the literal town square of conversation—Mars Hill.

People today aren’t sitting around in debate clubs. They aren’t going to the town squares in the middle of cities. Instead, they’re having discussions on social media. It's where people are gathering, debating, discussing ideas and
connecting with others. Why wouldn’t you want to be there?

If churches truly want to see the Gospel impact and influence a community, they should go to the place where the most significant conversation is actually taking place right now. Today, that’s on social media.

**Strategically Utilize Your Social Media Demographic**

Let’s take a look at some stats from Pew Research for three major social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which are going to be the most important for your church to engage. Pinterest is an important one, but really only among women. If you are able, you would be wise to set up a sort of women’s ministry Pinterest account, but you probably don’t need a church-wide account on that platform.

First, Facebook.

**Facebook**

In short, everyone uses Facebook. There is no one demographic that is significantly more attracted to Facebook than others, though women of all background are more likely than men to be on Facebook.

- 71% of all online adults use Facebook.
- 58% of the entire adult population use Facebook
- 66% of all online men use Facebook versus 77% of all online women.

What about age groups? How does each generation use Facebook? The stats are unsurprising, but for the first time ever, more than half of online adults over the age of 65 are using Facebook. Here’s the breakdown:

- 87% of all online 18-29 year olds use Facebook
- 73% of all online 30-49 year olds use Facebook
- 63% of all online 50-64 year olds use Facebook
- 56% of all online 65+ year olds use Facebook

It’s fair to say that your church needs to have a presence on Facebook. The vast majority of online adults are there, so you should be. But Facebook isn’t the online social network people are using.

Pew Research reports, as of 2014, "52% of online adults now use two or more social media sites, a significant increase from 2013, when it stood at 42% of internet users."

Let's take a look at Twitter.

**Twitter**

Twitter users tend to be racially diverse, but they amidst their racial diversity, it does seem that many Twitter users are young, college-educated, wealthy, and living in urban areas.

Here are some key Twitter stats:

- 37% of online 18-29 year olds use Twitter, as opposed to 25% of 30-49 year olds and 12% of 50-64 year olds.
• 30% of online college or graduate-level graduates use Twitter, as opposed to 16% of online high school (or less) graduates.

• 27% of online adults who make $50,000 a year or more use Twitter, as opposed to 20% who make less than $30,000 per year.

• 25% of online adults in urban settings use Twitter, compared to 23% in suburban settings, and 17% in rural areas.

Suffice to say, Twitter is a good place for your church to be no matter what, but especially if you're in an upper-middle class city or university setting. Set up and account and connect with your community.

Finally, check out Instagram:

**Instagram**

Instagram is almost as racially diverse as Twitter, but it is actually more popular among African Americans and Latinos than it is among White people. According to Pew's statistics, the most common Instagram user is likely an African American woman between ages 18-29 who's had some college education and lives in an urban area.

Some Instagram stats to consider:

• 29% of online women use Instagram, compared with 22% of online men.

• 38% of online African Americans use Instagram, along with 34% of online Latinos and 21% of online Whites.

• 53% of online 18-29 year olds are on Instagram, as opposed to 29% 30-49 year olds, and 11% of 50-64 year olds.

Instagram is a crucial social media platform for your youth or young adult ministries. This social media platform is growing rapidly, and Instagram is great for sharing pictures and videos of what's going on in your ministries.

**A Few Applications**

Because people are there, here a few things church leadership should consider.

First, every church should have an active Facebook presence—and that presence must be public and not simply a semi-private group page. A group page is acceptable for internal communication, but every church needs to have a public page as well.

A Facebook page’s full potential is seen with two-way conversations and not just one-way announcements.

Social media is no longer a fad. It is established in our culture.

Facebook is a great way to engage with guests after they’ve visited your church, though that is probably best done through someone’s personal account and not the official church Facebook page.

One of the ways I’ve seen Facebook put to great use by churches and other ministries is in the area of prayer. Today, it can be pretty tough to make sure you have everyone’s most current email address, which makes emailing major church issues or announcements and asking for prayer somewhat difficult. Through Facebook though, your church can share a major prayer request or physical need someone may have, and instantly, church members or people in the community can respond and help in any way they can.

Twitter is not as essential for the local church as Facebook is, simply because many more people use Facebook, but
Twitter is no less useful. A church on Twitter can share events, interact with church members and visitors, and engage with culture.

Further, Instagram is a platform that gives your church an opportunity to share pictures of your ministry, promotional videos for upcoming events, and even encouraging quotes or Bible verses. Instagram is especially important among younger demographics.

“All Things to All People”

Social media is no longer a fad. It is established in our culture. And churches should do everything they can to engage the public in this forum. As of January 2014, 74% of all adults who have some sort of presence online use social media—your church needs to be accessible there.

With some strategic thought, churches can reach those who are regularly using social media. The Apostle Paul provides some insight for churches that are still on the fence:

“I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, so I may become a partner in its benefits” (1 Corinthians 9:22b-23, emphasis added).

Chris Martin contributed to this blog post.
Should blacks be counted as Millennials?

That’s the question Thabiti Anyabwile, an African American pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, asks when handwringing commences about young people leaving US churches.

"Researchers describe millennials as a fairly privileged and special group, which is so far from the reality of so many African Americans," said Anyabwile. "When it comes to describing broad demographic trends, you’re woefully in danger of building a profile based on the assumed normative experiences of majority culture."

At large, millennials are less religious than were earlier generations of Americans. In 2012, Pew Research Center released data showing that 32 percent of Americans ages 18 to 29 are religiously unaffiliated. This was an 11 percent increase over any other age group that year, and a 7 percent jump from the 25 percent of young people who responded this way in 2007.

Yet a deeper dive into Pew's study suggests whites are overrepresented among those who are not religiously affiliated. Anglos make up 66 percent of the US population, yet they compose 71 percent of those with no religious affiliation. In contrast, blacks make up 11 percent of the population but only 9 percent of the so-called “nones.”

Black Protestants have retained the greatest number of millennials compared with Catholics, white mainliners, and white evangelicals, according to 2012 data from the Public Religion Research Institute and Georgetown's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. These traditions have seen their market share of millennials drop by 8.4, 7.3, and 2.2 percentage points, respectively. In contrast, black Protestant millennials have decreased ...
Kenji Goto, Christian Journalist, Beheaded By Islamic State

(UPDATED) IS releases video reportedly showing execution of Japanese believer.

Timothy C. Morgan

[ posted 1/30/2015 01:14PM ]

Screen shot

Kenji Goto on video explaining why he traveled to Syria's IS-controlled areas.

Update (Jan. 31): The Islamic State (IS) has released a video showing the beheading of Kenji Goto, a Japanese journalist and a Christian with a wife and two young children. The New York Times reported Saturday evening:

_The video of the killing of the journalist, Kenji Goto, came two days after a deadline set by the extremists expired and the Jordanian government failed to give in to their demands that they exchange a convicted would-be suicide bomber for Mr. Goto’s life. Left unclear by the video, which was posted on a Twitter account associated with the Islamic State’s media organization, al Furqan, was the fate of a Jordanian pilot, whom the extremists also threatened to kill if Jordan did not release the would-be bomber, Sajida al-Rishawi. Japan had not yet authenticated the video. Jordan did not publicly comment._

Goto’s 78-year-old mother, Junko Ishido, told journalists following the news of his death, “It is my only hope that we
can carry on with Kenji’s mission to save the children from war and poverty." She added, "Kenji has left us on a journey."

Goto’s wife, Rinko, said in a statement via the Rory Peck Trust, "My family and I are devastated by the news of Kenji’s death. He was not just my loving husband and father to our two beautiful children, but a son, brother and friend to many around the world. . . . I remain extremely proud of my husband who reported the plight of people in conflict areas like Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. It was his passion to highlight the effects on ordinary people, especially through the eyes of children, and to inform the rest of us of the tragedies of war." (The Peck Trust supports freelance journalists.)

-----

Last week, Japanese Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists held a vigil in Tokyo to show public support for the release of Kenji Goto Jogo, 47, the Christian journalist whom the Islamic State (IS) took as a hostage in Syria.

On Jan. 20, IS threatened to behead Goto and the captured Jordanian fighter pilot, Muath al-Kasaesbeh. (Another hostage, Haruna Yukawa, was beheaded a few days ago.) The terrorist group is demanding release from prison an Iraqi woman convicted in a 2005 terrorist attack in Amman. As of Friday, there was no word of the fate of Kenji and al-Kasaesbeh. A prisoner-hostage swap has been on the table for days. Christians joined the #PrayforKenji and #IamKenji social media campaigns to bring greater public pressure for his release.

Before Goto was taken hostage, some Japanese antiwar activists said his trips to Syria were misguided because they were too dangerous and undermined Japan’s pacifism. (In 2013, Algerian militants killed 13 Japanese workers.) The Japanese public has been extremely guarded about any involvement by Japan in the recent Middle East conflict. Article 9 of Japan’s constitution forbids Japan from making war on other nations. Only a self-defense force is legal.

But this past summer, Japan’s President Shinzo Abe reinterpreted Article 9 to allow Japan to use its self-defense force to aid allies during war—a move the United State supports, but many Japanese resist. Abe was in Cairo recently and announced that Japan would provide $200 million in nonmilitary assistance to nations resisting IS.

Goto, a freelance journalist and producer who became a Christian in 1997, has a reputation for traveling into war zones to cover the human side of violent conflict. “There are criticisms of his action. Before leaving for Syria, Kenji left a video message that he was aware that this attempt was very dangerous and he was taking the full responsibility for his actions,” Atsuyoshi Fujiwara, a professor of theology at Seigakuin University and founding pastor at Covenant of Grace Church in Tokyo, told CT.

“Some are critical. Yet mass media are very sympathetic to Kenji—and generally so is public opinion. They say that someone had to do this kind of work. And Kenji was a kind journalist who took a risk to rescue Yukawa.”

Japan’s Christian minority largely supports the nation’s pacifist stance and view Kenji’s trips to Syria in that light. “Kenji is a Christian. Christian population in Japan is less than 1 percent of the national population,” Fujiwara said. “Not only his church, the United Christian Church of Japan, but also the churches in Japan are praying for him. We think that Kenji was doing important work for peace-making.”

But Fujiwara said, “Christians are strongly against the Abe regime as being militarily oriented and nationalistic. When you think about the opinions of Christians in Japan, you can almost assume that they are generally more antinationalistic, more nonviolence-oriented than the public. Christians should be peace-making, yet we need to be wise as serpents and give alternatives to the Abe regime.”

CT asked Fujiwara about unity among religious groups against terrorism. He said, "Islamic Center Japan condemned the action of ISIS on Jan. 23, 2015, saying that Muslims had not received religious harassment in Japan and the Japanese were not enemies of Muslims. Unlike Europe and North America, we have not had Protestant-
Catholic conflicts in Japan, either. In addition, after the 2011 earthquake, religious organizations learned to work together for the common good when possible.

After IS said publicly that Kenji and Yukawa were being held hostage, the parents of both men apologized to Japan’s public on television for the trouble they caused. “The initial reaction here in Japan was that these two went and got themselves in trouble by going where they should not have gone and have made a problem for the country,” said another Tokyo-based pastor. “The reports from his pastor and others that Goto is a Christian and is motivated by giving children in war zones a voice did a lot to gain at least him favor in the eyes of the public that at least he was not just an adventure seeker.”

Kenji’s wife, Rinko, recorded a video statement, saying, “My husband is a good and honest man who went to Syria to show the plight of those who suffer.”

The Japan Times reported:

As a journalist, Goto is “devoted to reporting what should be reported with a firm conviction,” said Hiroshi Tamura, pastor of the Chofu Church of the United Church of Christ in Japan. Tamura had until March 2013 been pastor of the Denenchofu Church of the United Church of Christ, which Goto attended. He said Goto “has a strong sense of justice . . . and he has always been conscious of vulnerable people, including children.”

The UCCJ is Japan’s largest Protestant body. In 1941, the government forced all Protestant groups into the UCCJ. Today, it has 200,000 members and has a reputation for liberal theology. After the war, Baptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, the Assemblies of God, and a few others dropped out.

Goto’s journalism projects have aired on national media and he has published several books, including We Want Peace Not Diamonds: A Confession by Child Soldier Muria.
Research into how the human brain develops helps explain why teens have trouble controlling impulses.

Leigh Wells/Ikon Images/Corbis

Teens can't control impulses and make rapid, smart decisions like adults can — but why?

Research into how the human brain develops helps explain. In a teenager, the frontal lobe of the brain, which controls decision-making, is built but not fully insulated — so signals move slowly.

"Teenagers are not as readily able to access their frontal lobe to say, 'Oh, I better not do this,' " Dr. Frances Jensen tells Fresh Air's Terry Gross.

Jensen, who's a neuroscientist and was a single mother of two boys who are now in their 20s, wrote The Teenage Brain to explore the science of how the brain grows — and why teenagers can be especially impulsive, moody and not very good at responsible decision-making.
"We have a natural insulation ... called myelin," she says. "It's a fat, and it takes time. Cells have to build myelin, and they grow it around the outside of these tracks, and that takes years."

This insulation process starts in the back of the brain and heads toward the front. Brains aren't fully mature until people are in their early 20s, possibly late 20s and maybe even beyond, Jensen says.

"The last place to be connected — to be fully myelinated — is the front of your brain," Jensen says. "And what's in the front? Your prefrontal cortex and your frontal cortex. These are areas where we have insight, empathy, these executive functions such as impulse control, risk-taking behavior."

This research also explains why teenagers can be especially susceptible to addictions — including drugs, alcohol, smoking and digital devices.

**Interview Highlights**

**On why teenagers are more prone to addiction**

Addiction is actually a form of learning. ... What happens in addiction is there's also repeated exposure, except it's to a substance and it's not in the part of the brain we use for learning — it's in the reward-seeking area of your brain. ... It's happening in the same way that learning stimulates and enhances a synapse. Substances do the same thing. They build a reward circuit around that substance to a much stronger, harder, longer addiction.

"The effects of substances are more permanent on the teen brain. They have more deleterious effects and can be more toxic to the teen than the adult."

Just like learning a fact is more efficient, sadly, addiction is more efficient in the adolescent brain. That is an important fact for an adolescent to know about themselves — that they can get addicted faster.

It also is a way to debunk the myth, by the way, that, "Oh, teens are resilient, they'll be fine. He can just go off and drink or do this or that. They'll bounce back." Actually, it's quite the contrary. The effects of substances are more permanent on the teen brain. They have more deleterious effects and can be more toxic to the teen than the adult.

**On the effects of binge drinking and marijuana on the teenage brain**

Binge drinking can actually kill brain cells in the adolescent brain where it does not to the same extent in the adult brain. So for the same amount of alcohol, you can actually have brain damage — permanent brain damage — in an adolescent for the same blood alcohol level that may cause bad sedation in the adult, but not actual brain damage.

...
Dr. Frances Jensen is a professor and chair of the Department of Neurology at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine.

Because they have more plasticity, more substrate, a lot of these drugs of abuse are going to lock onto more targets in [adolescents'] brains than in an adult, for instance. We have natural cannabinoids, they're called, in the brain. We have kind of a natural substance that actually locks onto receptors on brain cells. It has, for the most part, a more dampening sedative effect. So when you actually ingest or smoke or get cannabis into your bloodstream, it does get into the brain and it goes to these same targets.

It turns out that these targets actually block the process of learning and memory so that you have an impairment of being able to lay down new memories. What's interesting is not only does the teen brain have more space for the cannabis to actually land, if you will, it actually stays there longer. It locks on longer than in the adult brain. ... For instance, if they were to get high over a weekend, the effects may be still there on Thursday and Friday later that week. An adult wouldn't have that same long-term effect.

**On marijuana's effect on IQ**

People who are chronic marijuana users between 13 and 17, people who [use daily or frequently] for a period of time, like a year plus, have shown to have decreased verbal IQ, and their functional MRIs look different when they're imaged during a task. There's been a permanent change in their brains as a result of this that they may not ever be able to recover.

It is a fascinating fact that I uncovered going through the literature around adolescence is our IQs are still malleable into the teen years. I know that I remember thinking and being brought up with, "Well, you have that IQ test that was done in grade school with some standardized process, and that's your number, you've got it for life — whatever that number is, that's who you are."

It turns out that's not true at all. During the teen years, approximately a third of the people stayed the same, a third actually increased their IQ, and a third decreased their IQ. We don't know a lot about exactly what makes your IQ go up and down — the study is still ongoing — but we do know some things that make your IQ go down, and that is chronic pot-smoking.

**On teenagers' access to constant stimuli**

We, as humans, are very novelty-seeking. We are built to seek novelty and want to acquire new stimuli. So, when you think about it, our social media is just a wealth of new stimuli that you can access at all times. The problem with the adolescent is that they may not have the insider judgment, because their frontal lobes aren't completely online yet, to know when to stop. To know when to say, "This is not a safe piece of information for me to look at. If I go and look at this atrocious violent video, it may stick with me for the rest of my life — this image — and this may not be a good thing to be carrying with me." They are unaware of when to gate themselves.

**On not allowing teenagers to have their cellphones at night**

It may or may not be enforceable. I think the point is that when they're trying to go to sleep — to have this incredibly alluring opportunity to network socially or be stimulated by a computer or a cellphone really disrupts sleep patterns.
Again, it's also not great to have multiple channels of stimulation while you're trying to memorize for a test the next day, for instance.

So I think I would restate that and say, especially when they're trying to go to sleep, to really try to suggest that they don't go under the sheets and have their cellphone on and be tweeting people.

First of all, the artificial light can affect your brain; it decreases some chemicals in your brain that help promote sleep, such as melatonin, so we know that artificial light is not good for the brain. That's why I think there have been studies that show that reading books with a regular warm light doesn't disrupt sleep to the extent that using a Kindle does.

Read an excerpt of *The Teenage Brain*
America's Largest Christian Bookstore Chain Files for Bankruptcy

CEO: 'We have carefully and prayerfully considered every option.'

Morgan Lee

[ posted 2/12/2015 11:24AM ]

CEO Chuck Bengochea explains Family Christian Stores's bankruptcy.

Family Christian Stores (FCS) has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Yet the ministry assured customers yesterday that it "does not expect" to close any of its more than 250 stores or lay off any of its approximately 4,000 employees.

"We strive to serve God in all that we do and trust His guidance in all our decisions, especially this very important one," stated FCS president and CEO Chuck Bengochea. "We have carefully and prayerfully considered every option. This action allows us to stay in business and continue to serve our customers, our associates, our vendors and charities around the world." [Full announcement below.]

Image: FCS website

Map of Family Christian Stores locations.

With 266 stores in 36 states, FCS is the nation's largest chain of Christian stores as measured by locations, not sales. (For comparison, LifeWay Christian Resources has 185 stores in 29 states.) In 2014, FCS generated $216
million in gross revenues, notes Randall G. Reese at Chapter 11 Cases.

FCS bought itself back from private equity owners in 2012 and pledged to donate 100 percent of its profits to widows and orphans. One example: It partnered with Karen Kingsbury to donate 2013 Black Friday sales to help Haiti orphans. FCS recently expanded into filmmaking, with 90 Minutes in Heaven to be the first of a planned two movies made each year.

In a video message to customers, Bengochea named the recession, the digital revolution, and the company’s debt load as factors leading to FCS's bankruptcy.

“I wish that we had alternatives but we do not,” he said.

On its FAQ page, FCS stated that it moved forward with bankruptcy “after much prayerful consideration and only after working to cut costs and taking other steps. We believe our only two options are to liquidate and shut down our stores or go through the Section 363 sale process and preserve Family Christian Stores. When faced with these two options, we strongly felt that there was only one viable path to take.”

“Our customers will not see any change in operations during this process,” stated Bengochea. “After the court approves the sale, we can begin to reinvest in our stores and bring our customers products and services that will help us better fulfill our mission—to glorify God by helping people find, grow, share and celebrate their faith in Christ.”

FCS has no plans to ditch "brick and mortar" stores for an online-only presence. "Some could say that 'brick and mortar' retail is not relevant, but our new management believes differently," states its FAQ. "Our plan is make the necessary investments to our stores, diversify our product lines and craft a strong retail strategy that properly places the emphasis back on delivering a warm and positive customer experience."

FCS’s restructuring will be completed over the next two months as follows:

Through a newly formed subsidiary, Family Christian Ministries will serve as the lead bidder for the Section 363 sale process, putting forward a plan that acquires the streamlined organization’s assets and maintains operation of the chain’s 267 stores in 36 states, as well as its e-commerce site www.familychristian.com. Family Christian Stores is asking the court for a schedule to complete the sale process in about 60 days.

After the judge approves the sale, we’ll be immediately cash-flow positive and profitable. This process is similar to the one taken by the automobile and airline industries in recent years. We see this as the start of a fresh new day for Family Christian Stores and look forward to delighting our customers for many years to come.

Among our next steps are to make various capital improvements to our stores, as well as invest in an expanded product line and implement a new retail strategy that will enable us to better serve our customers.

Many of FCS’ creditors are publishers notes Publishers Weekly:
Publishers are on the hook for millions of dollars led by HaroerCollins (sic) Christian Publishers which is owed $7.5 million. Other publishers owed large sums include Tyndale House ($1.7 million), B&H Publishing Group ($516,414), Faithwords ($537,374), and Barbour Publishing ($572,002). Ingram's Spring Arbor distribution arm is owed $689,533.

Last June, FCS named Bengochea as its new CEO after Cliff Bartow retired after 11 years in leadership. Bengochea had previously served as the CEO of The Original Honeybaked Ham Company and as a Coca-Cola executive.

Christian bookstores have experienced conflicting trends in recent years, as an overall sales surge masked mixed results for individual stores. The National Endowment for the Arts reports that in 2014, only 54 percent of Americans read a book (print or digital).

In 2013, 49 stores closed across the country, according to the Association for Christian Retail. This was an increase from 2012’s 39 store closures, but lower than the all-time high of 63 store closures in 2011. Additionally, 18 new Christian bookstores opened in 2013, an increase from 15 in 2012.

While 2013 sales increased by three percent, Christian retail failed to capitalize on Black Friday sales. In 2012, Black Friday sales rose 22 percent and a primary reason why the industry saw a 9 percent overall gain that year. Bible and book sales accounted for about 60 percent of the total sales for bookstores last year, according to CBA’s report.

CT has previously noted tensions between FCS and the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association in 2005, and editorialized on FCS’s decision to sell on Sundays, among other coverage of Christian retail news.

CT also published a cover story on how to save the Christian bookstore (hint: stop making it so religious), noted how Christian publishers are searching for the next big thing, and reported how more and more churches are getting into the book business.

Here is the FCS statement:
A newly formed subsidiary of Family Christian Ministries will serve as the lead bidder for the Section 363 sale process. It will acquire the streamlined organization’s assets and maintain operation of Family Christian Stores’ 266 stores in 36 states, as well as its e-commerce site www.familychristian.com. Family Christian Stores is expecting to complete the sale process in about 60 days.

“Our customers will not see any change in operations during this process. After the court approves the sale, we can begin to reinvest in our stores and bring our customers products and services that will help us better fulfill our mission – to glorify God by helping people find, grow, share and celebrate their faith in Christ,” said Bengochea.

Family Christian Ministries also owns two other companies – iDisciple, an online source for Christian inspiration, messages, sermons and music; and Giving Films, a movie production company developing Christian movies. These two companies are not part of the restructuring and will continue to operate independently of Family Christian Stores.

[Photo courtesy of Consumerist - Flickr]