Message from the President

Seeking God’s Big Dreams for Central

“You can tell an organization is in trouble when they have more memories than dreams.” Scripture says it like this, “When there is no vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18.

Janet and I had a thrilling one-day experience in January that has challenged us anew to enter this new decade seeking to understand Jesus’ dreams and visions for us and our church. We met with three close friends who are also regular prayer partners: Paul Ratsara, Juanita Kretschmar and Derek Morris.

What a day it was! We began by focusing on Jesus through praises and thanksgiving. We prayed for the Holy Spirit, revival, and the needs of the world-wide church. Then we began to share our individual desires to understand God’s bigger dreams and plans for us.

Paul, president of the Southern African Indian Ocean Division, has been asking the Lord what His plans are for the more than 50 Conferences across nine Unions. He believes, as do his leaders, that God is calling them to dramatically grow.

Currently 600,000 lay members are being recruited to each hold one outreach meeting. A training manual, including 16 sermons, was developed. But there was no money to print the manuals.

Recently, one church businessman stepped forward and donated the printing which cost the equivalent of $1 million USD! An average of 25 baptisms at each site would result in an unprecedented growth for our Adventist movement! (Fifteen million new members!)

At age 77, Juanita Kretschmar oversees a team that operates two “God as Creator” multi-media tourist attractions in Key West, Fla. (www.akeyencounter.org and www.keysradio.com). Twelve years ago, she and her husband, Merlin (now deceased), mortgaged their home to start the ministries. Now widowed, she also pastors the two churches where Merlin served.

Most recently God led her to start the “Power to Cope” live radio program. She does interviews, takes calls, shares Bible verses, and prays with people in need.

Her station manager has been so blessed by her ministry that he just placed her on his Country/Rock 100,000 watt station, Country Thunder. Her ministry continues to expand to a larger audience.

Derek Morris, senior pastor for the Forest Lake Church in Orlando, Fla. for the past six years, continues an amazing and adventurous journey with the Lord.

The once wounded congregation, split because of a previous pastor that had left the Adventist church and taken part of the congregation with him, now hosts five services each Sabbath. Adding additional parking is their current challenge.

It is from a small men’s prayer group in Derek’s office that God’s bigger dreams have grown. One church member said, “Derek, you should be talking to the whole world and not just this one church.” Within two years, that same man was the president of two divisions of Direct TV and has made it possible for our
Out of thousands of California elementary school participants, two Adventist students have won their way into the second round of this year’s National Geographic Bee.

Myro Castillo, a sixth grade student from Armona Union Academy (AUA), and Cameron Penaflorida, a fifth grade student from San Francisco Adventist School (SFAS), won their school-level competitions and the chance to win a $25,000 college scholarship.

“I did the contest because I just wanted to win the $25,” says Castillo, about the first prize accomplishment.

Beverly Church, principal and teacher at SFAS, says she incorporated the preparation into normal geography lessons, including books about missionaries serving around the world. Students also played map games and used the practice questions on the National Geographic Web site.

“It feels nice to be the SFAS Geography Bee winner, and I thank my dad, mom and sister who helped me study,” says Penaflorida.

The school-level competition, held November 9, 2009 through January 15, 2010, is the first round in the 22nd annual National Geographic Bee and requires students to answer oral questions on the topic of geography. Students from around the United States in grades four through eight competed within their different divisions.

The next step is a written test. Up to 100 of the top test scorers will then be eligible to compete in their State wide next round on April 9.

The geography contest is designed to encourage teachers to include geography in their classrooms, spark student interest in the subject and increase public awareness about geography.

This is the first year of participation for the two Adventist schools, and both principals say they hope to make the competition an annual event.

“The Bee is great, it gives the students an opportunity to grow and expand on the things they’ve learned and gives them opportunities for their futures,” says Erik Borges, principal of AUA.

Once State competitions are complete, the National Geographic Society will provide an all-expense paid trip to Washington D.C. for the state champions and teacher-escorts to take part in the national championship rounds scheduled to be held May 25 and 26.

The first place winner will receive a $25,000 college scholarship, a lifetime membership in the Society and a trip to the Galapagos Islands.

The national finals will be televised on May 26 and Alex Trebec, host of Jeopardy! will be moderating.

More than 700 people attended the third annual GLOW rally Sunday, January 10 at the Fresno Central Church. GLOW (Giving Light to Our World) is an adult literature ministry for local churches. The rally was to provide GLOWers (people who already participate in the ministry) additional training and guidance. Thrilling testimonies and an inspiring sermon by David Asscherick, speaker and director for the ARISE Institute, filled the morning. In the afternoon participants could choose from eight training sessions in both English and Spanish. Seventy-one thousand six-hundred GLOW tracts were sold at the rally. Since inception three years ago here in Central, 713,000 GLOW tracts have been distributed in the conference. Twelve other conferences in North American Division and seven European countries have also started GLOW programs. “We’ve been riding the wave and God’s been opening doors for us all along the way. We’ve just been trying to keep up with Him,” says Nelson Ernst, GLOW director. For more information go to goglow.org.
For seven years, members of the lay-led, Bay Area Wellspring church plant tried innovative ways of reaching out to the needs of post-moderns in today’s society. They attended seminars at the Saddleback church, home of Rick Warren, famed preacher and author of *A Purpose Driven Life*, used an upbeat worship style and loved freely. “We were hungry for souls,” says Flori Quinones, Wellspring’s prayer ministries coordinator. But the group wasn’t growing. Yet the members’ desire to be in tune with God’s guidance has led to changes that are bringing in a harvest.

In the fall of 2009, the group’s 40 members hosted a “Revelation of Hope” series that led 18 people to baptism, bringing four to six new members to five area churches.

What happened?

“Our relationship with Christ began to change,” says Quinones. “As we prayed and read the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy more, we realized we needed to change the way we did things.”

Using CCC’s Prayer Priorities Bookmark model, the members made a list of their own five Prayer Priorities and set aside time at noon each day to pray. Wherever they were, they would stop and pray for repentance, reformation, a personal relationship with God, a church building of their own, and a part-time pastor.

As the members prayed together, their priorities began to change. “Our focus has changed from what we want to what God’s wants. We’re really trying to get in tune with God and listen to what He wants us to do,” says Head Elder Mike Blantett. When their own place of worship was acquired, an outreach series with Conference Evangelist Taj Pacleb was scheduled. But a major obstacle loomed. The occupancy permit for their own building had not yet been approved, and the church they were renting would not allow them to hold their series there.

Should they postpone?

Just a few weeks before the meetings were to start, members moved forward in faith, renting a hall in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Milpitas. “It was a real growing time for our church family,” says Blantett. “Everyone was constantly doing something to make the program better.” Other Bay Area churches were invited to come and bring guests, too.

Pacleb’s dynamic presentations drew members and their guests from Wellspring, Mountain View Japanese, San Jose Fil-Am, Milpitas, and San Jose Central churches. Other guests came as a result of receiving flyers or seeing the signs at the hotel. Attendance ranged from 150-180 guests. Eighteen people were baptized at the meetings’ close. Each of the four churches and the Wellspring church plant welcomed four to six new members.

“It’s exciting to see how God is using us to help other churches,” says Quinones. “It was eye-opening to realize that we are all in the kingdom together and how much we can help each other.”

Wellspring’s members have developed a strong faith over the past seven years and are eager to continue sharing Christ in the Bay Area. They moved into their own facility in January. “Our services are still very upbeat, but they are calmer than they used to be,” Blantett says about some of the services changes.

The church plant group is now a company, which is the next step towards becoming a church. “We’re the small church that can,” says Blantett. “We don’t look at a problem and think we can’t do it, we just ask God how to do it and get it done.”
Adventist Hope Channel to be on Direct TV, going into 50 million homes.

Fifty volunteers make up the church’s Video/TV ministry team and produce 17 hours of programming for Direct TV each week.

And, of course, these friends have been praying for our exciting adventure here in Central California Conference as well. Each one has visited our camp meeting in the past two years. The explosion of the evangelism offering and the many ministries it has resourced has been a miraculous and life-changing journey for so many of us.

Janet and I convinced are that God has big dreams for His work here in Central. We want to see these difficult times not as times to manage nervously to survive, but rather as times of opportunity for our Lord to expand His kingdom in ways we have not yet imagined.

Your conference leaders agree and we’ve planned a day in March to pray and meditate in God’s word together, asking our heavenly Father what He has in mind for Central. We want to see with His heart and eyes – not ours.

This week I came across this powerful statement of how we can please our Lord: “He is well pleased when they [His people] make the very highest demands upon Him, that they may glorify His name. They may expect large things if they have faith in His promises.” Desire of Ages, p 668.

Please join us in prayer to continue to seek God’s visions and dreams for each individual, each family, each congregation and our conference this coming year. Jesus is coming so very soon and we want to walk step-by-step working with Him!

Your brother in Christ,


It took four years, faithful Adventist friends, multiple Bible studies, and two evangelistic series before Haben Tekeste was ready for baptism. “The timing never seemed right,” says Tekeste, an Eritrean nursing student living in San Jose. “And I was worried about what my family would think.”

Three Adventist coworkers first shared their faith with Tekeste in 2005. Much of what the young ladies shared seemed ridiculous to his Greek Orthodox mind, but his understanding slowly grew and he began attending San Jose Central with them. By early 2008, he was considering baptism.

Then online videos and articles lambasting Adventism scared Tekeste. He quit attending church and quickly became depressed. Several months later one of his friends invited him to a Bible study. God spoke to him through the leader’s comment, “Haben, God wants you to be in heaven with Him.”

Soon after, Tekeste attended an evangelistic series with the Youth Evangelism Team (YET) at the Milpitas church. After the 2008 series, YET members joined Tekeste’s other Adventist friends in loving him, keeping in touch and spending time whenever possible.

It was during a fall 2009 evangelistic meeting, with conference evangelist Taj Pacleb and a five Bay Area church partnership, that Tekeste finally “got convicted of everything…the Holy Spirit just hit me and I realized that this was the time, and if I really loved my family I needed to decide for Christ so I could be an example to them.”

Coworkers, church friends, and the YET members joined together in celebrating Tekeste’s baptism at the Milpitas Church on November 21, 2009. “Haben’s baptism was the result of everyone working together,” says Zachary Page, YET leader. “Like Paul says, ‘I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.’” (1 Cor. 3:6)

Tekeste’s decision is already bearing fruit. A lady who witnessed his baptism made her own decision for God as a result. “You don’t know how many people might miss out on God when you wait to decide for Him,” says Tekeste. “God is awesome and it’s a blessing to share Him.”


Haben Tekeste (center) is surrounded by Youth Evangelism Team members (l-r) Sammi Ridley, Leah Page, Zach Page and Jon Tillay. It was coworkers who first shared Jesus with him and invited him to church.