Oakwood Accepts Huntsville Mayor's Walking Challenge

Yesterday, the Healthy Campus Ambassadors accepted Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle's 100-mile Walking Challenge, issued by the Healthy Huntsville team. The Mayor's Challenge is a citywide effort to encourage people of all ages to add physical activity to their daily routines by walking at least 100 miles from September 1 to November 30. That's about one mile a day, and is something everyone can do.

The "U" in Oakwood's "STAND OUT" campaign is for "Use physical activity," so accepting the Mayor's 100-mile Walking Challenge is a natural match. Regular physical activity has been shown to help control weight and lower risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and depression.

View the Health Ambassadors' acceptance video here.

Psychological Sciences Hosts Consecration Service

by Naomi Coggs, student writer

"With complete consecration comes perfect peace," says author Watchman Nee.
The Department of Psychological Sciences held its yearly consecration service on August 28, in Green Hall. About 20 psychology students were in attendance as the department devoted itself to God and His use.

Psychology professor and chair, Martin Hodnett, Psy.D., explained the importance of consecration service to the Psychology Department, "Typically as we're studying psychological science, it's a discipline which requires not only a special calling, but also a certain level of commitment and seriousness. Not only in terms of a discipline, but also in personal discovery in finding God's not only calling on your life, but use for you in the field."

The Consecration served as the first event for the Psychology Club for the 2015-2016 school year. Students were encouraged with a word by Pastor Toussaint Williams, assistant pastor of Oakwood University Church, shown standing at the left. Others in the photo: (l-r) Camille Bell, La'Ker Kwamogi, Kiel Smith, Psychology Club Sponsor Carmen Bucknor, Ph.D., Brandi Batten, Zoe Winston-Cartwright and Tia Spence.

Eva B. Dykes Library Holds Open House
by Naomi Coggs, student writer

On August 27, students were able to familiarize themselves with the Eva B. Dykes Library, staff, and its revamped services at an Open House. Although Eva B. Dykes Library has not had a physical change in over 40 years, campus librarians are embracing a new motto, "I am your librarian."

Library Director Paulette Johnson stated, "The 'I am your librarian' emphasis is to help reduce any anxiety students may have in using the library. Each librarian is paired with a department, and we want students to get to know the librarian for their department and make that librarian their first contact for research purposes."

Besides the addition of a new motto, the library has expanded many of their services. Electronic resources can be accessed anywhere around the world and helping aides are also available online, which is very convenient in a digital world. Oakwoodites can also expect more flexible hours. "The library opens at 7:30 a.m., 15 minutes earlier than before. This is to give students additional time to print out/copy papers, return overnight reserve book loans, and to be ready for their first class of the day, especially if that class is at 8:00 a.m.," explained Johnson.

Last week's Open House was lively and informative as students were served popcorn and snow cones, while playing a variety of games that tested their library knowledge including a scavenger hunt, and library jeopardy.

Alumni Note

Click here to see the Summer 2015 issue of Oakwood Magazine, or visit www.oakwoodmagazine.com
William C. Pergerson, II, '91, a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist, died on August 27, in a fiery airplane crash at the airport in Battle Creek, Michigan, as he prepared for an evangelistic series. The funeral service will be held at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 20, at the Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. MORE

About Oakwood

The mission of Oakwood University, a historically black, Seventh-day Adventist institution, is to transform students through biblically-based education for service to God and humanity.
William Carlson Pergerson II taught a message of Christ and His righteousness that changed his own life in 10 minutes.

Updated on September 2, 2015, with the names of Pastor Pergerson's siblings.

By Andrew McChesney, news editor, Adventist Review

William Pergerson, a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist who once refused to share a pulpit with a woman wearing a ring but went on to make Christ and His righteousness the centerpiece of powerful, soul-winning sermons, died in a fiery airplane crash as he prepared for an evangelistic series. He was 48.

Pergerson, a longtime pilot, had just taken off from the airport in Battle Creek, Michigan, for the 20-minute flight to his home in Berrien Springs when his kit-built Long-EZ plane experienced suspected engine trouble on Aug. 27.

Pergerson, who was flying alone, tried to land twice, keeping in constant contact with the control tower.

But the plane came down in a grassy field near one of the runways during the second attempt at 8:19 p.m., exploding in a ball of fire, the airport said in a statement.

Firefighters rushed to the scene and quickly doused the blaze, but little remained of the plane other than the charred engine.

Remarkably, Pergerson's pilot logbook also survived, bearing a record of his many flights between churches across North America, said Sharon Pergerson, his wife of 18 years, his partner in ministry, and the mother of their two teenage children.

"We were able to salvage my husband's logbook out of the smoke," she said Sunday. "Wow, all the places that he had gone!"
The Long-EZ is known as a reliable aircraft and has a range of just over 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers). (Juanita Staten)

- William Pergerson attending the ASI Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in August 2015. He was a speaker. (ASI)
Pergerson sitting in his kit-built Long-EZ plane at the Battle Creek airport. (Juanita Staten)

- Pergerson told his wife that he could accomplish more at a lower cost by flying his own plane to meetings. (Juanita Staten)
The Long-EZ is known as a reliable aircraft and has a range of just over 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers).
(Juanita Staten)
William Pergerson attending the ASI Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in August 2015. He was a speaker. (ASI)

**A Journey With Christ**

Pergerson’s most incredible journey, however, did not involve his airplane but a close walk with Christ that began partway through his evangelistic career, according to his wife and others who knew him.

After graduating from college, Pergerson worked as a Bible worker and then a pastor and evangelist in the 1990s, preaching a gospel of obedience to God's law.

“He was a hard-core legalist,” said Richard Kearns, a close friend for more than a decade.

He was so focused on the rules that he once refused to accompany a woman who was wearing a ring to the pulpit, Kearns said. A few years later, he said, Pergerson returned to the church with a prayer that the congregation would be able to accept him back.

While preaching obedience, Pergerson grew discouraged and seriously considered quitting as a pastor and evangelist. The evangelistic series he led resulted in just a handful of baptisms.

“I was scraping at the bottom of the barrel, and I didn’t have anything to give to people,” Pergerson later told a friend.

“I used to try all sorts of gimmicks to bring people across the line,” he told another. “Brother, I was a lost man.”

Then in 2001 he experienced a change of heart when he traveled from his home in Virginia to speak at an evangelistic series in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The first surprise came when a local Adventist member gave him a car to use on weekdays, a courtesy that no one had ever extended to him before.

“That just blew Will’s mind!” his wife said. “He said to me, ‘Who is this guy who would do this?’”

A second surprise followed soon after when the car’s owner, seeing William Pergerson’s discouragement, invited a retired pastor to fly over from the East Coast to speak with him.

Pergerson was not pleased to see the old man approach him in the hotel lobby.

“When he first met me, he said to himself, ‘What can this old man tell me that I don’t already know?’” Lloyd Knecht, now 91, recalled with a chuckle.

But Pergerson later acknowledged to Knecht, who became his mentor, “Those 10 minutes changed my ministry and my life.”

Knecht offered a quick Bible study on Christ and His righteousness, starting with 2 Corinthians 5:19, which says, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (ESV).

“I said to Will, ‘We believe that God in His grace and mercy has forgiven all of our sins through the merits of Jesus,’” Knecht said.
Pergerson preparing a Cessna plane to fly from Omaha, Nebraska, to Denver, Colorado, around 2006. (Richard Kearns)

Christ and His Righteousness

Back home in Virginia, Pergerson buried himself in books. When Knecht had a wait of several hours at the Baltimore airport, he rented a car and made the two-hour trip to Pergerson to share books on Christ and His righteousness written by 19th-century Adventist authors Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner.

The delivery shocked Pergerson.

“A white guy has never visited me before. I got to read what he is giving me,” he told Kearns, a trained pastor currently working as a nurse in Walla Walla, Washington.

“Whatever Will got from Lloyd was gobbled up and consumed,” Kearns said.

The concept of Christ and His righteousness refers to Christ’s work for people in pardoning their sins (also known as justification) and for His bringing them into harmony with His law (sanctification). Through faith, a person accepts both the gift of the pardon and the gift of the power to live a holy life.

Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White wrote more than a century ago that Adventists didn’t properly understand this righteousness by faith and, if they did, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit would follow.

“I was shown that if God’s people make no efforts on their part, but wait for the refreshing to come upon them and remove their wrongs and correct their errors; if they depend upon that to cleanse them from filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and fit them to engage in the loud cry of the third angel, they will be found wanting,” Ellen White wrote in
Counsels for the Church, page 100. “The refreshing or power of God comes only on those who have prepared themselves for it by doing the work which God bids them, namely, cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

This summer, the Adventist world church identified Christ and His righteousness as a main focus for its evangelistic strategy for the next five years.

Pergerson announced his new understanding of Christ and His righteousness to his wife once he decided that what he was reading was biblical and supported by Ellen White.

“He told me, and my heart just burned,” Sharon Pergerson said. “We were faithful legalists, but in our hearts it wasn’t working for us. We felt like we were on a treadmill going nowhere.”

The first thing her husband did was to organize a “gospel summit,” as he called the evangelistic meetings that he went on to hold in churches across North America. He rewrote his sermons to put the main focus on Jesus and allow Jesus to explain Adventist doctrines.

“He taught our distinctive doctrines drenched in Christ and His righteousness,” his wife said. “Every night was Jesus and how those doctrines fit into Jesus.”

William Pergerson speaking at Southern Adventist University on July 18, 2015. An audience member said tearfully that she could not forget how Pergerson had referred to Christ as “our lovely Jesus.” The sermon starts at 7:47.

A Change in Preaching

Fellow pastors said the Holy Spirit worked powerfully at those revamped meetings, which averaged 130 non-church members. While only three or four people once asked for baptism after a series, the number now swelled to around 80 percent. Attendance also did not see any decrease.

“He had the distinction of concluding the series with as many in attendance on the final evening as were in attendance on opening night,” said Bill Brace, pastor of the Adventist church in Braintree, Massachusetts, where Pergerson led a series two years ago. “He uniquely presented the prophecies permeated with the theme of Christ our righteousness. My congregation absolutely loved him! He was one of the finest evangelists I have had the honor to work with in my almost 40 years of pastoral ministry.”

Pergerson also astonished first-time listeners with his love for Jesus during a Sabbath sermon that he gave at Southern Adventist University in July in his two-year-old role as manager, director, and evangelist for the 1888 Message Study Committee, an Adventist supporting ministry based in Berrien Springs.

“His message was so Christ-centered and he had a passion for leading people to the foot of the cross,” said Jared Thurmon, strategic partnerships liaison for the Adventist Review, who was in the audience.

That evening, a woman tearfully told one of Pergerson’s friends that she could not forget how he had referred to Christ as “our lovely Jesus” in the sermon.

“She said those words are flat but when he said it there was such power and realness to it that she had been teary all day thinking about our lovely Jesus,” said the friend, Andi Hunsaker, a physician whose husband, Robert, is vice president of the 1888 Message Study Committee.

“She said that ‘Will said the words as though he really knew Jesus,’” Hunsaker said. “Will did know his ‘lovely Jesus.’”

Sharon Pergerson said her husband made Jesus irresistible to those who heard him speak.
“They fell in love with a Jesus who had done so much for them,” she said. “If people walked out, they were walking out on Jesus, not on a set of doctrines.”

William Pergerson had a special burden for his fellow ministers and evangelists, said Fred Bischoff, a friend for more than a decade and director of Adventist Pioneer Library, a service of Light Bearers Ministry.

Pergerson cherished his private time with Jesus, waking up at 4 a.m. to spend two hours in devotions. He was known to exclaim: “No Bible, no breakfast! No Bible, no bread!”

Passion for Poor and Planes

One of his first major evangelistic series after Las Vegas was in Minneapolis, an endeavor that resulted in about 100 baptisms and the planting of a new church in 2004.

As he preached, he also sought to care for the underprivileged, said Oliver Nelson III, who served as elder of Pergerson’s New Life Adventist Church in Minneapolis for four years.

“Although a busy evangelist with conference pay, Pastor Pergerson and his wife, Sharon, would routinely invite broken families to live in their home in order to share the balm of Jesus’ love,” Nelson said. “Many of these individuals remain connected to Christ's body to this day because of Pastor Pergerson’s love sacrifice.”

Pergerson worked for the Adventist Church’s Central States Regional Conference.
Nelson, who described Pergerson as his mentor, said the evangelist believed and lived out the conviction that “to effectively share the gospel of Jesus Christ requires that one actually care about people — which he did with great intensity.”

Pergerson organized free medical checkups for the underprivileged during an evangelistic series in St. Louis shortly after the General Conference session there in 2005. The series resulted in the opening of a new church.

Pergerson, who owned a Cessna aircraft at the time, flew between the St. Louis and Minneapolis churches, preaching, teaching, and encouraging members.

“Flying was a passion for him, but it also was a necessity for him,” said Kearns, who helped Pergerson plant the church in St. Louis and flew with him many times.

Sharon Pergerson said she sometimes asked her husband why he didn’t choose a less dangerous pastime like golf and he replied that he could accomplish more at a lower cost by flying his own plane to engagements.

Pergerson, who completed an undergraduate degree in theology at Oakwood University in 1991, was active in many pursuits. He established GospelNet, a nonprofit organization to share the gospel, and spoke at the ASI Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, last year. He led evangelistic series in South Africa, held meetings in Trinidad and Tobago last summer, and planned to return to the Caribbean islands next year. He also was gearing up to co-host a Revelation series with Light Bearers co-director James Rafferty on 3ABN television and to lead major meetings at the Battle Creek Tabernacle church this fall.

He was leaving Battle Creek after finalizing arrangements for those meetings when his plane crashed last Thursday.

Pergerson had spent the day meeting with pastors and Bible workers, said Brian Schwartz, an interventional cardiologist at the Kettering Medical Center in Ohio and board chair of the 1888 Message Study Committee.

“They talked him into going to dinner afterward. He said he would have to cut it short because he didn’t want to fly in the dark,” Schwartz said.

Pergerson excused himself from the meal early, and a Bible worker drove him to the airport. The Bible worker returned and the group was still talking around the table an hour later when Sharon Pergerson called to say that she had heard about an accident at the airport.

It was unclear whether the Battle Creek meetings would go ahead as planned.

“I’m not sure I know anybody with his skill set of getting decisions and also being so strong on the gospel of Christ,” said Rob Benardo, pastor of the Battle Creek church. “His emphasis was righteousness by faith, he loved the Lord with all his heart, and he had a great burden for all souls for God’s kingdom.”
Saving Souls in Death

William Carlson Pergerson II, born Aug. 7, 1967, in Washington, D.C., will be buried after a memorial service at the Battle Creek Tabernacle on Sept. 19 and a memorial service at the Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University on Sept. 20. In addition to his wife, he is survived by their two children — William III, 16, and Jaissa, 13 — his father, William, and two younger siblings, Joel Pergerson of Virginia and Kim Pergerson-Williams of California. His mother died in May.

The 1888 Message Study Committee is setting up a scholarship fund for the two teenage children.

Friends said they did not understand why Pergerson died so young, but many expressed hope that more people would decide for Jesus in his death than in his life.

One of the first decisions was made early Sunday.

Sharon Pergerson said she woke up at 3 a.m. to hear her son sobbing on the porch. She went outside to comfort him and learned that he was not weeping about the loss of his father.

“Mom, I am not crying for Daddy,” the boy said. “I am crying to God. I am giving full surrender of my soul to Him. I don’t want anything between Him and me.”

Sharon Pergerson, speaking with a voice strong with passion for Jesus and her husband in a 45-minute phone interview, said she was hurting but filled with love for the Lord.

“I am in love with Jesus, I have been a long time, and this has taken me to a whole new level,” she said. “There is nothing worth staying here for. My mansion is in heaven, and my partner is resting, waiting to join me with our Lord. I want Christ to come soon.”

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