Social Media Catches Up With Week of Prayer

By Ivan Williams, Director, NAD Ministerial

Grace Underwood feels a wave of nostalgia wash over her as she drives home from work. It’s the first week of November. In a previous era she would be sitting at church with other Adventists enjoying the annual Week of Prayer readings. Unfortunately with her commute schedule she will barely make it home in time to feed the kids, supervise their homework, and tuck them into bed.

Grace may be representative of many who treasure those times of fellowship, prayer, and revival, but whose schedules will not allow for a nightly trip to the church. Yet things may be changing in the North American Division this fall. George Johnson, communication director for the NAD is turning social media loose on solving the Week of Prayer scheduling issue.

Johnson says “we wanted to try something new this year. We know that not everyone is able to get out to the church every night but we didn’t want them to miss out on the Week of Prayer. Now with the technology of social media they can read and pray together through a virtual week of prayer.”

Week of Prayer has been a long-standing tradition in the Adventist church. Stephen Chavez, associate editor of Adventist Review reflects “back when I was a pastor we would order extra copies of the Review for the church and then gather together Sabbath evening and read and discuss the devotional. Then we would continue throughout the week, sometimes at the church, sometimes at Elders’ homes and study and pray together.”

The tradition continues this year starting November 2-9. A special edition of the Adventist Review dated September 26 carried all eight readings for the week of spiritual emphasis. Titled “And they Followed Him,” they tell the story of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Writers include Larry

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New Technology Tool for Evangelism

The North American Division Office of Communication has released a new website called “MyWayToJesus.com.” The website was designed to be able to appear in search engines when web surfers “seek” information about spiritual matters.

The website has unique features such as:

• Did You Know (28 Fundamental Beliefs explained in .90 videos with Bible study links, and live chat feature)
• Who Is God (Discover Bible Studies)
• God Loves Kids (My Place with Jesus)
• Wednesday’s Word (weekly email devotional service)
• Prayer Requests.

The videos from the “Did You Know” section share how the belief relates to real life, either through a story or concept that everyone, including those who are not religious, can relate to. The videos take our beliefs and make them deeply personal. Since each video focuses on one of the 28 fundamental beliefs, they provide a good way to reach and teach people about the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Because of the content, the “Did You Know” videos are designed to be used as identity spots on television. This will give congregations the opportunity to put a face on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in an appealing way that they typically would not be able to produce. Stay tuned to Practicing Communicating for more information on how to obtain these as identity spots in your area.

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Wilson says “that the Week of Prayer focuses on revival and the Christian life, and how we can have a vibrant, happy, and rewarding relationship with God.”

For Grace and others who have a scheduling conflict, social media may provide a way to participate in this year’s Week of Prayer.

Social media is a world where people can interact, create, share, and exchange information without having to be in the same room at the same time. Facebook may be the most familiar social media site with over a billion users worldwide. Churches have begun to take advantage of social media by engaging the greater virtual community on a personal basis in discussions, Bible studies, and mission projects. Social media-savvy churches see themselves not confined to a specific time or place. Local ministry can happen twenty four hours a day anywhere in the world. This fall social media catches up with Week of Prayer.

Dave Gemmell, associate director of the NAD Ministerial Department, says “Our staff will be hosting this year’s Week of Prayer virtually via Facebook. This November you can go to www.facebook.com/NADAdventist and find the reading for the day along with discussion questions. You can share your feedback on the reading and your prayer requests. My colleagues in Ministerial will be there. I’m looking forward to meeting you. Together we can study and pray together.”

Perhaps things will be different for Grace Underwood this year. After the kids are tucked in she may have some quiet moments to sit down with her computer or tablet device and take in the reading for the day. She might type in her reflections on the reading. She could read others’ comments and give words of encouragement. Grace may be brave enough to type in her prayer requests and enjoy having many participants lift her up in prayer as well as pray for others in the virtual meeting. Even though she is physically alone, Grace may experience the fellowship of hundreds this November in NAD’s virtual Week of Prayer.
TechTalk: Digital Disciples

Times have changed, if you were a public speaker in the 19th or early 20th century and someone in the audience was not keeping eye contact and was focused on something other than the speaker, you would think the subject matter was boring or the participant was not interested or engaged. However, in the 21st century it is often just the opposite. People now are using their digital devices to google information, fact check, and share content from the presenter.

The modern public speaker should understand that there is an audience within the audience to which he or she speaks or presents. Each person in attendance who is engaged in social media has an audience to which they speak, communicate, and share. It makes all the sense in the world for the modern speaker to realize and embrace this fact. This is a modern way to achieve what Jabez asked for, enlarging of his territory. (1 Chronicles 4:10)

Churches should embrace and encourage the digital disciples who utilize technology to spread the gospel to their audiences through social media outlets like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and social cam. This is an effective way to reach out to those who are not present.

Successful Methods

- Use a hashtag for the event. i.e. #practicingcommunicating
- Give concise points that are easy to remember
- Summarize the main thought in 140 characters or less
- Take/show short videos of specific moments or a post-interview with a participant

Cautions

Remember, the purpose is to share the blessing or information with friends, not to compete or try to out-do or shine someone else. You do not want the acknowledgement to overshadow the goal. It would be very easy for it to become a competition or a race to be noted as the church that does this and miss the reason for doing so.

And this gospel shall be preached in all the world … digital disciples are one method to hasten the Lord’s coming.

By Bryant Taylor, pastor and communication director who lives at the intersection of ministry and technology.