At an arms length

Maybe it’s the digital divide or is it simply inertia? Whatever it is, hundreds of Adventist Churches across the South Pacific are loving InFocus Adventist News being shown between Sabbath School and Church, but hundreds of others don’t even know about it! This Adventist Media emphasis Sabbath is the perfect time to change that! Just click [here](#) to view InFocus Adventist News, and share it with your church this Sabbath.

You see, while the majority of work done by Adventist Media is aimed outside the church—It Is Written Oceania TV, Signs Magazine, the Discovery Centre, Diggings Magazine, the full InFocus News, Beyond DVDs—InFocus Adventist News is something Adventist Media produces just for your church. It is the ideal way to get people out of the hallways and into the church for the service to start on time. And it is terrific! So why not use this Adventist Media Sabbath to introduce your church to something interesting, inspiring and something that will make you proud to be an Adventist. Just click [here](#), to ensure your church doesn't miss out!

Also:

- [European Youth Congress impacts community](#)
- [Adventist sentenced to life in prison](#)
- [Historic health summit in PNG](#)
Adventist publishing houses not to merge

Australian PM visits Adventist college

Come-BAC Kidd: Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pays a visit to Brisbane Adventist College (BAC) as part of his election campaign, launching a new $A450m pledge for out of hours school care.

Indecent exposure

Linden Chuang explores the amazing human mind, and how the greatest danger to it could be inside your own home.

Read RECORD

This Sabbath has an Adventist Media Network emphasis. Check out the Adventist World, with an Adventist Media wrap-around for more information.

Watch/download InFocus

Watch this week's Christian news bulletin, discover issues Christians should be aware of before the upcoming Australian federal election and enjoy a special interview with an extreme pastor, living life on the edge. All this and more. Check it out!
A life of service

The smash hit Downton Abbey plays on the tensions between the servant class and the aristocracy they work for. ADRA CEO Mark Webster explores the dangers inherent in a life of service.
Seventh-day Adventist young people helped clear the air this week in Novi Sad’s Liberty Square (Serbia), where they asked passers-by to trade their cigarettes for watermelon and other fresh fruit on a warm summer day.

Benjamin Zihlman and Reimo Butscher from Switzerland expressed surprise when most of the residents were willing to swap not just their lit cigarettes, but their entire pack of cigarettes. Others went further, indicating a desire to quit smoking altogether and exchanging contact information with the young volunteers.

Zihlman and Butscher plan to keep in touch with one couple through Facebook, where they’ll offer ongoing support in their efforts to quit.

The outreach event was one of six community-wide activities undertaken by young people in Serbia this week for the “Power of One” Pan-European Youth Congress. Adventist youth also cleared rubbish along the banks of the Danube River, repainted playgrounds equipment at local elementary schools and donated blood. Other young people handed out gift bags full of books such as “Gifted Hands,” by renowned Adventist neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson.

“It is a privilege to watch our young people take the ‘Power of One’ to the people through practical Christianity and sharing the gospel,” said Janos Kovacs-Biro, director for Evangelism for the Adventist Church’s Trans-European Division.

Back at the SPENS Sports Center, after helping passers-by confront addiction, young people heard a message on facing their own struggles during a devotional by Adventist evangelist David Asscherick.

Asscherick reminded an audience of some 3,000 Adventist youth that growing in Christ is “a walk, not a leap. It takes time.”

“So many of us have been told that struggle is wrong, but if you struggle in your Christian experience, if you’re finding it hard to learn how
to walk with Christ, that means you’re swimming against … the inclinations of the world,” Asscherick said, adding that the key to Christian growth is “to keep getting up.”

Matthew Gamble, pastor of the Elmshaven Seventh-day Adventist Church in St. Helena, California, United States, built on Asscherick’s message of spiritual growth.

“Some people believe they need to get over sin to be accepted by Christ. This is not the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is this: You’re going to heaven because of what Christ has done, what he is still doing and what he will continue to do.”

Asscherick and Gamble were both on hand to lead some of 17 workshops during the congress. In “The Mission Lifestyle,” Asscherick outlined the importance of guarding both spiritual and physical health while leading a Christ-centered, mission-focused life.

“This was a life-changing message for me,” said Elycia Martins from Australia.

Martins wasn’t the only young person to travel to the continent for the congress. Two visitors from Papua New Guinea logged 87 travel hours and passed through seven countries on their way. Forty-five European countries were also represented at the congress.

For Adventist youth ministry leaders in Europe, the congress marked a breakthrough. In the 1990s, church leaders first tried to organize a youth congress in Serbia, but political instability in the region thwarted their efforts.

This time around, young people were reminded how a relationship with God can bring lasting stability to their lives.

“If this congress has been the motivation for [young people] to either find Christ or to continue in this mission, I think it has achieved its main goal,” said Stefan Sigg, director of Youth Ministries for the church’s Inter-European Division.

"The [conference] was a magnificent and multicultural experience," said Tabitha Krznar-Radovanovic, from Sydney, Australia. "Everything was so inspiring! The highlight moments were the creative approach to outreach activities from blood donation, book crossing, watermelon stalls and swapping cigarettes for fruit. Now we hope to continue to go confidently forward and share the good news about the power of the One, (Jesus Christ)."
A court in Pakistan sentenced a Seventh-day Adventist man to life in prison for allegedly defaming the Prophet Muhammad in a case that falls under the country’s controversial blasphemy laws.

Sajjad Masih, 29, was convicted of sending blasphemous text messages to a member of a religious extremist group in 2011, despite his accuser’s subsequent retraction and prosecutors’ failure to produce any evidence of his involvement. Javed Sahotra, Masih’s defense attorney and fellow Adventist Church member, said the judge buckled under pressure from extremists who dominate the local religious and political landscape.

John Graz, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Adventist world church, said Masih’s case is not unusual.

“Members of religious minorities in Pakistan live with the constant threat of being accused of blasphemy,” Graz said. “They know that if they are accused, they cannot count on a serious investigation.”

According to news reports, Masih was framed by Donald Bhatti, who in May 2011 forcibly married Masih’s then fiancée, coercing her parents with promises of work visas. Bhatti had dated the young woman before moving to the United Kingdom, and is said to have still been jealous of her relationship with Masih. After the ceremony, Bhatti immediately returned to the UK, taking his new wife with him. Masih and his former fiancée, however, maintained a close friendship, frequently calling each other.

In late December, the Gojra police ransacked Masih’s house, looking for evidence and intending to arrest him, Sahotra said. His accuser, Tariq Saleem, had informed local police of the text messages and urged them to track the mobile number and arrest its owner, he said.

The number was later found to be registered in Bhatti’s wife’s name. She told Masih that Bhatti had purchased a SIM using her ID card and arranged for an accomplice to send the messages, hoping to muddy their relationship, Sahotra said.

Gojra police arrested Masih on December 28, 2011. His lawyer accompanied him to the Gojra City Police Station, where he hoped Masih could record a statement and clear his name, church leaders said.

But the case was registered under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, which call for death or life imprisonment for any person found guilty of blaspheming Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.

Michael Ditta, president of the Adventist Church’s Pakistan Union, said the laws are notoriously used to take revenge on Christians and other religious minorities. Pakistan is 96 percent Muslim, with only 2 percent of the country’s population identifying itself as Christian.

“We as a minority faith are concerned about the misuse of this law and growing intolerance toward Christians in the country,” Ditta said.

Earlier this year, Pakistan was categorised as a “tier 1” country by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom for “systemic,
ongoing and egregious” intolerance toward minority faith groups.

At the police station, Masih said he was forced, under duress, to “confess” to sending the text messages, Sahotra said. He was subsequently sent to prison to await trial.

After more than a year and a half in District Jail Toba Take Singh, Masih has been sentenced to life in prison, despite the fact that under cross-examination, his accuser admitted he had not received any blasphemous text messages as he originally claimed.

Furthermore, affidavits from Masih’s co-workers confirm that he was at work in Pakpattan at the time prosecutors claim he sent the text messages from his former fiance’s cell phone.

Sahotra said he is planning to appeal the ruling in early August.

At world church headquarters in the US state of Maryland, Graz and other members of the newly-formed Defense of Members Persecuted for Religious Reasons Committee are monitoring Masih’s case. The committee is also advocating on behalf of Antonio Monteiro, another Adventist Church member arbitrarily detained.

“We want our members and government leaders to know that the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes these cases very seriously,” Graz said.

“What is happening to Sajjad Masih is another tragic example of the abuse of blasphemy laws in some parts of Pakistan. Oppressing people on behalf of a religion contradicts the message of peace and justice to all religions that we advocate.”
Historic health summit in PNG

Goroka, Papua New Guinea

At Goroka Airport in Papua New Guinea there’s a large billboard for Milo. The slogan? “Milo Givim Yu Strong.” The best feature? The gleaming clean, healthy tooth prominently displayed in the advertisement. There are a lot of good things you could imply about Milo, but a force for promoting dental health seems a little counterintuitive. And Milo’s just one of the many highly refined foods advertised heavily in this mountaintop town.

It shouldn’t be surprising that with an increase in the wide availability of high calorie, highly refined foods, lifestyle diseases like diabetes, heart attack and stroke are on the increase in PNG. There’s also a threat from HIV/AIDS—particularly as men leave their families to work in mining sites and cities far from home.

Historically the Adventist Church’s emphasis in PNG has been on health problems such as maternal health, infant mortality, infectious diseases and injuries. However, as PNG develops, the Church is working to also address the new lifestyle disease threat.

As part of this effort, the Church organised a health summit at three sites—Port Moresby, Goroka and Sonoma, near Rabaul—last month. The concept was to provide practical training on health education, with the goal that every Adventist church, school and clinic will become a centre for health education. More than 1700 Adventist pastors, teachers and health workers were invited to the summit. In addition, some professionals from outside the Adventist community attended.

Many who presented at the summit are at the top of their field, including doctors Oscar and Eugenia Giordano, who lead an Adventist global effort in South Africa to stem the HIV/AIDS pandemic. There were also a number of presenters from PNG who added their expertise both on substantive issues and contextualising programs and methods to the various cultures in PNG.

“This health summit was directly related to the ‘health promoting churches/schools/clinics and hospitals initiative’ that’s currently being rolled out Pacific-wide by the South Pacific Division’s Health team,” said Pastor Kevin Price, director of the team. “We are determined to address the double disease burden that comes from communicable and lifestyle diseases that so many are experiencing in the Pacific. We believe our health message needs to be loudly re-proclaimed. There has never been a time when it has been more relevant.”

The General Conference awarded Sibilla Johnson the Health Ministries Medal of Distinction for her lifetime of service in health ministry. Mrs Johnson—director of Adventist Health Ministries in Victoria—received the award at a ceremony at Sonoma College during the Health Summit, with retiring world Church Health Ministries director, Dr Allan Handysides, and director elect, Dr Peter Landless, conducting the presentation. It was fitting the ceremony took place in PNG, as it was in that country that Mrs Johnson began her health ministry work in 1982.
The Church has long had a commitment to improving the health of the people of PNG. It currently operates 31 clinics there—many of them very remote—and recently acquired Komo Hospital.
Adventist publishing houses not to merge


A commission announced June 19 to consider a merger of the Pacific Press Publishing Association in Nampa, Idaho, and the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland, will cease its work, officials of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) and North American Division (NAD) said.

Citing “differing perspectives as to the interpretation” of Spirit of Prophecy writings about the independences of the two units, a statement issued by church leaders said: “It is felt in the best interest of the publishing work of the church at this time for there to be no change to the governance of the two institutions.”

However, the statement noted that leaders of the GC and its NAD have “requested that the two publishing houses continue to operate under their current structures but that they try to find ways to realise economies through closer cooperation and possible shared services.”

Additionally, “The publishing houses are also encouraged to work very closely with and respond to the NAD’s mission-driven publishing needs and cooperate in developing more division-oriented and efficient delivery and distribution systems,” the statement indicated.

As noted in an earlier report, “Review and Herald Publishing Association is the successor to the first publishing house, The Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, incorporated in 1861. The Pacific Adventist Publishing Association, established in California, was organised in 1875. It was renamed as the Pacific Press Publishing Association in 1904. A third General Conference-sponsored publishing house, Southern Publishing Association, merged with the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1980.”

In the July 31 announcement, church leaders asked Seventh-day Adventists to “please pray for the public sharing and personal use of printed and electronic materials as we lift up Christ, proclaim His three angels messages of Revelation 14 and announce His soon second coming.”
Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has paid a visit to Brisbane Adventist College for the first full day of his election campaign, which kicked off this week (August 5).

The visit came as the Labor Government announced a $A450m boost for before and after hours school care, a move the Prime Minister believes will boost productivity and ease household costs for families.

According to The Australian newspaper, school care could open as early as 7am and run as late as 7pm.

"A kid's development doesn't just begin at 9am and end at 3pm," Mr Rudd said. "It's also about ensuring our schools are the best possible environments to boost the skills and education levels of our kids. And that's all about preparing the economy for the future and managing the big transition ahead of us."

Mr Rudd spent his morning at BAC on the Primary campus, explaining the proposed pledge to students, joining in with classes, and reading to attentive Year 1 students.

Principal Jack Ryan says the visit was a perfect way to teach the students lessons about respect and hospitality.

“Irrespective of our personal political views or preferences, we want our children to respect our civic leaders and honour those who govern our great country,” he said. “It was an opportunity for our children to see first-hand our nation's leader, and practice the ministry of hospitality... I am sure Mr Rudd and his entourage will not easily forget their happy visit to BAC.”
Prime Minister Rudd talks to students, with Principal Jack Ryan (left).

The Government’s pledge would fund 500 schools, providing more flexible after-school care, more places and higher quality activities and programs such as sporting activities, music lessons and homework clubs.

Schools can apply to the Better Schools: Before and After fund before the start of the 2014 school year.

At the time of publishing, no other parties had commented on these policies.
A friend of mine recently recalled his experience of being hypnotised. Well, he actually shared his girlfriend’s take on what happened—he didn’t remember a thing.

We had a good laugh over the various antics the hypnotist encouraged him to do, from playing a grand piano with fervour to playing a tiny piano with just two fingers. It may sound like an innocent stage act, but for hypnosis to work properly, the participant must willingly surrender their mind to the ideas and promptings of “the man with the watch”.

Christians are generally apprehensive about the practice of hypnosis—and I count myself among the concerned. The idea of exposing my mind to the promptings of an external source makes me uneasy. Christians, however, have little to fear of the man with the watch. Of greater concern are the idiot and the box.

The tube. The telly. Yes, the idiot box.

“Oh, here we go,” some of you might say. “Another discussion about the negative impact of television. I’ve heard it all before.” And it’s true—the old wives’ tales that TV “melts your brain” and is a “tool of the devil” have been passed around for years. But have you ever considered the possibility there’s a grain of truth to such tales?

When you watch TV, the right hemisphere of your brain—the side that allows for emotional and uncritical thinking—becomes twice as active as the left hemisphere—the analytical and critical side. As a result of this anomaly, the brain takes on a “passive” state, leaving the viewer susceptible to absorbing a large amount of information unfiltered.¹

This passive response to watching television is akin to the state of the brain under the influence of hypnosis. And with the mental guards removed, we leave ourselves exposed to all sorts of perverted ideas and thoughts, which can ultimately lead to inappropriate actions.

For men, two key drawcards of TV shows and movies are fight scenes and attractive women. But television does a terrible job in portraying either in a pure and honest manner. Lengthy fist fights do little to represent the reality that a single hit can kill. Television encourages men to look lustfully at women—a serious offence according to the Bible (Matthew 5:28; Ephesians 5:3).

In spite of this, television is not the problem. While there’s merit to the conversation that we’re watching too much television², the issue lies with us—what we’re watching, what we’re exposing our minds to. Television is just a tool, which can be used for good as well as evil.

You won’t get any tips from me on what constitutes good or evil television, for the Bible already does a great job on offering some guidelines:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,
whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8, KJV).

In keeping such verses in mind when deciding what we watch on television, we become Christians concerned with pleasing our Lord, and not just idiots hypnotised by a box.


Linden Chuang is an assistant editor of RECORD.
There’s a TV series that has enjoyed popularity over the last couple of years called *Downton Abbey*. I haven’t seen much of it, but it is a mild obsession at the moment for a member of my household who shall remain nameless. Suffice to say I’ve seen bits and pieces of the series as well as a behind-the-scenes documentary.

What I think is particularly interesting is the exploration of the relationships between the aristocracy and the servants, which is highlighted by one of the main characters who finds himself somewhat uncomfortably placed between the two groups.

Given that as Christians we are called to a life of service—“Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” Mark 9:35—how to act as a servant to others regardless of how we encounter each other is a topic that should be foremost in our minds as we make our way through life. And I don’t think it’s an entirely straightforward thing.

In fact I think it can be easy, and I know this from my own experience, to fall into one of two traps as we seek to live a life of service.

The first trap, and perhaps the most common for people living prosperous lives in places like Australia, is to think that I am somehow better than the person I am serving, that my success in life or my choice to serve somehow makes me superior.

The second trap, which is equally unfortunate, is to believe deep down that somehow I am inferior to those I have chosen to serve. To genuinely serve others we need to find balance and equality in our relationships.

In the narrative of *Downton Abbey*, the moments where we see positive, functional relationships between people reflect the ability of the characters to get this balance right, recognising an inherent equality and that service flows both ways despite the roles and titles.

As people who care about the issues of poverty and injustice, who feel called by God to the service of others in whatever form, we should always remember that at its deepest, truest level all service is a choice.

It is a choice to put the needs of another ahead of your own wants, a choice that is based on a deep understanding of equality—“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23.

Any motivation coming from feelings of superiority (or inferiority) displaces and undermines even the most genuine intent or desire to serve.

*This article was originally posted as a blog on the ADRA Australia website, <www.adra.org.au>.

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