Music for the soul

It’s the end of another week. At this stage—23 days into the new year—you’re probably either well and truly back into the working routine or simply ready for another holiday.

Whichever category you fall into, here’s something that will help you end the working week on a high note: a half-hour live concert featuring Psalter Music artists Eric & Monique (did you “note-ice” the music pun?).

Tune into the broadcast at 1pm AEDT at <www.hopechannel.com/events>.

For more “note-worthy” (sorry, pun-overload) news and views, keep reading this week’s edition of Record eNews.
3052 baptised and 200 pastors ordained

Thousands of people packed a stadium in the Dominican Republic’s capital on Sabbath (January 17) to celebrate 3052 baptisms and the historic ordination of more than 200 pastors.

In the path of an inferno

The Adelaide Hills fires in early January destroyed 27 homes. A number of Adventist properties were affected as well, including that of South Australian Conference president Pastor Andrew Kingston.

100 years celebrate on the track

More than 5000 campers gathered at Efogi, a village along
the Kokoda Track (Papua New Guinea), with the 700 residents of the village to celebrate 100 years of Adventism in the district.

What we do with the Bible

Reading the Bible more—it’s also one of those resolutions many of us make with each new year. While a good place to start, perhaps Bible reading is not the goal we sometimes make it out to be.

And “demon sugar”—what is it, and how does it affect your body? Dr James Wright discusses.

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Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Thousands of people packed a stadium in the Dominican Republic’s capital on Sabbath to celebrate 3052 baptisms and the historic ordination of more than 200 pastors at the close of a worldwide Ten Days of Prayer initiative by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The worship service at Santo Domingo’s El Palacio de Los Deportes stadium, transmitted live online and via radio and television, was attended by the Adventist Church’s 29 top leaders, including General Conference president Dr Ted Wilson, who preached the sermon.

“We leave with hearts filled with gratitude for the moving of God’s Spirit and overflowing with joy that the Holy Spirit has worked powerfully in this capital city,” said evangelist Mark Finley, who led a nightly program titled, “New Year, New Life” in the stadium on January 7-11.

The 3052 baptisms include more than 1800 were baptised in the stadium on Sabbath, January 17, and hundreds baptised elsewhere in the island on January 16 and 17, according to the Adventist Church’s Dominican Union. Dozens more were baptised during Finley’s evangelistic series the previous week.

“Jesus is the rock and you are asked to build His church on the rock—on Jesus Christ,” Dr Wilson told the baptismal candidates in the stadium. “Build God’s church as you point people for Him, to His Holy Word, to His church, to His prophetic movement.”

One baptism took centre stage: Hiu Wang, who became the first Chinese believer to join the Adventist Church in the Dominican Republic.
“Wang represents a group of believers the church has been working with through a Adventist missions centre in Santo Domingo for the last year and a half,” said Luis Miguel Acevedo, the pastor who oversees the group.

The centre offers Spanish classes, cooking classes, Bible study and other activities aimed at reaching out to the local Chinese population.

Wang, who has three children, was baptised by Inter-American Division president Dr Israel Leito after the president of the Northern Asia-Pacific Division, Jairyong Lee, gave the baptismal prayer.

Wang said she didn’t want to miss the opportunity to give her life to Jesus on a special national day of celebration in the country called Dia de la Hermandad, or Day of Fellowship.

The audience joined G T Ng, executive secretary of the General Conference, as he prayed for the Chinese ministry. The population of Chinese on the island is about 80,000 and growing, according to Acevedo.

The ordination service, held on Sabbath afternoon, marked a historic moment for the Adventist Church in terms of the number of ministers who were ordained and the number of countries and top church leaders involved.

More than 200 pastors were ordained, including 26 at the host site in Santo Domingo. Leaders from all 13 divisions of the world church attended the ordination service together with General Conference vice presidents and other officers, some of whom participated. Twenty-three church unions in 11 countries took part in the service via satellite.

Pastor Finley, who works as assistant to the General Conference president and an editor-at-large for Adventist Review and Adventist World, said the stadium was overflowing when he and other church leaders arrived at 9am after a two-hour bus drive from the hotel where they were staying in La Romana.

The 15,000-seat auditorium was packed to its maximum capacity, with more than 20,000 people inside and thousands more outside listening via loud speakers.
“The day was an inspirational feast, with inspiring music, a powerful sermon by Pastor Wilson, an amazing musical production of the story of Acts, and a moving baptismal ceremony,” Finley said by e-mail.

Church leaders have spent the past week in La Romana, reviewing strategic objectives for the Adventist Church at an annual meeting. They took a day off on January 14 to help construct a local church building, and they attended the unveiling of a city street named after church co-founder Ellen G White on January 15.

The Sabbath also capped the Ten Days of Prayer, an annual initiative by the General Conference’s Ministerial Association that saw Adventists gather daily worldwide to ask for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church. Adventists have spoken of renewed unity in their church families and of spiritual and physical healing as a result of the prayer sessions.

South Pacific Division president Dr Barry Oliver speaks during the Sabbath worship service on January 17. [Photo courtesy: @adventistasrd]

Pastor Finley said God was changing lives through the efforts of dedicated Adventists in the Dominican Republic, and he expressed hope that Adventists around the world would set aside personal interests to focus on the church’s mission of sharing Jesus.

“I leave Santo Domingo deeply impressed with the commitment of our Adventist church members to mission, the extraordinary participation of young adults in the life and witness of the church, and the laser focus of church administration on evangelistic outreach,” Pastor Finley said. “I leave sensing that God did something incredibly unusual because administrators, pastors, and lay members united in God’s mission to the world with a sense of urgency. And I leave wondering what might happen if this unified focus on mission and commitment to winning lost people to Christ overshadowed all self-interest and was the priority of every church, every conference, union and division.”
In the path of an inferno

Dorothea Mackellar describes her “sunburnt country” as a land of beauty and a land of terror. And there’s nothing in this land that terrifies more than the destructive power of fast-moving bushfires on a blistering hot summer’s day. Stringy bark lights up like fuses. Gum trees explode like firebombs. And the hot winds spread burning twigs and leaves like matches for kilometres around. If you think you can outrun, outfight, outlast an Australian bushfire, it’s because you’ve never experienced one.

Some say you can’t truly understand the heart of Australia until you’ve weathered a raging bushfire on your property, sifted through the remains of your charred belongings and, in the smoking aftermath, thanked God that at least you’re still alive. Bushfires are how this rugged land purifies and regenerates. But there’s no process on earth that’s more gut-wrenching.

From January 2-9, bushfires raged through the Adelaide Hills and Adventists were caught in the middle of the crisis.

South Australian Conference president Pastor Andrew Kingston found his four-hectare property in the path of the inferno. “We thought we’d lost everything,” he says. “It is shocking to come home and see the land blacked and charred in every direction.” But his home? “The fire came right up our carport but no further. Sadly, the caravan I’d bought for retirement and parked under trees for shade, it was burned to cinders. I imported it from the UK especially. So much for our human plans! But we still have a home and, much more importantly, we still have each other. For that we are profoundly grateful to God.”

Pastor Kingston wasn’t the only Adventist who found themselves in the path of the fire. Lyndon Wright was certain his home would be consumed. When needed most, his trusty fire pump spluttered and died. The fire was racing towards him and he had no way to respond or prepare apart from bucketing water from his swimming pool and hurling it on the approaching flames. All through this he was praying for God to do something.
Just as the raging fire was about to hit he heard a rumbling sound in the distance. It came closer and louder, and then, through the blinding smoke he saw *Elvis*: the air-crane helicopter that holds 9500 litres of pure firefighting gold. It dumped its contents and saved his home. It came back a little while later and dumped a second load for good measure.

“We were fortunate this time,” Pastor Kingston says. “No Adventists lost their homes. But we also know some of our friends and neighbours did lose their homes, their pets, their cars and everything they owned. Our hearts and prayers go out to them, as does our hand of help and friendship. This is a tough, tough land sometimes. But through bonds of mateship we can help each other. It’s all about doing for others as we’d hope for. And you can’t get much more Aussie—or Christian—than that.”

This also was the first time ADRA Australia had responded to a disaster in South Australia after a direct request from the state government. Click [HERE](http://record.net.au/items/in-the-...) for more on ADRA's response.

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*James Standish is editor of Adventist Record and director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty.*
Efogi, Papua New Guinea

More than 5000 campers gathered at Efogi, a village along the Kokoda Track (Papua New Guinea), with the 700 residents of the village to celebrate 100 years of Adventism in the district.

The theme “Tracking to Glory Land” was appropriate, as many of the campers had trekked for three or four days to attend the 12-day celebration from December 10 to 21, 2014.

Five flame runners, grandsons of pioneer Koiari missionaries, had spent three days carrying two lighted lamps from Owens Corner at the southern end of the Kokoda Track to Efogi for the official opening. Pictured (above) are Berry Geda, grandson of Faole Adobo; Martin Otio and Geda Vame, grandsons of Timothy Baigani; Benson Morgan, grandson of Belesi Elulu; and Elisha Peter, grandson of Boloni Kelea.

Present at the celebrations were Papua New Guinea Union Mission president Dr Leigh Rice and Adventist politician and Environment Minister John Pundari, whose department oversees the Kokoda Track Authority. Also in attendance were Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other PNG government representatives, together with Mission presidents Pastor Kove Tau (Central Papuan Conference), Pastor Peter Oli (Western Highlands Mission, who was pastor-teacher at Efogi in 1976-77), Pastor Peter Yorio (North East Papua Mission, where the track ends) and Pastor Kepsie Elodo (Bougainville Mission and son of Efogi).

In 1914, pioneer Pacific missionary Pastor William Lock extended the mission work from Bisiatabu where the Church had commenced work six years earlier. With his wife and family he settled in Launumu village and from there the Adventist Church spread along the Kokoda Track and to the surrounding villages.

By the Second World War the Adventist message had spread north and the villages along the southern half of the track were Adventist.

“The coming of the Adventist message to the Mt Koiari area transformed the communities,” Pastor Elodo said. “The story of Jesus and the Adventist lifestyle won the hearts of the people. My grandfather happily gave land for the establishment of the mission in Efogi. This is now the district headquarters and there is a clinic and primary school here. The Church is working with the national government to see the establishment of a high school for the district.”

As part of the celebrations a new Adventist church at Launumu was dedicated. Displayed prominently in front of the...
church are the remains of the gaba: the original log bell (part of the Fijian connection) that Pastor Lock had made to
summons the congregation to worship.

Local MP Peter Isoaimo and James Enage, CEO of the Kokoda Track Authority, unveiled a plaque commemorating
the 100 years. Mr Enage is a son of Launumu and was instrumental in sourcing funding and overseeing the logistics
of getting materials into this isolated site. “The costs more than double because of the isolation of Launumu,” he said.

“The track passes right in front of the church and more than 5000 international trekkers will see it each year,” Pastor
Tau said. “The influence of the church will spread around the world.”
What we do with the Bible

It’s a recurring call to action from preachers, church publications, and leaders: if we would only read the Bible—or read the Bible more—we would grow spiritually. It’s also one of those resolutions many of us make with each new year.

Bible reading is an important spiritual practice, but I wonder if quantity is everything, and I wonder how we might measure the Bible’s effect in our lives. After all, even Ellen White warned, “there is much reading of the Bible that is without profit and in many cases a positive injury” (Steps to Christ, p 110).

While a good place to start, perhaps Bible reading is not the goal we sometimes make it out to be. Reflecting on these questions, and on one of the central themes of the Bible itself, there seems a more practical method of judging the quantity and quality of our engagement with the Bible.

At least one in every 15 Bible verses—more than 2100 out of about 31,000 (of course, these specific numbers vary on different counts and in different translations)—speaks of God’s concern for the poor, His impatience with injustice, and His desire for His people to work on behalf of the oppressed and marginalised. While reading the Bible must be more than merely a statistical exercise, we should be alert nonetheless to those ideas and themes that just keep re-appearing through the various stories and literature that make up the Bible. As such, we cannot rightly read the Bible and miss the repeated call to “do justice” (see Micah 6:8).

This is important. Our engagement with justice is practical. It is something we can observe playing out in our lives, and the lives of those in our community of faith. We make different choices, have different priorities, and seek to serve in our communities and change the lives of others around us and around the world. As a practical response to our Bible reading, “doing justice” is one gauge by which we can monitor how the Bible is echoing in our lives.

Historically, both the abuse and neglect of the Bible have fuelled injustice. Many people seek justice apart from the motivation of the Bible; and we should celebrate and support such people and movements of good will, great hearts, and generous hands. But ignorance of the Bible and ignoring the Bible both silence a strong voice for the causes of justice in our world. And the divine mandate to “do justice” is something we who seek to follow God cannot afford to ignore.

To a similar effect, abuses of the Bible—such as selective reading and cultural misapplication, sometimes blindly, sometimes wilfully—have also fostered or justified the abuse of people and the trampling of justice. Indeed, the
anti-justice stances of some people of faith are among the greatest blights of Christian history.

Sadly, in cases such as the Abolitionist and the Civil Rights movements, for example, some of the greatest opposition to these faith-inspired justice movements came from fellow believers. Soberingly, earnest Bible readers used the Bible to try to silence these disturbers of the status quo. Or, worse, some even appealed to the Bible to justify and perpetuate the injustice, inequality, and oppression in their societies. In doing so, they have rendered the Bible a “positive injury,” offensive and unpalatable to so many in our world.

Borrowing from the Bible itself, we often use metaphors of food when talking about the spiritual nourishment offered in reading the Bible. More important than mere bread (see Matt. 4:4), it points us to the Bread of Life. But rightly read and prompted by His Spirit, it will be less about our filling and more about creating in us a new kind of hunger. As Jesus said, “God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6, NLT).

Want to know if your Bible reading is working or worthwhile? As the Bible itself addresses and urges its readers, “Listen to me, my people . . . for my law will be proclaimed, and my justice will become a light to the nations” (Isaiah 51:2, NLT). So let’s ask ourselves: What differences does our reading of the Bible make in the lives of others, particularly those most in need in our communities and in our world?

Nathan Brown is editor of Signs Publishing House in New South Wales, Australia.

Many newer translations use “justice” and “righteousness” more interchangeably than older translations, portraying the original concept of the full goodness God desires for His people and His creation. “The standard reference work explaining New Testament Greek words lists three fields of meaning for dikaiosunē: (1) ‘the quality, state or practice of judicial responsibility with focus on fairness, justice, equitableness, fairness; (2) quality or state of juridical correctness with focus on redemptive action, righteousness; (3) the quality or characteristic of upright behaviour, uprightness, righteousness.’ Jesus’ fourth beatitude makes clear that justice is among the goals of His mission” (Steven Thompson, “The Strand of Justice” in Do Justice: Our Call to Faithful Living (Nathan Brown and Joanna Darby, eds.), Signs Publishing, 2014, p 10. <www.amazon.com/Do-Justice-Call-Faithful-Living-ebook/dp/B00OKERKOG>.

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