Dear Lexie,

We Will Never Look at Our Neighborhood Quite the Same Again

"So simple, yet so effective," was the verdict of one keen attendee at the first Potomac Conference sponsored "Hope for Today - Prepare and Engage" training program on October 25, 2014. Fifteen minutes prior to the scheduled start organizers thought that most of the sixty chairs that were carefully laid out in the Sligo Church Atrium would remain unoccupied for the afternoon. All such ideas vanished when Don McFarlane's devotional was interrupted as additional chairs were brought into the Atrium to accommodate the seventy people who attended.

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In Praise of Small Groups

I have the good fortune of being a member of several small groups at Sligo Church. The ones
to which I belong run the gamut from "ministry teams," such as the Sligo Adventist School Board and the Membership Team, responsible for particular ministries of the church, to what might be considered "conventional" small groups. These latter types of groups are communities in which fellow members encourage, nurture and affirm each other and members find fellowship, friendship and support in our shared spiritual quest; have opportunity for study, conversation and worship; and meet for social purposes.

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Sligo Prays for Eastern Middle School

With the goliaths of Ebola and Isis strutting around, the last thing we needed was the presence of another menace to disturb our peace. Well the evil one again stirred terror on a school campus in Seattle. Our prayers for the safety of schools may be focused on the city of Takoma Park, but our concern reaches to every learning community.

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Representatives from Burnt Mills, Capital Memorial, Germantown, Hyattsville, Langley Park Spanish, Manassas, Metropolitan, Restoration Praise, Takoma Park, Vienna, and Sligo Churches were taught the basic principles of the Hope for Today program, how to make friends with folks in the community, share one’s faith cross-culturally and recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in all forms of outreach.

This was the first attempt to extend the Hope for Today program, developed by Sligo Church, to other churches within the Potomac Conference. Paolo Esposito, considered the “father” of the Hope for Today initiative, was joined by Pastors Peter Casillas, C J Cousins, John Daniel, Jimmy Munoz and Don McFarlane in leading out in the plenary sessions and seminars on various aspects of this exciting outreach initiative.

Sligo Church currently has 15 active Hope for Today centers (Homes of Hope) around the Washington Metro area. Not only are these effective small groups in which participants are supported and encouraged, they are also Bible study groups that explore faith through scripture and address practical life situations by using biblical principles. Over ten people have been baptized so far at Sligo Church as a result of this ministry and many more have become acquainted with Adventism and, more importantly, God’s claim on their lives.

Commenting on the event Elisabeth Wear said, “I felt surrounded by people with passionate energy– all of us looking
for a transforming venture with Christ—but not sure just what. A group willing to step forward and do something new—even something a little unnerving. Pastors and lay members learned to engage in witness though everything from backyard BBQs to active Bible study groups. We examined the easy-to-use Homes of Hope Discussion Guides and evaluated ways to form friendship teams to use these materials. We’ll never look at our own neighborhood quite the same again.”

Potomac Conference Hope for Today Coordinator, Paolo Esposito, was pleased with the success of the event: “I am happy about many things that happened in this event, but perhaps the one I am most happy about is the opportunity we had to meet people from other churches, who share the same passion to lead people to Jesus in their communities, learn from each other, share experiences and prepare to engage in leading people to Jesus.”
In Praise of Small Groups

Scott Lawrence

I have the good fortune of being a member of several small groups at Sligo Church. The ones to which I belong run the gamut from “ministry teams,” such as the Sligo Adventist School Board and the Membership Team, responsible for particular ministries of the church, to what might be considered “conventional” small groups. These latter types of groups are communities in which fellow members encourage, nurture and affirm each other and members find fellowship, friendship and support in our shared spiritual quest; have opportunity for study, conversation and worship; and meet for social purposes. Here’s one small example of the value and benefit I derive from being part of the groups to which I am privileged to belong. Having met weekly for at least twenty years in its current incarnation, members of Believers and Doubters have been able to retain their connection to the Seventh-day Adventist expression of Christianity through study of scripture and the writings of inspired followers of Christ. Being actively engaged in the church’s ministries has also been essential. A few days ago a member of this particular group sent me and fellow members the following excerpt from the book titled, Catching Up With Jesus by Diarmuid O’Murchu:

Lived Experience

Dogmas have helped to hold Christians together in faith communities, but it is not the dogmas that animate and inspire. Living faith belongs to the heart rather than to the head. People grow in faith through encounters with others whose fidelity to Christ is a lived experiential witness rather than fidelity to a set of truths. Christian faith is a lived experience rather than intellectual assent to a creedal formula.

I find this quote to be an exquisitely and marvelously succinct, yet profound, statement of what Christian faith is. The quote reminds me of an insight we gained some years ago when our group read and discussed another writer’s work on the history of religions, including Christianity: Faith and Christian spiritual growth occurs not from an assent to a set of doctrinal propositions but out of a commitment to a person, Jesus Christ.

The author of the excerpt quoted above says in part that “People grow in faith through encounters with others whose fidelity to Christ is a lived experiential witness…”

This has certainly been true in my experience over the years, but especially so in the last five years. The Adventist church has, as have many North American Christian denominations, over the last thirty or more years experienced a seemingly endless series of crises: doctrinal controversies over the church’s Sanctuary theology, evolution and creation, to name but a few. The controversies and resulting crises affecting North American Christian denominations have resulted in the departure of countless millions of members from thousands of congregations across the continent.

These swirling changes have been disorienting and unsettling for many Christians; so, some have simply checked out—become indifferent. At the same time, there is no such thing as a solitary Christian; to be Christian means one is by definition part of the particular expression of Christian community to which one is attached. John Wesley is reported to have said in one of his sermons that “Christian life is life in community, in the fellowship of the Spirit we call the church.”

My participation in the various small groups at Sligo has played no small part in keeping me connected to the church by providing a forum in which members are able to be part of meaningful community: sharing one another’s burdens and engaging in serious study, and thoughtful, respectful conversation.

(by Karl Lawrence)
Scott Lawrence

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We thus invite our Sligo church community to join us in entering into the web of concern and care for Marysville-Pilchuck High School. Please include them as you pray.

(by Chris Daley & Dawn Reynolds)