

These larger churches are a key to the higher growth rate in regional Conferences.

The more than 50 percent of North American Seventh-day Adventists who are members of these large churches are not the ones who are most likely to write scorching letters to conference presidents, cancel subscriptions to denominational periodicals, or send their tithe to private organizations that have a reactionary agenda. They

are less likely to stand up and make emotional speeches at constituency meetings or buttonhole speakers at camp meetings. But these large churches provide most of the human and fiscal resources that are so necessary to the Adventist global mission. Even though they are the majority, they are not heard from by denominational leaders as often as are other voices. They are the vital "silent majority" of the North American Adventist Church.

## My Disability, My Church



by Kathy Roy  
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In my professional life, I work on public policy issues that enable persons with disabilities and their families to live independent and productive lives. I am also a practicing Seventh-day Adventist, a convert who was lucky enough to find a community I could call my own. I also happen to have cerebral palsy. Thus I live in two worlds: developing policy on the one hand, and on the other hand recognizing that all the federal legislation in the world cannot replace a higher law to which I am accountable. . . .

I must say that my own church has, in a sense, been converted

over the years. In my early days of attendance at Sligo church, I think many in my congregation didn't quite know how to take me. But gradually, I think that members at my church have come to understand that my disability is not an impediment to being a full part of the fellowship. Now, I feel a part of the family. Now I can be teased and hugged on Sabbath morning and pulled onto committees just like everyone else. And this acceptance—acceptance by the church—is critical. This enables me, like other members, to live out my faith in the context of a community.

All too often, people with disabilities are greeted with pity and not empathy. But pity and empathy are two entirely different things. Pity says that you are inferior and need "taking care of," whereas empathy looks at the individual as a human being—a child of God—and seeks to understand that individual as a person. It's funny, but as someone with a lifelong disability, you can smell pity a mile away. And don't get me wrong, these folks mean well, to be sure. For example, I have a speech impairment and when I meet someone for the first time, I'm usually tense, which only makes things worse. (Besides, it's Sabbath, and by the end of the week we're all tired, right?) So I slur

a "Hello" introduction, and I quickly pick up that the individual assumes that all my cookies aren't in the jar. (A word of honesty here: All of my cookies aren't in the jar, but this has nothing to do with my disability!) I've developed a method of very quickly letting that individual know that yes, I work, I pay bills, and I'm happily married, thanks very much. I give this illustration to make the point that many people have preconceived ideas about people with disabilities. Often, people believe that having a disability means that the individual is, by necessity, dependent on others. But all of us are dependent in one way or another. And isn't this what the church is about?

When I was young I was taught and believed for many years that "God has given you cerebral palsy for a reason." I grew up thinking that my own disability was a part of God's grand scheme. It was not until I had attended Sligo for many years that then-senior pastor James Londis and I had a long and rather heated debate about God, cerebral palsy, and the universe. I remember that Jim had just finished a sermon entitled, "Why Bad Things Happen to Good People." His conclusion, not surprisingly, was that God does not do terrible things to "teach us a lesson." Further, God wants only good things for his children. To those of you who have had the blessing of growing up in our church, this is no great revelation. I was flabbergasted. I vividly remember speaking to Jim after the service in a rather animated discussion. I even recall stating that this could not possibly be correct, that this flew in the face of how I'd been raised. But this fundamental Adventist understanding of God's grace has gradually helped me, not only with my personal understanding of my disability, but in other personal tragedies I have experienced. And it is this fundamental

belief which perhaps makes our church uniquely qualified to welcome persons with disabilities into our fellowship.

Today, many churches of other denominations are reaching out to persons with disabilities. Many have one or more services interpreted for persons who are deaf. Many churches are also being made physically accessible to persons who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices. And I understand that some

churches are working on study curriculums that can be used by the cognitively impaired. I am pleased with all of this progress. In fact, I think these types of reforms are well overdue and *must* be embraced by our church, and many congregations are doing just that. But I also believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church may have a unique role to play in enabling persons with disabilities to reach their full God-given potential.

monkeys, lions that roared till the ground shook, and poisonous snakes invading the children's quarters of their bungalow on the mission compound. The ebony elephants and carved ivory tusks that decorated the parlor of their Maryland home substantiated the exotic stories.

My personal roots in the Adventist community grew strong during a protracted family crisis. My parents' marriage disintegrated over a period of six years or so, and as things became more and more difficult at home I began to look elsewhere for emotional stability and personal support. I found it in the close-knit and caring community of our church and the church school my sister and I attended. Caring teachers, church leaders, and even childhood friends were always there for us. They seemed to understand our situation and respond to our needs for companionship without prying for explanations or offering advice.

These troubling experiences had some lasting effects on my religious outlook. Our family's problems made me sensitive to life's larger questions at a rather early age, and the church's teachings provided me with helpful answers to these questions. Moreover, the profound reassurance I drew from my religious community and its beliefs validated my convictions on something much deeper than an intellectual level. So, I began to identify the things about religion that really mattered, and my confidence in them became firmly established.

At the age of 10 I requested baptism. And three years later I enjoyed the most intensely religious phase of my life. Over a period of several months, God became a vivid personal presence in my life. He occupied my first thoughts in the morning and my last thoughts of the evening. I spent

## Why I Am a Seventh-day Adventist



by Richard Rice  
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*parative Study" (Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1970).*

By one great aunt's account, I am a fourth- or fifth-generation Adventist. I'm not sure which. I only know that my ancestors were looking for Christ's return long before I arrived. And they not only looked forward to it, they spent their lives preparing for it and helping the church finish the work. My grandparents on both sides left the United States for overseas mission work. In fact, church leaders encouraged my mother's parents to marry and leave college before they graduated. The end of time was near, the fields were white with harvest, and church policy prevented my grandfather from entering mission service as a single person. After their wedding, the couple went directly from the church to the railway station and caught a train to San Francisco. There they boarded a ship to the Far East, where they spent seven years helping to establish the Adventist work in Korea. My mother was born in Seoul in 1919.

My father's family served for a seven-year term in Portuguese West Africa. I grew up riveted by Granddaddy's accounts of boisterous pet