



# John Brunt

Why I Remain a Seventh-day Adventist

**T**o the question, “Why I remain a Seventh-day Adventist,” my short answer is, I can’t imagine *not* being a Seventh-day Adventist. This church has shaped everything that I am. I am a product of an Adventist home, Adventist churches, and Adventist educational institutions from the first grade through seminary.

Yet I could never remain a Seventh-day Adventist if it were only a comfortable cultural home. I remain a Seventh-day Adventist because I am captivated by the vision of this church. I have sometimes been asked what it is that makes Adventists unique. I don’t believe that any single specific doctrine does this. The genius of Seventh-day Adventism is the holistic way that it puts together our entire religious life.

I think of the triad that Richard Rice speaks about: believing, behaving, and belonging. If Adventism were only doctrine, it would be cold and lifeless. If it were only lifestyle, it would be shallow. If it were only community, it could become narrow and tribal. It is the holistic combination of doctrine, lifestyle, and community that makes Seventh-day Adventism appealing to me.

I remain a Seventh-day Adventist because I believe Jesus Christ is my Savior. I believe that he invites me to Sabbath rest. I believe that he invites me to live a responsible life of service for others. I believe that he invites me to be part of a wonderful worldwide body that transcends nation and language, and I believe that Jesus promises to come again and bring about an eternal kingdom where life will be lived as he, the Creator, originally intended that it should be lived.

In addition to these basic beliefs, I enjoy the fringe benefits of Adventism. I appreciate the educational system that shaped my life and that I believe has blessed my children. I appreciate being able to travel around the world and find friends who share this vision.

I see the results of these fringe benefits in my mother’s family, a family of twelve children. Some stayed in the Church and some did not. As I look at the families, it seems that the quality of life has been demonstrably different, for the most part, for those who have remained in the Church.

Sometimes I feel almost guilty for the privilege of being part of Adventism with so little cost, since I was born into an Adventist family. It has been different for my wife. She has had to pay a high price. She was not reared an Adventist. She attended evangelistic meetings in Denver when invited by a family for whom she babysat. She made the decision to join the Church, her family objected, and she was secretly baptized at the age of sixteen. At eighteen,

she was given an ultimatum: either renounce Adventism or leave home. She decided to leave home. She and her father were never reconciled. She continued to write, to send Christmas cards, letters, and gifts. We went to Denver and attempted to visit him on two occasions. Both times, her father spoke to me but would not speak to her. Three years ago, we attended his funeral. She continues to feel the pain of this unresolved conflict.

When I left home at the age of eighteen, I went to La Sierra University, and that is where we met. As she thinks of the great pain she has suffered from this alienation, she often quotes Mark 10:29-30.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters,

mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

I remain a Seventh-day Adventist because I am overwhelmingly grateful for the blessing of being part of this family and sharing its vision.

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# Bonnie Dwyer

Why I Remain a Seventh-day Adventist



**T**he first time I remember addressing this issue was when I was twenty. I was working in Washington D.C. at the National Association of Public Welfare Administrators, next to the Russian embassy on Sixteenth Street. Newly married, fresh out of a two-year degree program at La Sierra University, I was exhilarated by being out in the world. For lunch, my coworkers and I often walked down to Lafayette Park and watched the TV crews set up for live news shots in front of the White House.

This occurred during Nixon's last days as president. The tensions and rumors over his possible impeachment or resignation filled the air with electricity. During one of those lunch hours someone asked me about my church affiliation. "Seventh-day Adventist," I answered. Then I dispassionately added a list of SDA beliefs because the questioner was not familiar with the Church. "Sounds like you're not totally convinced," was the reply. I have to admit that, up to that point,

the Church and its schools seemed to have dominated my life. I was trying to understand my identity separate from Adventism.

The next time I remember asking myself came a couple years later. We had moved back to California. I had completed a journalism degree and picked up an assignment with *Spectrum* to help investigate a breaking story about church finances that involved a man by the name of Davenport. Going through the stacks of correspondence files

and lists of investor names at a lawyer's office made me feel like a real reporter. But the work was also depressing.

One day, I stopped by the office of Wilford Hillock, a business professor at La Sierra, to ask questions about the intricacies of the Davenport finances. "Does this whole business affect your faith?" I asked. His reply was, "no." His faith had never been in the Church. His faith was in Jesus Christ, so whatever the brethren did had no effect on his faith. That answer has helped me keep things in perspective ever since.

There have been other times when I have asked myself why I belong to this organization. Covering Annual Council one year in the 1980s, when there were hints that action would be taken against the Association of Adventist Forums and its journal and that a motion for ordination of women would be

rejected, I went home asking myself why I belonged to an organization that seemed not to want people like me.

This past summer, I was stunned when ASI—Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries—rejected *Spectrum's* application to have booth space at its convention and blocked our distribution of magazines to attendees. Reading the handbook of the International Board for Ministerial and Theological Education, which seems to me to signal the closing of the Adventist mind, has severely depressed me. Once again, I found myself muttering about the organization, while still being determined not to let other people define me out of the church I love.

What gets me through those times—and this is the number one reason I am still an SDA—is people, my heroes. I think about people like Fritz Guy, who taught me that Adventist Christianity includes lively intellectual curiosity; Richard Rice, who articulates so eloquently ideas about the importance of Adventist story and community life; Roy Branson, who showed me the transcendence in laughter and gave me opportunities to write about the community that he has loved so passionately. People like my mom and my son, my church friends. People make life within Adventism rewarding and significant.

That is not to say that Adventist beliefs are not important to me. I am an Adventist because I love the Sabbath. To me it is biological. While training for a marathon several years ago, I found rest just as important as long-distance runs and carbohydrate loading. Learning that lesson taught me to cherish the Sabbath. The more I read about the Sabbath and experience the joys of resting, ceasing, embracing, and

feasting, as Marva Dawn says, the more precious it becomes. I don't keep the Sabbath, it keeps me.

Corporately, the good deeds of the Church through its agencies and institutions fulfill my need to be part of something bigger than myself. The Adventist Disaster and Relief Agency helps address my wish to feed the hungry and house the refugees. The health care system that meets very specific community needs, the educational system from which I graduated—these entities make me proud to be an Adventist.

I am an Adventist today because within Adventism I have found rich community experiences throughout my life. First on Griswold Street in Worthington, Ohio, the one-block-long street with the church at the end; there I spent my childhood. Next in Silver Spring, Maryland, where my classmates included General Conference progeny like Ted Wilson; there church politics

became very personal. Then in La Sierra and Loma Linda, where the theological air was rich and Sabbath mornings confronted me with decisions about where I wanted to worship. After that, to *Spectrum*, where I found my voice within Adventism. I guess that is what I had been looking for ever since I was twenty. We all want our voice to be heard. Now that I have a voice and have discovered a community of people with vibrant ideas about what it means to be Adventist, I know I can't leave. There's so much more that we have to share.

I'm still an Adventist, because now I couldn't think of being anything else. This is the community that feeds my soul, understands my jokes, loves me through tough times.

When I sat down to write this piece I began by making a serious list, but while staring at the computer screen it turned into a David Letterman-style top-ten list. Since I'd like to leave you smiling—or at least groaning—here it is:



## Top Ten Reasons Why I'm Still a Seventh-day Adventist

10. Don't want to miss Sunday football games
9. Pathfinder honor sash not yet filled
8. Have too much tithes invested
7. Addicted to Super Links
6. Still have a set of Bible Story books and an Eric B. Hare recording of "Mr. Crooked Ears"
5. Want to see how the Great Controversy turns out
4. That wholistic thing
3. Love my ADRA T-shirt
2. Have a lifelong subscription to *Spectrum*  
— and the number one reason —
1. The people; I just love being part of a worldwide family

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