

# Searching for Shalom in Alabama

BY CARMEN LAU

In early October, on Sabbath, a group of two dozen trekked through Alabama to seek a robust peace, or Shalom. We were enriched with the knowledge that Adventist Forum founder and long-time *Spectrum* editor, Roy Branson, had journeyed to Alabama in 1965 to participate in the effort for the right to vote, including being a marshal in the sentinel Selma to Montgomery march.

Masked, temp-checked, social-distanced, with hands slathered in sanitizer, the group visited the Legacy Museum and National Lynching Memorial in Montgomery before driving to Selma to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which has become a symbol for the push for the right to vote.

Travel time passed quickly as a variety of speakers enriched and fed our souls. Dr. Ramona Hyman, chair of the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Oakwood University, shared stories about the Montgomery bus boycott and her encounter with White civil-rights activist, Virginia Foster Durr, that resulted in a call to a life-long mission to reimagine American citizenship. Dr. Gilbert Ojwang, chair of religion at Oakwood University, invited the group to apply Noah's faith, as described in Hebrews 11:7, as a basis to condemn injustice now and invite folks to safety, as in his time Noah invited people to the ark. Dr. Lisa Diller, chair of history at Southern Adventist University, provided a framework to help attendees grapple with an array of facts to decide what should, and should not, take featured space in communities and in the minds of individuals. Marci Corea represented Adventist Peace Fellowship, a co-sponsor of the event, and spoke of the important work of this organization with the help of passionate Adventist college students. Board member Ken Peterson reflected on the production of the documentary *J.E.S.U.S.A.*, a film examining Christian nationalism and violence. Alexander

Carpenter, board member and host of the *Adventist Voices* podcast, moved all with a reading of Psalm 7 from The Message.

On Sunday, the group gathered on the steps of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to walk the route where the Children's March had occurred in Birmingham. Along the way, we stopped in a large circle under the trees at Kelly Ingram Park to allow each participant to share aloud specific passages from Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

On Monday, a visit to Oakwood University provided me with a spiritual highpoint of the journey. I was reminded that in order to heal, a person or group must acknowledge a wrong and repent. Oakwood thrives, and has been a place for growth, because it has spoken truthfully about the past. It is believed that Dred Scott's wife and two sons are buried on the Oakwood property. By the grace of God, a space where the evil of slavery had ruled has become a place where African Americans can thrive and be prepared to contribute to society in fantastic ways. I believe every Adventist would benefit by spending a day at Oakwood to learn, in humility, how God has worked in the African American context. It is my hope that *Spectrum* can be one of the conduits to assist in this pursuit. In this moment, I see again that God's way is to elevate premiere leaders from a group that dominant culture considers to be the "least of these."



CARMEN LAU is board chair of Adventist Forum.