Weekly News From Around the Columbia Union Conference

September 12, 2013

Ohio Conference President Announces Retirement

Raj Attiken, who served 15 years as Ohio Conference president, announced to the conference’s executive committee Tuesday his plans to retire from his current responsibilities. In a letter to conference personnel, Attiken wrote, “I have savored the privilege of participating in the transformations, advances and expansions that the conference has experienced, both internally and in extending Christ’s mission in our communities. It is with immense gratitude, therefore, that I … embrace a new season of life with passion and energy.”
Upon hearing the announcement, Dave Weigley, Columbia Union Conference president, said of his colleague, “Raj has made a very valued contribution to the work of God, here in this union and beyond. He is a creative, innovative and provocative thinker who really challenges how we do things in this church. … He has stepped out among others in the union to move the work forward. He has served well and will be missed as a full-time leader.”—Story by Heidi Shoemaker

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Potomac’s SEEDS Convention Draws More Than 180

Last weekend SEEDS, a convention focused on growing church plants in creative ways, drew more than 180 people to Potomac Conference’s Community of Hope church in Silver Spring, Md. “[The] SEEDS conference is an amazing event, because it’s a place to inspire, motivate and encourage people to see the mission of Christ,” said main speaker, Johnny Wong (pictured), who planted 15 churches in Melbourne, Australia, with his idea of Care Groups. “When the souls come together and get it, it just makes sense to plant another church there. It’s what the early pioneers did, and we need to make that happen more often.”

During each break in the program, the rooms would buzz with excited chatter of church plant ideas and networking. Tara VinCross, pastor of the Chestnut Hill church in Philadelphia and one of the speakers at SEEDS, added, “My sense is, if we let our hearts be open for the Spirit to lead us, that these people will multiply the people for God. God wants us to grow, and I think that is what people from the Potomac Conference will take away from this conference.”—Story by Potomac Conference Staff

READ MORE AND SEE MORE PHOTOS ON POTOMAC’S WEBSITE

Adventist HealthCare Projects Approved for Nearly $1 Million in Funding
Adventist HealthCare (AHC) based in Rockville, Md., recently received a grant of approximately $1 million through the Maryland Hospital Association (MHA) Bond Review program. The funding will help finance three projects that will help further enhance the system's capacity to provide high-quality, population-based care for the Maryland communities they serve.

The funds will be used to reduce re-admissions for underserved patients at Washington Adventist Hospital in Takoma Park, enhance delivery of emergency services at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in Rockville and provide even higher-quality and safer care to bariatric patients at the Adventist Rehabilitation Hospital of Maryland in Rockville.

AHC leaders say MHA’s approval of the grants signifies that the three projects are viewed as important services that will provide long-term benefits to the community. —Story by Cindy Glass

Allegheny West Conference member Frances Obikunle, RN, provides a free blood pressure screening.

Central Ohio, Allegheny West Churches Screen 800 During Health Expo

Seventh-day Adventist members from six Ohio and Allegheny West conference churches in the Columbus, Ohio, area ended up being the largest provider of free health screenings this summer at the annual 10TV Health and Fitness Expo put on by CBS affiliate WBNS. Held at the Columbus Convention Center, the weekend featured national celebrity guests, cooking demos, health screenings, fitness classes and more than 150 wellness exhibitors who helped 10,000 people address their health.
The pastoral and health ministry leaders from the Worthington church, with assistance from members at Allegheny West Conference’s Columbus African church, met for weekly meetings to prepare for their participation in the expo. Under their efforts, they were able to gather more than 100 volunteers from six area churches, representing both conferences, to administer cholesterol, glucose, BMI, lung function and blood pressure screenings to nearly 800 individuals.—Story by Heidi Shoemaker

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Allegheny East Haitian Church Embraces 20 New Members

Some 20 people became baptized members of Allegheny East Conference’s Shekina church in Philadelphia following a three-week prophecy seminar held last month themed “Revelation to Daniel: The Ticket of the Millennium.” The church’s Personal Ministries staff organized the series and invited John Edward Maisonneuve, pastor at the Bethel Haitian church in Trenton, N.J., to preach the series.

Hundreds attended the event, many of whom received one of the 5,000 flyers that church members distributed. The program was also broadcast live on Heavenly Vision, a local Haitian radio station. Six more are taking Bible studies in their homes as a result of the series.—Story by Johnispen Saint-Sauveur
Columbia Union Members Invited to Fast for Orphans

From sundown October 18 to sundown October 19, several students and church youth groups in the Columbia Union will join a nationwide fast to support orphans. Calling it the DO Fast, or Defend Orphans Fast, the 24-hour fast aims to get Seventh-day Adventists all across the North American Division (NAD) involved in supporting orphans.

Norma Nashed, a member of Potomac Conference’s Sligo church in Takoma Park, Md., initiated the program in partnership with NAD's Education, Ministerial and Youth Ministries departments to bring awareness and support for orphans in need across the world. Nashed is also founder and president of Restore a Child, which serves 4,000 needy children in 15 countries. For more information about the fast, visit restoreachild.org/do, then go to facebook.com/columbiaunionvisitor and let us know if you participate.
Photo of the Week: New Pennsylvania Member’s Looks Up

Randy Nims, pastor of Pennsylvania Conference’s Meridian Road church in Butler, recently baptized Nijuel Zenmon and Carlos Zenmon (pictured) in Lake Arthur at nearby Moraine State Park. When Pastor Nims described the story of God looking down upon Jesus being baptized and being pleased, Zenmon looked up into the sky and raised his hands. Both boys wanted to be baptized outside and are excited about serving.—Story by Tamyra Horst
NAD Launches New Seeker Site

The North American Division recently launched a new seeker site called My Way to Jesus. One of the highlighted features of the new site is a series of 28, short videos called “Did you know?” about Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. A church member presents each video and shares how the belief relates to real life, either through a story or an easily relatable concept.

Because each video is only 90 seconds in length, they will also be useful as identity spots on television. This will give congregations the opportunity to put a face on the Seventh-day Adventist Church in an appealing way that they typically would not be able to produce. To see the videos, visit, MyWaytoJesus.com.—Story by NAD NewsPoints

Join the Conversation
A recent TIME Magazine article on childfree adults is generating a lot of conversations in and outside the church. More and more childless adults are saying they feel judged for not having children. What do you think? Are we doing a good job of including childfree adults in our churches? Click here to join the conversation on the Columbia Union Visitor Facebook page.

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End Quote: It’s OK to Get Help

“"A few years ago, my father-in-law committed suicide. That tragedy changed our family forever, and the resulting agony and anxiety caused tremendous emotional distress. … My wife attempted to put her emotions aside and avoid dealing with the symptoms, but … she started having anxiety attacks that turned into serious panic attacks. At times, she would feel helpless, hopeless, depressed, frustrated or out of control, and she often had terrible feelings of impending doom. On occasion, she would leave the house to escape the attacks.

One morning while driving through an intersection, she had a panic attack that prevented her from stopping the car, and she had an accident. After several visits to the emergency room, she was finally diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Thanks to medication, help from a psychiatrist, support from friends and family and continued counseling, my wife now lives a full and happy life.”—Pastor Ismael Gama, MA, MBA, serves as associate vice president for Mission Integration & Spiritual Care at Adventist HealthCare, Inc., headquartered in Gaithersburg, Md.

READ GAMA’S ENTIRE ARTICLE.

More articles on this topic:

My Journey Out of Darkness: Why I Walked for Suicide Prevention
8 Tips for Survivors of Suicide Loss

Columbia Union Members in the News

Let's Move Day 5K run/walk takes off Sunday at Wayne church

Montgomery County, local groups helping people displaced by Aug. 27 fire

Denying Sabbath Off May Hammer Dollar General

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington

UPCOMING EVENTS

MARYLAND

September 12-24: The Potomac Adventist Book and Health Food store is offering several free health classes at 6:30 p.m. On September 12, the class will be titled “Common Denominator of Chronic Disease,” September 19 “Eat More Weigh Less,” and September 24 “Fiber Your New Best Friend.” Classes take place in the Living Well Lifestyle Center’s room. The store is located at 12004 Cherry Hill Road in Silver Spring, Md.

September 13: Pastor Andre Hastick will lead Restore, a young adult worship gathering, this Friday at New Hope. Join the group at 7 p.m., 12350 Hall Shop Road, Fulton, Md.

September 13-14: Pastor David Asscherick, known around the world for his speaking ability and intellectual prowess, will appear as “The Man Who Knows Nothing” at the Metropolitan church in Hyattsville, Md. Confused? That’s okay! The program starts at 7:30 p.m. on September 13 and at 11 a.m. on Sabbath, September 14. For more information, visit metrosda.org/knowsnothing.

September 20-21: Walter Brueggemann, an acclaimed author and theologian, will be speaking at the 33rd G. Arthur Keough Lectures at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md. The topic will be “Reperforming our Best Narrative.” His lectures will be in the Morrison Hall chapel. In his September 20 lecture, which begins at 6:30 p.m., he will address "Choosing an Alternative Life: Follow me." September 21, the lecture begins at 10 a.m. and he will address "Imagining Neighborliness: Love thy neighbor." For more information, contact the Religion Department at (301) 891-4033.

NEW JERSEY

September 15: The Wayne church’s third annual Let's Move Day 5k Run/Walk is scheduled for this Sunday. Registration begins at 7 a.m. and the race begins at 8 a.m. There will also be a 100-yard dash. Click here to register and you’ll be eligible to pick up a chip from Sports Authority at the Willowbrook Mall on September 13 from 3 to 7 p.m. and will be entered to win a $50 Sports Authority gift card. Registration is $25 dollars.
**OHIO**

**September 22:** All motorcyclists are invited to participate in the second Annual Run for the Hungry, which starts at the Newark Moose Lodge #499 at 235 National Drive., in Newark, Ohio. The run benefits the Adventist Community Services Center and Food Bank of Licking County. The entry fee is $15 per bike and $20 per couple. Registration will be from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Ride departs at 12:00 p.m. and will return to the Adventist church 701 Linnville Rd. Heath, 43056 around 2 PM where participants will be given a Free Picnic Supper provided by the Center staff. For more information, call (740) 739-0750. Registered participants are eligible to enter a drawing for two leather jackets.

**Pennsylvania**

**September 20:** Pennsylvania Conference’s Fall Camp Meeting will feature speaker Tim Roosenburg. The camp meeting will be at the Laurel Lake Camp and Retreat Center in Rossiter. For more information or to register, contact the conference office at (610) 374-8331.

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**September 28:** Leslie Pollard, PhD, Oakwood University’s (Ala.) president and the Advancement & Development Division are hosting a reception for graduates and friends at the Washington Hilton Hotel located at 1919 Connecticut Avenue NW in Washington, D.C. A short vespers program will begin at 6:30 p.m., followed by light refreshments and fellowship. The Aeolians, recent gold medalists of the World Games, will perform starting at 7 p.m. Hear about the latest developments at Oakwood, enjoy the lively discussion, get a bite to eat, and come prepared to get involved and support your alma mater. For more details, email alumni@oakwood.edu or call (256) 726-7039.

**VIRGINIA**

**September 6-21:** Lonnie Melashenko will be the evangelist for a series of Bible prophecy meetings that will be held at Sandusky Middle School in Lynchburg, Va. The meetings begin at 7 p.m. each night. There will be no Thursday meetings. The final meeting will be held at the Lynchburg church. The school is located at 805 Chinook Place. For more information, contact Pastor Mike Hewitt at pastormikeh@mac.com.

**VIRTUAL**

**September 11-14:** The North American Division's Adult Ministries is hosting a virtual Festival of the Laity to equip church members for ministries for Sabbath School, Personal Ministries and Prison Ministries. Registration is free. To find out more information about this event, visit the Festival of Laity website and then register online.

**September 16:** Planning to participate in “Let’s Move! Day” on
September 22. The North American Division is planning a webinar to help you prepare. Learn more at AdventistsInStepForLife.com, or call (301) 680-6733 to find out how you, your church and your school can get involved.

October 1: The alumni association for Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Md., is collecting stories of how the school has impacted your life. Send your stories to Susan Laurence Cooksey, alumni association president, at susan.cooksey@ta.edu, or Ronnie Mills, director of institutional advancement, at rmills@ta.edu by October 1. The goal is to publish and present this book to alumni during the 2014 Alumni weekend. All proceeds from the book will benefit the Worthy Student Fund.

Click here for a full calendar of upcoming events around the Columbia Union.

Taashi Rowe, Visitor News Bulletin Editor
5427 Twin Knolls Road, Columbia, MD 21045
Email: visitor@columbiaunion.net • Website: www.columbiaunion.org
Facebook: facebook.com/columbiaunionvisitor • Twitter: @VisitorNews

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Ohio Conference President Announces Retirement

Story by Heidi Shoemaker Published 9/11/13

Raj Attiken, Ohio Conference president, plans to retire after serving 25 years in conference administration.

Yesterday Raj Attiken, Ohio Conference president, announced to the conference’s executive committee his plans to retire from his current responsibilities. In a letter to conference personnel, Attiken wrote, “I have savored the privilege of participating in the transformations, advances and expansions that the conference has experienced both internally and in extending Christ’s mission in our communities. It is with immense gratitude, therefore, that I prepare to sign off from my current responsibilities and to embrace a new season of life with passion and energy.” Upon hearing the announcement, Dave Weigley, Columbia Union Conference president, said of his colleague, “Raj has made a very valued contribution to the work of God here in this union and beyond. He is a creative, innovative and provocative thinker who really challenges how we do things in this church. He is also a person of courage. He has stepped out among others in the union to move the work forward. He has served well and will be missed as a full-time leader.” Attiken has served in the conference’s administration for 25 years, 15 of them as president. He was reelected to conference leadership at seven consecutive constituency sessions. He began his service in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination as a pastor in 1971. Attiken devoted much of his ministry to nurturing the church in Ohio to be firmly centered on the cross of Jesus and to grow deep in authentic biblical spirituality. His consistent emphasis on Christ-centered and grace-oriented living and serving, and his initiatives to shape a robust culture of innovation, diversity, sound scholarship, community engagement and missional entrepreneurship have received wide recognition and appreciation. His distinctive approach to church leadership, based on the principles of love, trust and freedom, helped create an invigorating faith and ministry environment in Ohio. He grew up in the island nation of Sri Lanka, where he also began his pastoral ministry. After coming to the United States, he served as a district pastor in Ohio for 15 years before being invited to serve in conference leadership. He holds bachelor’s degrees in religious philosophy and theology from Spicer Memorial College in India, a master’s degree from Andrews University (Mich.) and a Doctor of Ministry from the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. Attiken’s wife, Chandra, a human resource and organizational development executive with her own consulting business, has also made her unique contributions to the ministry of the Ohio Conference. In the aforementioned letter, Attiken closes by saying, “Chandra and I will forever cherish the friendships and collegiality that we have enjoyed in Ohio. You have enriched our lives and we feel incredibly blessed.”

Attiken says his actual retirement date is dependent on the results of the presidential search process, but he is committed to finishing out 2013.

Raj and Chandra Attiken (center) are pictured with their children, children’s spouses and grandchildren.

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SEEDS Conference Drew More than 180 People

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Johnny Wong, main speaker at Potomac SEEDS convention and who planted 15 churches in Melbourne, Australia.

During each break in the program, the rooms would buzz with excited chatter of church plant ideas and networking.
“In my interaction today, people are excited to think about possibilities and what God can do in their life,” said Tara VinCross, pastor of Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church and one of the speakers at SEEDS. “My sense is if we let our hearts be open for the Spirit to lead us, that these people will multiple the people for God. God wants us to grow and I think people from the Potomac Conference will take away from this conference.”

Tara VinCross, pastor of Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church and one of the speakers at SEEDS.

The afternoons consisted of breakout training sessions to empower and train planters and their teams. The event finished with a call by Peter Casillas, who coordinated this event and pastoral associate for evangelism and church planting, and John Cress, vice president for pastoral ministries, to take charge of what God has given. “We are a force to be reckoned with,” said Casillas. “We should be planting within the messiness for the purpose of transformation. Praise God for what He is doing, I can’t wait to see where He is leading us.”
Peter Casillas, who coordinated Potomac's SEEDS event and pastoral associate for evangelism and church planting.

John Cress, vice president for pastoral ministries.
Central Ohio, Allegheny West Churches Screen 800 During Health Expo

Story by Heidi Shoemaker Photos by Jennifer Howard

Allegheny West Conference member Frances Obikunle, RN, provides a free blood pressure screening.

Seventh-day Adventist members from six Ohio and Allegheny West conference churches in the Columbus, Ohio, area ended up the largest provider of free health screenings this summer at the annual 10TV Health and Fitness Expo put on by CBS affiliate WBNS. Held at the Columbus Convention Center, the weekend featured national celebrity guests, cooking demos, health screenings, fitness classes and more than 150 wellness exhibitors who helped 10,000 people address their health. The pastoral and health ministry leaders from the Worthington church, with assistance from members at Allegheny West Conference’s Columbus African church, met for weekly meetings to prepare for their participation in the expo. Under their efforts, they were able to gather more than 100 volunteers from six area churches, representing both conferences, to administer cholesterol, glucose, BMI, lung function and blood pressure screenings to nearly 800 individuals. For many attendees, this was their first health screening of any sort, and a number of them commented on “what a blessing” the service was for them and their families. For numerous others, it was their first interaction with the Adventist Church, our health message and health ministry. Volunteers report that a number of visitors also expressed their pleasure in learning that such programs as the Full Plate Diet and Complete Health Improvement Program are regularly offered at the Worthington church. “The event was an overwhelming success … to be involved in an event of this scale that reached so many people,” commented Dan Thorward, MSN, RN, co-director for Worthington’s health ministry program. “We look forward to next year, when we can build on what we accomplished this year.”

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Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

By Pastor Ismael Gama Published on 9/4/2013

It’s OK to Get Help

A few years ago, my father-in-law committed suicide. That tragedy changed our family forever, and the resulting agony and anxiety caused tremendous emotional distress. The same week we learned of his passing, my wife and I also learned we would be having our third child. She attempted to put her emotions aside and avoid dealing with the symptoms, but after the baby was born, they hit with a vengeance. She started having anxiety attacks that turned into serious panic attacks. At times, she would feel helpless, hopeless, depressed, frustrated or out of control, and she often had terrible feelings of impending doom. On occasion, she would leave the house to escape the attacks. One morning while driving through an intersection, she had a panic attack that prevented her from stopping the car, and she had an accident. After several visits to the emergency room, she was finally diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Thanks to medication, help from a psychiatrist, support from friends and family and continued counseling, my wife now lives a full and happy life. Demonstrating God’s Care

During the difficult months of uncertainty prior to her diagnosis, we had friends who provided space and presence for us. I also had a very special professor at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md., who listened to my struggles and prayed with me. His presence and support helped us get through those dark moments and realize that there were many other people struggling with similar issues.

Oftentimes our human tendency toward self-sufficiency or self-preservation leads us to minimize or ignore symptoms of depression and anxiety, but this is the last thing a person suffering from any mental disorder needs. I’m thankful for the professional help and spiritual support my wife and I received during our time of greatest need.

Today I lead a group of 28 staff chaplains, interns, student chaplains and volunteer community clergy at Adventist HealthCare’s hospitals in Maryland and New Jersey. Our mission is to demonstrate God’s care to those who are suffering and experiencing difficult times. Our role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s ministry of healing is to provide space, help, hope and a calm and nonjudgmental presence that allows
patients and families to share their stories and receive professional pastoral care.

If you or someone you know is suffering, please don’t hesitate to seek professional help and spiritual care today.

Pastor Ismael Gama, MA, MBA, serves as associate vice president for Mission Integration & Spiritual Care at Adventist HealthCare, Inc., headquartered in Gaithersburg, Md.

More articles on this topic:
My Journey Out of Darkness: Why I Walked for Suicide Prevention
8 Tips for Survivors of Suicide Loss

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I remember the moment I got the call:

“No, no, noooo he didn’t!” I screamed. He couldn’t have, I thought, as my body went numb and my mind spun in disbelief. I tried again to digest the emergency responder’s words: “I’m sorry, ma’am. I have some bad news for you. Your husband has died.”

I collapsed on the hard, cold floor in the hotel lobby where I was staying for a business trip. I demanded from her: “What? How?!” She softly replied, “I’m so very sorry, ma’am. He took his own life.”

I could barely whisper, “He’s dead, Mom.” He took his own life.”

“He committed suicide. He’s dead!” I repeated over and over. After someone assisted me to a nearby couch, I sat in a daze, then realized I needed to call my parents. I could barely whisper, “He’s dead, Mom.” She also screamed and cried, then desperately asked me, “Honey, are you going to be okay? Can you make it back?” I answered robotically, “I don’t know, but I have to.”

The night was torturous and long, but I finally got home where I was met with a barrage of loved ones, neighbors and co-workers. As we wept together, I realized I simply wasn’t ready to face my daughters, Mylah and Madalyn, only 4 and 2 at the time. In an instant, their lives had been forever changed and they didn’t even realize it yet. Later, as I gazed upon them napping peacefully, I fell to the
floor and wept again. The reality hit me like a bus—the life that we had together as a family of four, the one I was so proud to call my own, no longer existed.

A Look Back
During the following weeks and months, the question that continued to run through my mind was, “Where did it all go so terribly wrong?” McCants and I were happy. Sure we had our ups and downs, but we were committed to making it work. We were both raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and went to Adventist schools. In fact, we met in 1998 while attending Washington Adventist University, located in Takoma Park, Md. From that moment on, we were inseparable. We dated for seven years then blissfully married in 2005. That was the happiest day of our lives, besides the later births of our daughters.

As I look back over our last year together, there were signs my husband was suffering from depression. He isolated himself from family, slept more than usual, easily became irritable and sullen, and made erratic spending choices. The one time I confronted him about possibly being depressed, he got extremely defensive. Every day brought new challenges. At times, he was on top of the world. On other days, he distanced himself completely. I became resentful and ashamed for constantly making excuses for his absence at family gatherings. I was bitter that I carried the load of watching over the children while he left the house to do as he pleased. He simply wasn’t himself, and our marriage suffered as a result. But, never for a second did I think he would take his own life.

Nothing could prepare me for the physical, emotional and spiritual pain that crippled me in the following months. Having to tell my children that their father would never come home again left me empty and aching. I spent many nights rocking Mylah to sleep after hours of searching for daddy or sobbing uncontrollably by the door. Only then would I also surrender to sleep on my tear-stained pillow. There were seemingly endless nights of wonder and guilt, and the what-ifs engulfed me: What if I had just stayed home from my trip? What if I had called to say “I love you” one last time? Did he think of me, the girls, his mother? If so, how could he go through with it?

My questions were endless, but even worse, the answers were not there. I had nowhere to go but to God, but I was angry with Him. How could a loving Father allow such a tragedy to happen to us? Yet, through this anger, I clung to Him with every ounce of my soul. I knew in my heart I could not take one breath or one step without Him by my side. When I challenged God with, “You said you would never give me more than I can handle. What have I done to deserve this?” He gave me verses of comfort, like “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, ESV), and “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5, ESV).

Learning a “New Normal”
As the months rolled on, the girls and I developed a “new normal.” We resumed daily activities, but I still barely felt like I existed.

When I returned to work and church, I was met with mixed reactions. Some shared an awkward glance as they passed me silently in the hall. Some asked more questions than I cared to answer. Others offered their opinion about his thought process or his spiritual outcome. I tried desperately not to take anything they said or didn’t say personally, but it was difficult. Some days I just wanted to be left alone; other days I wanted someone to let me unburden my thoughts and feelings. I was thankful to those who offered a simple “I’m praying for you” or “I’m here for you if you want to talk.”

While I continued to search for purpose in all of the grief, I began to think about what Jesus would do. Would He wallow in self-pity? Would He detach Himself from those around Him? The answer was undeniably “no.” It was then I knew God had a special plan for me, and I began to feel that He would use this tragedy for good.

Finding Purpose in the Pain
The most significant part of my healing started to take place on a typical morning drive into work at the General Conference building in Silver Spring, Md. I was listening to the radio, which I rarely did in those days, and heard an announcement about the annual charity event Out of the Darkness Overnight Walk sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). I learned that participants walk 16-18 miles overnight to raise money and awareness for suicide prevention research, education and advocacy. I immediately knew this was something I had to do. I rushed into work and logged into the AFSP website (afsp.org) to register for the upcoming walk in Washington, D.C. Within 24 hours, I exceeded raising the necessary $1,000 to participate. I knew I’d found a purpose in all this sadness—I was surviving to make a difference.
As the event drew closer, I felt stronger in my purpose, but my apprehension grew as well. I knew this walk would not be easy, physically or emotionally. I was going to be surrounded by others who have been affected by suicide, depression and mental illness. I questioned if I should put myself through this and bring up all the pain I had worked so hard to move past. My answer always came back to Romans 8:28 (ESV), “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for the good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” God never said life would be easy, but He did promise He would never leave us or forsake us.

As I arrived at the event, with two of my closest friends by my side, I was overwhelmed by the feelings that washed over me: excitement, a sense of kinship with the other walkers, indescribable sadness for the loss so many of us had experienced and strength from deep within. I knew that God guided me to this point and had used my pain to mold me into the person He wants me to become. It would take strength and courage to complete this walk, but I remembered God is “close to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Ps. 34:18, ESV).

As we walked that night, I shed many tears passing historical landmarks that my family had visited. I longingly gazed upon the spot where the four of us sat, under the cherry blossoms, for a picnic lunch. As we approached the Washington Monument, my stomach churned as I recalled the first time we took the girls to visit the tall structure. But with each weary and painful step, my determination grew. I thought of my beautiful girls, and how grateful I am to have them—they are a light in my life. I thought of my parents, who have been my rock. And, I thought of McCants, who I loved and missed so dearly. That night my anger toward his decision was replaced with sweet memories and sadness for the unimaginable pain he must have endured to want to end his life.

As we crossed the finish line, the adorned luminaries that lined the sidewalk took my breath away. Each one told the story of a lost person. Then one by one, exhausted walkers fell down in the grass to wait for the sun to rise and the closing ceremony to begin. There was a peaceful silence, and I tearfully reflected on the previous 22 months. I could never have imagined such growth, and, at that moment, I thanked God for leading me here. When the sun broke the horizon, I felt a new chapter begin. No, the pain had not vanished nor the sense of loss, but my faith was strengthened.

I will continue to advocate for suicide prevention, if only to save one life. I simply pray that my testimony might offer others peace. If I can conclude with one thought, it is to quote the mantra, “Only God can turn a mess into a message, a test into a testimony, a trial into a triumph, a victim into a victory.” God’s plan is not always our plan, but it is perfectly divine.

*Meredith Carter attends Chesapeake Conference’s Spencerville church in Silver Spring, Md.*

Click [here](http://www.columbiaunion.org/arthome) for Meredith’s 8 tips for Survivors of Suicide Loss.

Want to see more Visitor articles? See a full PDF of the September issue [here](http://www.columbiaunion.org/arthome).

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Meredith’s 8 Tips for Survivors of Suicide Loss

By Meredith Carter Published 8/27/13

The author (center) relied on friends Kristen Pangborn (left) and Lisa Wolfe to support her through the emotional walk.

1. Take one day at a time. Sometimes I had to live hour by hour, or even minute by minute.

2. Allow yourself to feel any emotions that surface. I originally felt guilty for my anger, but learned that all emotions are normal.

3. Learn to accept that you may never know why it happened. It took awhile for me to accept that there were no answers.

4. Surround yourself with compassionate people. Although most people have good intentions, I had to learn not to take insensitive statements to heart.

5. Don’t be afraid to seek professional help. I found healing through counseling, participating in suicide survivor groups and reading self-help books, like Grieving a Suicide: A Loved One’s Search for Comfort, Answers and Hope by Albert Y. Hsu.

6. Remember that God is closest when He feels furthest away. God’s promises helped me through my darkest moments.

7. It’s okay to laugh again. I felt guilty for finding joy in my life, but it was necessary and healing.

8. Know you will never be the same, but you can survive—even thrive! I found a new purpose in my pain. So can you!

Read Meredith’s story of how she found healing after her husband committed suicide here.

COMMENTS POLICY: The Columbia Union Conference Visitor encourages quality conversation and welcomes your thoughtful comments. All comments are subject to approval but will not be edited.

Please limit your comments to 500 words or less. Only one comment per person will be published.
Let's Move Day 5K run/walk takes off Sunday at Wayne church

WAYNE - On Sept. 15, the Wayne Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church will be holding its third annual Let's Move Day: 5K Run/Walk and Kids' 100 Meter Dash.

"As a church group that promotes following a healthy lifestyle, we felt there was a need to extend something fun and active to the community to show how important it is to treat our minds and bodies well," said Delma Avila, executive director of the Let's Move Day Initiative for Wayne SDA Church.

Last year 120 people participated in the race to support the fight against childhood obesity: an epidemic that has run rampant across the nation resulting in children with heart issues, diabetes and any other obesity-related diseases. The event had several big sponsors including Raw Revolution, Stop & Shop, Ikegami, Boxevaf, and Bergen Anesthesiology.

This year's sponsors include New York Life, Costco, Sports Authority, LÄRABAR, Road ID, Arturi, D'Argentio, Guaglardi & Meliti law firm, Atonovich Furs, along with Stop & Shop.

As a result of the sponsors and private donors, there will be individual timers provided for each participant in order to see how well he or she does in the event.

All registrants are automatically entered to win prizes and there will be plenty of which to give away.

"As a parent, it is extremely important to me that my son understands the importance of making healthy food choices and staying active," said Amalia Meliti, Let's Move Day spokesperson. "This process must begin at a tender age so they actually know what is good and crucial for their mental, physical, and spiritual growth."

The event starts at 8 a.m. and the race begins at 9 a.m. at the Wayne SDA Church located at 218 Ratzer Rd., Wayne.

To register or donate for the race, visit: https://runsignup.com/Race/NJ/Wayne/LetsMoveDay5k

Early online registration is $20 and race day registration is $25.

Kids register for free when their parents sign up with them.
Montgomery County, local groups helping people displaced by Aug. 27 fire

Red Cross gave Silver Spring residents debit cards to buy essential items

Claudia Bachez, 34, was getting ready to cook dinner for her two children in Silver Spring on Aug. 27 when a neighbor shouted that smoke was coming out of the stairs.

“She screamed, ‘It is a fire,’ but we weren’t really sure if it were a fire because the fire alarm didn’t go off,” said Bachez, who works at a fruit factory, but had the day off when it happened.

“We simply saw smoke, and when we finally got out, we saw the fire,” she said. “It was a really terrible experience.”

The fire at the apartment complex in the 9300 block of Piney Branch Road in Silver Spring was ignited when an electric socket near a bed sparked a mattress fire, according to fire officials.

The flames were brought under control within 2½ hours, but left 100 people displaced from 27 units. Seven people, including three firefighters, were taken to a local hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, Scott Graham, the assistant chief of Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, has said on Twitter.

Graham has said that damage was estimated at $1 million for the building and $500,000 to the contents.

On Friday, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services organized a resource fair for fire victims at the Long Branch Community Recreation Center in Silver Spring. Victims of the fire came to find out about housing and gather school supplies for children, as well personal items such as soap, toothpaste, toiletries, and clothes.

Other organizations, such as IMPACT Silver Spring, Casa of Maryland, Tess Center and Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington, also offered help.

“It is absolutely amazing how people come together. The calls of people wanting to donate and do things,” said John J. Kenney of the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. “The school system itself — counselors came and took the kids to school [the] next morning. They rerouted buses. ... People have been coming to the shelter [saying], what can we do, what can we do? ... We are exceptionally proud. This community is absolutely amazing.”

Kenney said the management of the building that burned returned security deposits, plus $250 per family for assistance. “The average check each family got was about $450,” he said.

Joel Sosa, 30, was waiting for his wife to get home from work when the fire started at the apartment next to his on the first floor. “When I tried to leave the apartment, there was a lot of smoke, heat and fire. I couldn’t get out through the door,” said Sosa, a highway construction worker.

“We have been receiving a lot of help. The Red Cross and Montgomery County are doing everything possible to help us,” he added.

Sosa said he is thankful his family was not in the apartment when the fire broke out. He held back tears when he spoke of his son.

“He is only 2, but understands everything,” Sosa said. “He misses his home and says, ‘Let’s go home.’ He asks for his toys.”

Sosa and family were getting ready to move to a new apartment.

Meanwhile, volunteers from the Red Cross and Montgomery County officials have been working nonstop to help out the families in need.
“When there is a fire, the moment the bells are ringing in the fire station, we are called. So, we will get the word of the event right as it happens,” said Joseph Diaz, a Red Cross volunteer.

The Red Cross has helped families by giving them debit cards to buy items they immediately need.

IMPACT Silver Spring will have a “Meet and Greet” resource fair on Saturday at the Long Branch Community Center to help the residents get back on their feet.

“It will be a fun afternoon, where we want people to enjoy a day in unison,” said Carlos Iglesias of IMPACT Silver Spring. “We will have food (and) children’s activities, and we are inviting the community and all families affected by the fire.”
Denying Sabbath Off May Hammer Dollar General
By ROSE BOUBOUSHIAN

(CN) - Dollar General may be liable for firing a manager who refused to work on the Sabbath because he is a Seventh-Day Adventist, a federal judge ruled.

Webster claimed that he had stated on his July 2010 application for a manager position at the Dollar General in Sicklerville, N.J., that he "would never be available to work from sunset on Fridays to sunset on Saturdays" because his religion required him to observe the Sabbath.

When Webster accepted the job the next month, district manager Bob Miller allegedly said Webster would not have to work on Saturday "without exception," and that he would not be fired without cause.

Although Dollar General accommodated Webster for a brief while, he was eventually required to work on a Saturday, the complaint states.

After Webster objected to working on another Saturday, Miller allegedly had him contact Vince Triboletti, the manager of the Berlin, N.J., Dollar General, who, on Oct. 26, "became angry" when Webster said that he could not work on Saturday, according to the complaint.

The next day, Miller allegedly told Webster that he could not work at the Berlin store, and ordered him to provide a written statement explaining why he could not work on Saturdays.

When Webster refused to either work on Saturdays or accept a demotion with reduced hours, Miller asked him for his keys "and escorted him out of the store," the complaint states.

Webster claims that other employees were freely granted Sundays off, but that he received "repeated comments, statements and harassment" because of his religion.

After the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission authorized Webster to sue under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in September 2012, he sued store operator Dolgencorp LLC and several employees for employment discrimination.

The 10-count complaint also asserted violations of the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination, breach of contract, bad faith and emotional distress.

Dolgencorp removed the case to Federal Court on Feb. 4, and later moved to dismiss all but Webster's claims for Title VII religious discrimination and failure to accommodate.

U.S. District Judge Joseph Irenas partially granted the motion last week, holding that the October incident "hardly amounts to the severe or pervasive discriminatory conduct required for a plausible hostile work environment claim."

Though the court dismissed Webster's claims for state law discrimination and emotional distress as time-barred, his breach of express contract claim survived.

"Plaintiff clearly alleges that he entered into an employment contract with Dollar General on or about Aug. 12, 2010, and that as part of that contract, the parties expressly agreed that plaintiff would not be required to work on Saturday and would not be terminated without cause," Irenas wrote. "Plaintiff further asserts that Dolgencorp breached these express terms by first requiring him to work on Saturday, and then terminating him, despite him having performed his duties 'in an exemplary and unimpeachable manner.' Finally, plaintiff alleges that he suffered damages as a result of this conduct. These allegations state a plausible claim for breach of contract."

Webster can amend his complaint as to the Title VII hostile work environment claim, the ruling states.
Upcoming Events Around the Columbia Union

MARYLAND

September 12-24: The Potomac Adventist Book and Health Food store is offering several free health classes at 6:30 p.m. On September 12, the class will be titled “Common Denominator of Chronic Disease,” September 19 “Eat More Weigh Less,” and September 24 “Fiber Your New Best Friend.” Classes take place in the Living Well Lifestyle Center’s room. The store is located at 12004 Cherry Hill Road in Silver Spring, Md.

September 13: Pastor Andre Hastick will lead Restore, a young adult worship gathering this Friday at New Hope. Join the group at 7 p.m. 12350 Hall Shop Road, Fulton, Md.

September 13-14: Pastor David Asscherick, known around the world for his speaking ability and intellectual prowess, will appear as “The Man Who Knows Nothing” at the Metropolitan church in Hyattsville, Md. Confused? That’s okay! The program starts at 7:30 p.m. on September 13 and at 11 a.m. on Sabbath, September 14. For more information, visit metrosda.org/knowsnothing.

September 20-21: Walter Brueggemann, an acclaimed author and theologian, will be speaking at the 33rd G. Arthur Keough Lectures at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md. The topic will be “Reperforming our Best Narrative.” His lectures will be in the Morrison Hall chapel. His September 20, which begins at 6:30 p.m., he will address Choosing an Alternative Life: “Follow me.” On September 21, the lecture begins at 10 a.m. and he will address Imagining Neighborliness: “Love thy neighbor.” For more information, contact the Religion Department at (301) 891-4033.

September 22: The Miracle Temple church in Baltimore is planning healthful activities all day to celebrate “Let’s Move! Day.” Activities will be planned from 10-2 p.m. For more information, visit miracletemple.net.

September 22: The Vibrant Life 5K Fun Run and Walk is set for Sunday morning, at the Review and Herald campus in Hagerstown, Md. This outreach event attracts both serious and casual runners from around the tri-state area. A total of 22 different trophies are given out in 10 different age categories starting as low as ages 5 to 8. A portion of the proceeds goes to Fed Up With Hunger in Hagerstown. Site registration is from 8 to 9 a.m. or runners can register online at VibrantLife.com

October 4-5: Adventist Recovery Ministries will be hosting the official North American Division training for Recovery Ministries, “Journey to Wholeness,” in Rockville, Md., at the Shady Grove Adventist Hospital Conference Center. The registration fee is $50 and includes training materials and Sabbath and Sunday lunch. Pre-registration is required. Make checks payable to the Columbia Union Conference. To register, contact Gerry Davis at (301) 596-0800; (410) 997-3414, ext. 561 or jdavis@columbiaunion.net. Click here [http://www.adventistrecovery.org/site/1/docs/ARMin_Training_Flyer_2013_Revised.pdf] for more.

October 5: There will be a special screening of The Adventists 2 across the division. This sequel to The Adventists documentary is being prepared for broadcast on PBS stations nationwide this fall. Special screenings will be shown at Sligo church in Takoma Park, Md. Watch the ANN interview with Emmy-winning director Martin Doblmeier. Watch The Adventists 2 trailer. Contact John Dillon for more information.

October 5: The 8th Annual Maryland Men of Faith Conference themed “I Will Make a Covenant,” will take place at the Mount
Aetna Retreat Center in Hagerstown, Md. Shane Anderson, pastor of the New Market (Va.) church, focuses his messages on the story of Job. Seminar topics include media and the brain, how to have a personal relationship with Jesus, marriage, prayer, addictions, Prison Ministries, health and current Issues in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Register by September 30 at mmof.org. Questions? Email info@mmof.org, or call (410) 465-6864.

NEW JERSEY
September 15: The Wayne church’s third annual Let’s Move Day 5k Run/Walk is scheduled for this Sunday. Registration begins at 7 a.m. and the race begins at 8 a.m. There will also be a 100-yard dash. Click here to register and you’ll be eligible to pick up a chip from Sports Authority at the Willowbrook Mall on September 13 from 3 to 7 p.m. and will be entered to win a $50 Sports Authority gift card. Registration is $25 dollars.

OHIO
September 22: All motorcyclists are invited to participate in the second Annual Run for the Hungry, which starts at the Newark Moose Lodge #499 at 235 NATIONAL DR., in Newark, Ohio. The run benefits the Adventist Community Services Center and Food Bank of Licking County. The entry fee is $15 per bike and $20 per couple. Registration will be from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Ride departs at 12:00 p.m. and will return to the Adventist church 701 Linnville Rd. Heath, 43056 around 2 PM where participants will be given a Free Picnic Supper provided by the Center staff. For more information, call (740) 739-0750. Registered participants are eligible to enter a drawing for two leather jackets.

PENNSYLVANIA
September 20: Pennsylvania Conference’s Fall Camp Meeting will feature speaker Tim Roosenburg. The camp meeting will be at the Laurel Lake Camp and Retreat Center in Rossiter. For more information or to register, contact the conference office at (610) 374-8331.

VIRGINIA
September 6-21: Lonnie Melashenko will be the evangelist for a series of Bible prophecy meetings that will be held at Sandusky Middle School in Lynchburg, Va. The meetings begin at 7 p.m. each night. There will be no Thursday meetings. The final meeting will be held at the Lynchburg church. The school is located at 805 Chinook Place. For more information, contact Pastor Mike Hewitt at Mike Hewitt pastormikeh@mac.com.

September 14-15: Potomac Conference’s Women’s Retreat, will focus on God’s grace to us, how we show grace to others and how to move gracefully as women of God. Come for a weekend of spiritual, mental and physical refreshment in a wooded setting, amid tranquil paths with accommodations at the Westfield Marriott in Chantilly, Va. Click here to register. Deadline: September 4

VIRTUAL
September 11-14: The North American Division’s Adult Ministries is hosting a virtual Festival of the Laity to equip church members for ministries for Sabbath School, Personal Ministries and Prison Ministries. Registration is free. To find out more information about this event, visit the Festival of Laity website and then register online.

September 16: Planning to participate in “Let’s Move! Day” on September 22. The North American Division is planning a webinar to help you prepare. Learn more at AdventistsInStepForLife.com, or call (301) 680-6733 to find out how you, your church and your school can get involved.

October 1: The alumni association for Takoma Academy in Takoma Park, Md., is collecting stories of how the school has impacted your life. Send your stories to Susan Laurence Cooksey, alumni association president at to susan.cooksey@ta.edu, or Ronnie Mills, director of institutional advancement at rmills@ta.edu by October 1. The goal is to publish and present this book to alumni during the 2014 Alumni weekend. All proceeds from the book will benefit the Worthy Student Fund.
WASHINGTON, D.C.
September 28: Leslie Pollard, PhD, Oakwood University’s (Ala.) president and the Advancement & Development Division are hosting a reception for graduates and friends at the Washington Hilton Hotel located at 1919 Connecticut Avenue NW in Washington, D.C. A short vespers program will begin at 6:30 p.m., followed by light refreshments and fellowship. The Aeolians, recent gold medalists of the World Games, will perform starting at 7 p.m. Hear about the latest developments at Oakwood, enjoy the lively discussion, get a bite to eat, and come prepared to get involved and support your alma mater. For more details, email alumni@oakwood.edu or call (256) 726-.7039.