

# REACH OUT!

Relevant  
Youth  
Evangelism



Edited by  
S. Joseph Kidder  
& Gerardo Oudri

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## INTRODUCTION

The involvement and participation of youth and young adults in all facets of the church, especially in the area of evangelism, is not a prohibitive luxury but a most urgent and essential need. A quick survey of Adventist history shows that many senior youth and young adults played a vital role in the advancement of the mission of the Adventist Church<sup>i</sup>. A few good examples of prominent youth in Adventist history are:

- **Ellen Harmon:** she was just 17 years old when she received her first vision. (1844)
- **John Loughborough:** he became an evangelist when he was 17 years old, holding evangelistic seminars and winning many to Christ. (1849)
- **Uriah Smith:** he was 23 years old when he became editor of the Review and Herald (now the Adventist Review) magazine. He faced many financial problems when he started but managed so well that in a short time the Review and Herald began to flourish and grow. (1855)
- **J.N. Andrews:** he was a young theologian when he made several contributions to the church. He helped Adventists to understand that, according to Scripture, the Sabbath goes from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. He also helped the Adventist church become a legal organization so that it could obtain legal possession of properties. He was the first official missionary to Europe. (1859)
- **J.H. Kellogg:** he graduated from medical school at age 22 (sponsored by the James and Ellen White) and immediately began working at the Adventist health institute at Battle Creek, becoming medical superintendent in 1876.
- **Harry Fenner:** he was 16 years old, and **Luther Warren** was 14 when together they created the first ministry to reach out to youth. Thus was born the first Seventh-day Adventist young people's society on record. (1879)

Not only were youth and young adults central to the life of the church of our pioneers, they were also part of the theological vision of the church. In this regard Ellen White writes: "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might **furnish** how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!"<sup>ii</sup>

The book you hold in your hands is the result of a symposium that took place at La Sierra Adventist University in May of 2018. Under the theme "Reach Out: Relevant Youth Evangelism", a group of Adventist administrators, academicians and practitioners met for two and a half days to discuss some of the principal current challenges, as well as possibilities in the area of youth evangelism. The goal was to discuss relevant and effective ways to involve Adventist youth and

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i <http://archives.adventistreview.org/2004-1522/story2.html>

ii Ellen White, *Education*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002): 271

young adults in evangelism as well as to explore ideas to reach out to youth and young adults outside of the church in a more efficient manner.

This book is divided into five sections as follows: 1) *Innovative Youth Evangelism*. The papers in this section seek to provide creative ideas for youth evangelism, hoping that the readers will be inspired to try new evangelistic methods. 2) *Youth Evangelism on Campus*. This section deals with youth evangelism in a Public Campus Ministry (PCM) setting. 3) *Mobilizing Our Youth for Evangelism*. Here, the goal is to present recent successful experiences of youth involvement in evangelism, serving as examples for inspiration and emulation. 4) *Creating a Culture of Youth Evangelism*. In this section, the main focus is how to foster a culture that is conducive for involvement of youth and young adults in evangelism. 5) *Recommendations*. This last section presents the suggestions and recommendations that came from three focus groups: Administrators, Practitioners and Public Campus Ministry leaders.

It is our hope and prayer that this book will inspire and motivate you and your church, as well as to provide you with ideas and resources, so that youth and young adult evangelism will become more and more a reality in your context. The Adventist church began with a strong involvement and participation of youth and young adults, and we strongly believe that in these last days, before Jesus comes, a similar experience will take place, in which a movement of youth and young adults, passionate for Jesus, will be empowered by the Holy Spirit and by the church to preach the good news of the gospel to this generation.

*S. Joseph Kidder and Gerardo Oudri*

*Editors*

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**Innovative  
Youth  
Evangelism**

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## A NEW PARADIGM

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**Professor of Christian Ministry at the Seventh-day**  
**Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University;**  
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It is challenging for a church to preach the Gospel message to a postmodern audience using the traditional evangelism model. Churches, therefore, would be best served when they are intentional about not relying solely on denominationally provided programs and evangelistic models. By incorporating multiple evangelistic avenues year round, traditional as well as innovative, there is a greater opportunity to help people experience the Gospel. We must adapt to the times and use all the means of witnessing available to us.

Knowing that we need new ideas and coming up with those new ideas are not the same. Thankfully we have churches full of people from all walks of life who can help us generate and integrate innovative evangelism. The best creative evangelism is what the members come up with to meet the needs around them through loving relationships. Evangelistic ministries, birthed by the members, work best when there is a heart to reach people. It is not the ministry but your love and prayers that make the difference. This usually doesn't immediately impact your church's baptism or membership numbers, but it is about fostering long-term Christ-centered relationships with no strings attached.

Jesus called us to "Go" (Matthew 28:19) out into the communities, rather than waiting for them to come to us. As followers of Christ we, as individuals, are expected to do more than just speak the Truth to the world; we are to share life with others. Jesus "affirmed that the worship of God is central to what it means to be a disciple. But... He did not make the building—or corporate worship—the destination. His destination was the people God wanted to touch, those were, with few exceptions, people who wouldn't have spent much time in holy places."<sup>1</sup> Jesus intentionally socialized at weddings, feasts, people's homes, and even walking by the road or sea.

I (Joseph) discovered the potential for member-generated creative evangelistic ideas when I saw it in action at one of the churches I pastored. Diane, young adult, saw an angel tree in the mall over the Christmas holidays. The tree was filled with names of poor families in the community. She took 10 names back to the church. Within minutes the names were gone. Church members asked to be able to drop off the gifts for the families in person, rather than having the angel tree organization deliver them. The idea was to build a relationship with the families so that the church could look in on them and be there to help with any future needs. The organization agreed and Diane grabbed some more names off the tree to take back to the church. That Christmas, the church provided gifts for 100 families whose names were on the angel tree. The church was a beacon of hope for those families and a reflection of the love of Christ. Diane's impulse to have individual church members fill a community

need sparked in me a desire to tap into the creativity present in each of us for innovative ideas regarding evangelism. This led to the creation of a culture in the church in which eyes and ears were opened and encouragement given for every member to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in order to take part in filling community and personal needs.

Over the course of two chapters (this one and the next one), we want to invite you to take part in a paradigm shift in your thinking about evangelism and evangelistic strategies. This first chapter will focus on the changing paradigms of how people come to the Lord, the need for a church to exist in more than just the building, and creating an innovative evangelistic idea-generating environment. In fact, all the stories shared here feature youth and young adults.

### **New Paradigm: Show and Tell**

The old model of evangelism was a movement from facts (head knowledge) to faith to feelings (heart knowledge). In the age of modernity, being presented with facts would lead to a change in faith which would then lead to an experience within a like-minded community. For example, proof texts were presented about the validity of the Sabbath, people agreed with and had faith in those facts, and then started keeping the Sabbath.

Today, in our post-modern world, feelings hold more sway than facts.<sup>2</sup> As such, the new model of evangelism should be a movement from feelings to faith to facts.<sup>3</sup> This requires a larger commitment on the part of members. Relationships must be formed first—the unchurched need to see how Christianity works; they need to feel like a part of something—part of a community.<sup>4</sup> For example, in sharing about the Sabbath, proof texts and history lessons should not be the place to start. One should start with fellowship and relationship building, showing how living within a Sabbath rest helps to strengthen family bonds, church communities, and an awareness of God. Let the unchurched have a shared experience of the Sabbath as a delight. They will want a repeat of that experience which can lead to faith in the principles of the Sabbath. They then ask for facts about the Sabbath because they are already experiencing the joy of it. This is the “Show and Tell” paradigm.

The same is true for sharing about the Second Coming. People need to see how living in the hope of the Second Coming provides purpose and strength for everyday living. Once this is seen, the unchurched can begin to believe for themselves about the reality of the Second Coming. It is then that they will begin to ask for the facts.

Dr. Fredric Neuman observed in his psychotherapy practice that change takes more than new information. If what we learn requires a change in behavior we are less likely to embrace the needed change and more likely to reject the new information. But if we have already changed our behavior, it is much easier to adapt our beliefs to match.<sup>5</sup>

In a New York Times article by Maria Konnikova, she presents several studies that show the ineffectiveness of using facts to change people’s minds. Interestingly, it was found that when you feel good about yourself you are more open to accepting new facts.<sup>6</sup> In the realm of evangelism, this means we should not present the facts of the Gospel without sharing the love Christ has for every individual. When someone finds their value and self-worth in God, they are more open to understanding and absorbing the truth of the Gospel.

Church activities such as a picnic by the lake, a hike in the local forest, or a birding expedition are wonderful opportunities to build relationships with those who don't feel comfortable in a church. Sharing food together is another way in which to build up meaningful relationships and share how Christ is working in our lives.

Several years ago, Kristy was introduced to Alexis, the sister of a church member. The two women were the same age and became fast friends even though Alexis was not a Christian. They spent time together talking and sharing meals. They would often go to the zoo on Sabbath afternoons watching the animals and enjoying nature. Alexis began to understand the importance of taking a break from work and the busyness of life in order to rest and recharge. Kristy invited Alexis to church socials and tried to do a Bible study together. But these did not increase Alexis' interest in going to church services. Over the years, the women moved away from each other, but still kept in touch. Without pressuring, Kristy would share devotional messages or Bible texts from her church newsletter that Alexis seemed to respond to and comment on. Recently, with no prompting from Kristy, Alexis signed up for the weekly church newsletter devotional and continues to reach out for general spiritual guidance.

"In the end Christians must understand that unbelievers will not accept what we say about Christ until they first see the truth manifested in our lives."<sup>7</sup> We must first show people what life with Christ looks like and why it is better in order for us to earn the trust necessary to be believed. It is then that we are able to share the facts that people may not even realize they were searching for.

### **New Paradigm: Go and Do**

Michael L. Simpson shares that in the past, people would come to the church for answers and the church became their path to God. Yet today, few people seek out a church for answers to life's questions.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, "evangelism must often take place as an encounter outside the church. The church's role is to prepare Christians for these encounters and provide safe entry points for new believers to enter into church life."<sup>9</sup>

Ethan, a young man in his twenties, saw people converging at a local park. When he discovered that they were preparing to put on a triathlon, he wondered what he could do to help. The organizers said that they could always use more water. Feeling inspired, Ethan gathered together some church members who donated water for the triathlon. For those who wanted to help pass out water, the triathlon's sponsor covered the insurance and training of volunteers. Because Ethan saw a need, church members were able to meet some great people and fill a need in the community. Church leaders could encourage members to join with other organizations as volunteers. This is just one way in which we can "Go and Do."

In meetings, Andy Stanley, “will go around the room and ask staff members to report on who they are spending time with. If staff members are not talking to people who are hell bound, then something’s out of balance in their schedule and priorities.”<sup>10</sup> He even encourages pastors to spend more time with the unchurched than with their members.<sup>11</sup> Ellen White also spoke against ministers who only focused their time on their churches as “the ministers have other work to do. They must carry the message of truth to those who know it not.”<sup>12</sup>

In fact, everyone should make an effort to include spending time with unchurched people as a normal part of their day. When we intentionally spend time with people our eyes will be opened to their needs. When coupled with an evangelistic heart, members will be able to “establish ministries that allow the church to be present in the community, and have a process by which they are able to draw these unchurched people into the safety of Christ and a local church.”<sup>13</sup>

Jesus’s method of one-on-one personal contact was representative of the “special place in His heart for those [who were] shunned and rejected by society regardless of their socioeconomic level.”<sup>14</sup> You do not need a ministerial license to have the Holy Spirit work through you to reach people. “Angels of God attend you to the dwellings of those you visit. This work cannot be done by proxy. Money lent or given will not accomplish it. Sermons will not do it. By visiting the people, talking, praying, sympathizing with them you will win hearts. This is the highest missionary work that you can do. If do it, you will need resolute, preserving faith, unwearying patience, and a deep love for souls.”<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after he was baptized, Peter was asked to help out with Pathfinders. He was surprised to see only about 15 kids in the club and all of them were from the church. Peter envisioned a club with half of its members from the community. He had the kids invite friends to come out and join Pathfinders. They worked to make the club known within the community. He opened the gym to the community, had monthly social events for the kids and their families, and had the Pathfinders actively involved with church services on a regular basis. Under his committed leadership and creativity, the club tripled in size in less than three years with less than half being from the church. Several families came to be church members through the influence the club had on their children.

Peter helped his church to develop a paradigm shift for not only the Pathfinders, but also for the church as a whole. The members learned the value of having non-members included in ministries and taking those ministries outside of the walls of the church.

In the research done for this article we found several examples of churches going outside their walls to meet with and be seen by the community. Many churches meet at a local park for vespers programs, Sabbath lunches, or even to do Vacation Bible School. Small Groups are held in members’ homes and youth groups meet at the local coffee shop or Panera Bread restaurant. Some churches incorporate community service projects into the calendar for months with a fifth Sabbath. Others host block parties and church at the beach or camping in the mountains. One group opened a Prayer Café in a local strip

mall.<sup>16</sup> All of these ideas involve going out and being available, consistently, outside of the church building.

Robert Henderson shares his dream of what this type of church without walls would look like: “a congregation of down-to-earth, wholesome Christian folk who are ‘radioactive’ with their love of Jesus Christ, who are alert to and praying for all of their non-Christian friends, and who are able to enter into gentle conversations with these friends which would bring them to the knowledge of the Lord in sensitive ways.”<sup>17</sup>

Considering the amount of loneliness in our world today, we would do well to focus on building relationships and connections with others. These connections will help people to realize that you are sharing with them out of genuine concern and love for them with no strings attached. This means befriending coworkers, neighbors, the parents of your child’s friends, etc.

Ellen White encourages believers:

Wherever you can gain access to the people by the fireside, improve your opportunity. Take your Bible, and open before them its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse. The presentation of Christ in the family, by the fireside, and in small gatherings in private houses, is often more successful in winning souls to Jesus than are sermons delivered in the open air, to the moving throng, or even in halls or churches.<sup>18</sup>

It is through the forming and growing of relationships that you gain credibility and the right to be heard.<sup>19</sup>

Some of those reading may be saying, “But all of my friends are Christian!” Bill Tenny-Brittian counters that “A Christian without an unchurched friend is like a dash of salt in the ocean: it doesn’t do anyone any good, and no one even knows it is there.”<sup>20</sup> Forming lasting friendships takes time, energy, and intentionally—things that are often in short supply in today’s Instagram and Twitter world.

### **New Paradigm: Live and Imagine**

Have you ever considered that all worship and evangelism is contemporary? At least it was when the services and programs we now consider traditional were first instituted. They were new and innovative. “The challenge and opportunity, however, is to shape liturgy and church life [and evangelism] in ways indigenous to the cultures in the community, in this generation.”<sup>21</sup>

Churches need to celebrate ministry regardless of outcome; encouraging believers to zealously make use of every evangelistic ministry and opportunity. However, we must remember that “humans do not convert nonbelievers; only the Holy Spirit does that. Consequently, our responsibility is to serve as capable conduits of God’s love through a clear expression of the gospel message. Whether or not the person accepts Christ is beyond human control.”<sup>22</sup> Having this understanding will contribute to creating an environment for creativity in a safe place to fail or succeed. However, still aim for excellency and put your best effort into all that you do. An evangelistic ministry that is poorly planned or executed can work as a disservice to the glory of God and leave people with

a bitter taste in their mouths.<sup>23</sup> Take the time to bathe your ministry in prayer and properly prepare, doing all in service to Christ.

Harry had a passion for missing members. He knew that many were still in the community, but had stopped coming to church. With permission from the pastor, he started a Saturday morning breakfast specifically for former members. No topic was off limits; they could even bash the church while drinking their coffee. What was important was listening without judgment and rebuilding relationships. He was a little worried about how the members would respond to this new ministry. But the pastor told him to go ahead; he would deal with any member complaints. After several years of spending time in this group, some of these former members started to transition to rejoining the larger congregation.

What worked for Harry was his focus on relationships and the desire to share himself with former members coupled with a grace-filled and welcoming church congregation. When we take the time to be trained in relationship building (how to be a better spouse, parent, friend, and neighbor), evangelism will be a natural outgrowth. If people don't like you, or know you, why would they want to worship with you? If you are unlikeable, what does that say about the God you serve that you want others to know?

On the other hand, if you are compassionate and empathetic to people's needs, and genuinely care about them as individuals, that is the God they will see through you. As believers in relationship with Christ we are to do our best within the church to create "environments where people are encouraged and equipped to pursue intimacy with God, community with insiders, and influence with outsiders."<sup>24</sup> Maintaining an intimate relationship with God will help you to be in tune to the imaginings He puts in your heart for ways in which to reach out to His Children.

When pastors and leaders encourage church members to live with evangelistic intentionality in regards to others, they are more capable of discovering new and innovative ways in which to reach those around them. In this way they can "Live and Imagine", using their God-given creativity for evangelism. Members are to live by the command of Jesus in Mark 7:8 to avoid letting traditions get in the way of obeying God or ministering to people. Creativity, relevancy and innovation become part of their thinking. Moreover, change becomes integral to their strategy. They're willing to take risks for the sake of those who are lost. In order to be effective and to have the highest impact, they learn from their mistakes and constantly readjust their course.

## Conclusion

We have discovered that friendship must be at the root of all kinds of evangelism. It is through long-term relationships that we are able to see and meet the unique personal and community needs of those in our sphere of influence. Taking the time to see and sympathize with these needs is at the heart of innovative evangelism that allows each person to contribute creative ideas. This type of commitment is necessary if we are to model Paul's actions of identifying with people in order to share the message of salvation (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). It is the task of each one of us to look for ways in which to reach the unchurched.

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## Endnotes

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## AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE CREATIVE

**S. Joseph Kidder, Professor of Christian Ministry at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University & Kristy L. Hodson, Associate Pastor in the Southern New England Conference**

The core of evangelism is making connections with people. As ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), we would do well to look to His example. Ellen White reminds us that “During His ministry Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy but to save. . . . As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy wherever He went. The followers of Christ are to labor as He did. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the suffering and afflicted. We are to minister to the despairing, and inspire hope in the hopeless.”<sup>1</sup> The suffering, afflicted, and hopeless do not wander into our churches looking for relief. Therefore, we must find innovative and creative ways in which to reach out and get to know those in the community who are hurting. Allow them to see the genuine care churches have for the well-being of the community and the individuals that comprise it. Make an effort to know their names, not just having them know the name of the church. One must take the time to get to know others, before earning the right to be heard when sharing the gospel with them. When people see and feel that you care, they will want to know why.

In this chapter we will discuss three strategies for innovative evangelism: 1) Promote innovations; 2) Foster belonging and ownership; and 3) Celebrate community relationships.

### **Strategy 1: Promote Innovations**

There is as much potential for innovative ideas as there are people in your church. Church leaders should embolden members to not wait for someone to tell them what to do in regards to ministry, evangelism, and relationship building. Believers are to be encouraged to pray continually that God will lead them to opportunities, big or small, in which they can bless others. “God will surely help those who seek Him for wisdom. We are not to wait until opportunities come to us; we are to seek for opportunities, and we are to be ready always to give a reason for the hope that is in us. If the worker keeps his heart uplifted in prayer, God will help him to speak the right word at the right time.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Give permission to be creative!**

When we think of evangelism, we often think of large public programs provided by the denomination or churches. However the most effective programs and opportunities come from individual members. “It is

not the dramatic and the grandiose of large programs of evangelism that get the work done. It is the mysterious chemistry of countless ordinary Christians faithfully living out their kingdom lives.”<sup>3</sup> The collective ideas and synergy of mobilized members can have a far reaching impact in lives for Christ.

Pastor David Jamieson had an idea for putting ministry into the hands of his members after he read the book *Kingdom Assignment* by Danny Bellesi. He asked the church board to let him have \$3,000 from the community services A-OK (Acts of Kindness) program fund. Surprisingly, the church board agreed, even though the church budget was behind by \$90,000. After a sermon on the parable of the talents, Pastor Jamieson handed out 30 \$100 bills. He told the recipients to take the money, pray over it, and take the money outside of the church walls. They would have 90 days to multiply the money and use that to do an act of kindness anywhere in the world. By the end of 90 days, they had multiplied the original \$3,000 to over \$100,000.

The Young Adult Sabbath School class took \$100 and wanted to help a 2 year old girl, Emily, who was battling leukemia. Her family had to drive 8 hours to Vancouver for treatment, often missing work. The Young Adult class had heard about her through the local media. They decided to do a 24 hour soccer-a-thon and used the \$100 for a website and marketing. The event attracted about 100 people to play soccer in the cold for 24 hours. The Aldergrove church (now known as Church in the Valley) and community raised over \$21,000 for little Emily and gained extensive media coverage.<sup>4</sup> This is just one of the many stories of how the members multiplied the money given to them.

The Kingdom Assignment project was a success. By the end of the year, Aldergrove SDA made the church budget and gave away \$125,000. The Kingdom Assignment Association found out and gave them a Kingdom Assignment award recognition.<sup>5</sup> When the members took on the role of creating and implementing ways in which to reach the community, God blessed financially and a stronger bond between the church and the community they serve was formed. Pastor Jamieson noted that because of their Kingdom outreach several community members began attending church and have given their lives to God.

### **Strategy 2: Foster Belonging and Ownership**

Growing churches provide a variety of low-pressure volunteer options for attendees (even not-yet members) in order to foster a sense of belonging and ownership. Ownership leads to loyalty. “And by volunteering to serve the Lord, they [people] develop and mature spiritually.”<sup>6</sup> Have places for everyone regardless of age or status to help. Low commitment, non-threatening teams are good for new members. Andy Stanley and Ed Young, “found that getting them on a team prevents them from coming in the front door and going out the back; if they’re involved in a ministry from the beginning, they’re much less likely to fade away and never do anything.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Encourage Total Involvement**

Olivia came across a flyer for an upcoming evangelistic series at the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. She had fond memories of her neighbors bringing her to Sabbath School as a child and decided to check out the series. Once there, she accepted the gospel and decided to get baptized. Her husband, Mark, while supportive of her decision did not feel the same way himself. When Mark

started coming to church with Olivia the congregation took the initiative to get to know and welcome him. Friendships were formed and one couple in particular mentored Olivia and Mark. Because he no longer felt like a visitor, Mark wanted to become involved and volunteered as a greeter. Through their interactions, the pastor and leadership team noticed that he had a gift for teaching. So as Mark began to learn more about God and grow in his understanding of Scripture, he was occasionally asked to help teach Sabbath School class. After a little while Mark realized that his beliefs were the same as the church members and asked to be baptized. He and the pastor studied together and Mark officially joined the church that had already become his family. When asked why he wanted to join the church, Mark credited the love and acceptance of the congregation because of their willingness to let him be involved. It was the meaningful relationships which were formed within the church that brought about a feeling of belonging and ownership. Healthy churches understand that fostering relationships between members and attendees are a significant part of a thriving community.<sup>8</sup>

In order for evangelism to make an impact, there needs to be a commitment from the members to be involved. Relationships must be built.<sup>9</sup> Multiple friendships from within the church must be maintained in order for a new convert to stay in church. It has even been shown that some non-believers attend church because of the relationships they have there.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in a study released in 2013, the Barna Group noted that Millennials credit friends and family as the number two reason why their faith has grown.<sup>11</sup> For them, prayer was number one and reading the Bible was number three.

When meeting new people, look for ways in which to genuinely connect with them. “Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls... Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus.”<sup>12</sup> It is essential that we speak to the hearts of people.

### **Strategy 3: Celebrate Community Relationships**

Have a missionary mentality. “Missionaries see people as unique and valuable. Jesus saw people as individuals and in groups. The crowds were important to Jesus because of the people in them. Crowds are not trophies to be won. Neither are the crowds ‘projects’ to be completed. Influencing masses of people is not for the leader’s affirmation or self-worth. Crowds are important because of the incredible worth of people.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is important to engage with individuals in the community through intentional relationships. This will lead to discernment regarding the needs of the community, which in turn will lead to more opportunities to embrace them, which will lead to more engagement. It is a missional transformational cycle.<sup>14</sup>

### **Be Aware of Community Needs**

Tom walked into Costco on their annual community day. Noticing booths from local charities and businesses promoting their products and services, he began to think about how God could use an opportunity like this for his church to connect with the community. He ran back to the church to ask the pastor

why they didn't have a booth. The pastor encouraged him to go ahead and arrange for one. They called two other members who were doctors to help. The church-sponsored booth provided free blood pressure and cholesterol checks, magazines, and had a sign-up for a kid's soccer team that quickly filled up. So many people came to visit their booth that focused on free services for the community, that Costco rewarded the church with a year's supply of cakes for their weekly potlucks, asked the doctors to provide analysis for their employees, and offered a free booth for the next community day. The following year, the church's booth not only shared about health but also provided literature and information about upcoming seminars for the community. With time, people began visiting the church and attending seminars. Many even joined as new believers.

The above is just one example of creative outreach that worked. Some churches host block parties, Vacation Bible Schools, Financial Peace University, Divorce Care, cooking classes, concerts, and English as a Second Language courses. Know that not everything will succeed with building bridges in the community; however, still aim for innovation and excellence. Keep trying until you find something that works for you and your community. The more you know your community, the better you are able to find areas of need. Check new ideas and ministries against your vision: "The catalyst for introducing and facilitating change in the local church is a God-honoring, mouthwatering, unambiguously clear vision."<sup>15</sup> Encourage your members to undertake "a level of involvement that stretches them and calls them to take up the basin and towel and wash feet just as Jesus has called us to do."<sup>16</sup>

Ellen White also saw the need for building up relationships outside of the church for the purpose of evangelism. "We are not to renounce social communion. We should not seclude ourselves from others. In order to reach all classes, we must meet them where they are. They will seldom seek us of their own accord. Not alone from the pulpit are the hearts of men touched by divine truths. There is another field of labor, humbler, it may be, but fully as promising. It is found in the home of the lowly, and in the mansion of the great; at the hospital board and in gatherings for innocent social enjoyment."<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Most evangelistic ventures take time, months, and maybe even years before you see the fruits of your investment. This is consistent with any type of relationship—they take time and effort to mature. "Relationships are like bank accounts: They don't just happen."<sup>18</sup> All evangelism takes intentionality and should be done out of love for humanity and God and a desire to connect the two. The lack of an immediate result is not a sign of failure as evangelism is not about us, but about God. Most of us have no doubt heard stories of people who have been prayed over for years before finally deciding to come to Christ. Kristy is currently finishing up Bible studies with Jane who first heard and rejected the Gospel from a co-worker 40 years ago but recently came into the church through the local community services program. Jane and her former co-worker have rekindled their relationship and will be reunited at Jane's baptism.

What is your passion? Where can God use you and your passion to connect with people? Pray for God to reveal to you how He is working in the lives of your non-Christian colleagues and friends. Where might you have a chance to impact people as you go about your day?<sup>19</sup> If you feel that you cannot come

up with a way to connect with people, a simple evangelism method is to invite someone to your church. It may sound too simple, but research has shown that 82% of unchurched people are likely to come to church if they are invited. But the invitations are not being made. “Only 21 percent of active churchgoers invite *anyone* to church services in the course of a year. But only 2 percent of church members invite any unchurched person to church.”<sup>20</sup> You don’t have to be an evangelist or have that spiritual gift in order to share your personal experiences with Christ. When you let your relationship and journey with Christ show in your life then “Everything is outreach!”<sup>21</sup>

### Sidebar:

#### 1. Creative Community Care

In the past effective community services included stop smoking plans, clothes and food distribution, etc.. Monte Sahlin<sup>22</sup> notes that today effective ministries includes job-finding and training, family counseling, substance abuse programs, potty training geared for young mothers, reading for new immigrants, and budgeting and financial planning, The new programs are not only to deal with the physical aspect of ministry, but do include emotional, social, and spiritual ministries.

Study the demographic needs of your community and devise your ministries accordingly. There are many organizations that specialize in trends, demographic data and the specific needs of your community. Build a database listing the skill sets of members that can be called on. A mechanic maybe willing to donate labor costs or a dentist could provide free cleanings for those without insurance.

#### 2. Sports Ministries

One of the fastest growing ministries today is sport ministry. It does not require a budget or many people. If you have a gym, open it once or twice a week and invite the community to come. When I (Joe) was a pastor we opened our gym twice a week to the community. The people came, sometimes as many as 50 or 60 people. The event lasted about 2 hours. Right in the middle of these two hours, our youth pastor had a short devotion about 5-7 minutes.

One of our members started a soccer program for the kids on Sunday afternoon. Because soccer is rising in popularity, we had no problem attracting about 40-50 kids from the community. We always ended with refreshments and invitation to join our youth group. There were always one or two every week or so that joined.

We also started several teams for baseball, soccer, or basketball. These teams attracted people from the community, the church, and significantly increased the number of active young members. Also, many of the previously inactive youth now felt connected and became involved in the church.

#### 3. Community Bible Study Group

You would be amazed how many people from a non-church background are actually interested in learning about the Bible. Start a community Bible study group that is held outside of the church building. For example, a businessman started a breakfast Bible study for his co-workers in a conference room at work. Others use the common room of their

apartment complex for Bible study. Young adults can create a Bible study group relevant to their context.

4. Park Ministry

Take the Gospel to the parks. This kind of witnessing takes place with effectiveness especially during the summer time. One church goes to the park every Sabbath afternoon in the summer. They invite people to come and join them for songs and a devotional thought. They had a special program with gifts for the kids and refreshments for everyone at the end. This is a great way to get the youth and young adults involved in church ministry. Make sure this is presented as professionally as possible as this may be the only image of Christianity that some people get to see.

5. Children's Ministry

Ed Young shares, "On a regular basis (at least six times a year) the life-changing message of Christ is presented. If any children make a decision for Christ, their parents are contacted and invited to attend a class entitled KidFaith. Everything the kids have been taught about Christ is presented again to the parents and the kids. Attending KidFaith gives parents the opportunity to be involved in their children's decision to accept Christ."<sup>23</sup> Monthly birthday party for kids, Vacation Bible School during evangelist meeting. Children's programs in the park during the summer, children's choir, backpack giveaway. Youth and young adults can be involved in this type of ministry.

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## YOUTH EVANGELISM IN A DIGITAL CULTURE

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“It was the dawn of new era, one where most of the human race now spent all of their free time inside a videogame.” This line is uttered by the main protagonist in Steven Spielberg’s latest movie, *Ready Player One*, based on the book by Ernest Cline. I stepped out of the Imax theater with my daughter and wife, returned my 3D glasses and reflected on the story, which I enjoyed, partly as a nostalgic reliving of my childhood. The story presents to us a future where humanity primarily lives life in a virtual world called the OASIS. Here, one can be anyone or anything it wants. We are not at such a place in history but some fear we are speeding down the road, heading in that direction. This has implications for the church.

Times move on, methods change. This reality is undoubtedly true. As our world becomes more connected, more digital, the need to seek new approaches to communication, dialogue, and fellowship are necessary. Even the main mission of the church, evangelism, cannot escape the effects of a digital culture.

Evangelism at its basic level is communication: a message, Jesus Christ crucified, delivered by a messenger, the preacher, to an audience, the person or persons hearing the Good News. When all these elements come together, evangelism is taking place.

When we consider evangelism to a digital world, we must look at our communication strategy and consider if our traditional methods are having the desired outcomes. Can we organize public evangelism in such a way that those in the digital world will first, understand what we are saying, second, take time to listen, and third, believe what we are saying is true?

For those in the digital world to understand the message, we must speak their language. “The sermon, given in a language that the recipient understands, unquestionably holds the pre-eminent place in conveying the message of the gospel and the inclusion of human nature in the body of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> But knowing the language of the digital culture will not be enough. There is still one more element that is needed. Koukoura identifies the “code” of a culture, which is its system of language that the culture shares in order for it to be understood. She accepts that speaking the language of the culture will put the church in a place where they can connect emotionally with the audience and be trusted, but “it is not the vocabulary of youth that will gain their interest and trust, but honesty and consistency between what is said and what is done by the same preachers in their daily lives.”<sup>2</sup>

The focus of this paper is to attempt to have a better understanding of the digital culture that our youth and young adults live in and to explore the concept of contextualization as a means to help us create a more effective approach to digital evangelism.

## Digital Culture and the Church

There is no arguing that the advances in technology have altered our lives, perhaps indefinitely. The advancement of this technology has created a digital culture. This always-on existence, with the introduction of mobile devices, is creating a new reality for the church that must be considered in its approach to evangelism. The first step in making an impact in today's world is to have a better understanding of the digital culture we live in.

Some within the church look at digital culture and find a generation that they fear, or at least pity. And there are aspects of this culture that give us pause. Many youth and young adults are being steered away from social and spiritual opportunities such as networks of care, attention to the common good, families and local authorities, expectation to fully attend to the call of God, faith communities, and their own powers as agents of God in history.<sup>3</sup> This list should make us worry about our evangelistic effectiveness in a digital culture. How difficult will it be to invite youth and young adults to join the Body of Christ when they are walking away from it?

If we look at some of the characteristics of the individuals of the digital culture, we also find more challenges. Compassion is in decline while narcissism is on the rise.<sup>4</sup> Also, on the rise is a sense of entitlement.<sup>5</sup> Few would be surprised by this reality when there are less and less face-to-face interactions.

There is some good news. Social and religious institutions are not being abandoned completely, instead they are being redefined and reorganized around digital communities.<sup>6</sup> This will change the dynamic of how things have been done in the past and affect how relationships are made in the future. Now, through digital communities we can have “telepresence”, the feeling that we are always connected, but that connection will only be virtual until the next step is taken, an embodied relationship. The danger is that our digital selves become greater than our real selves.<sup>7</sup>

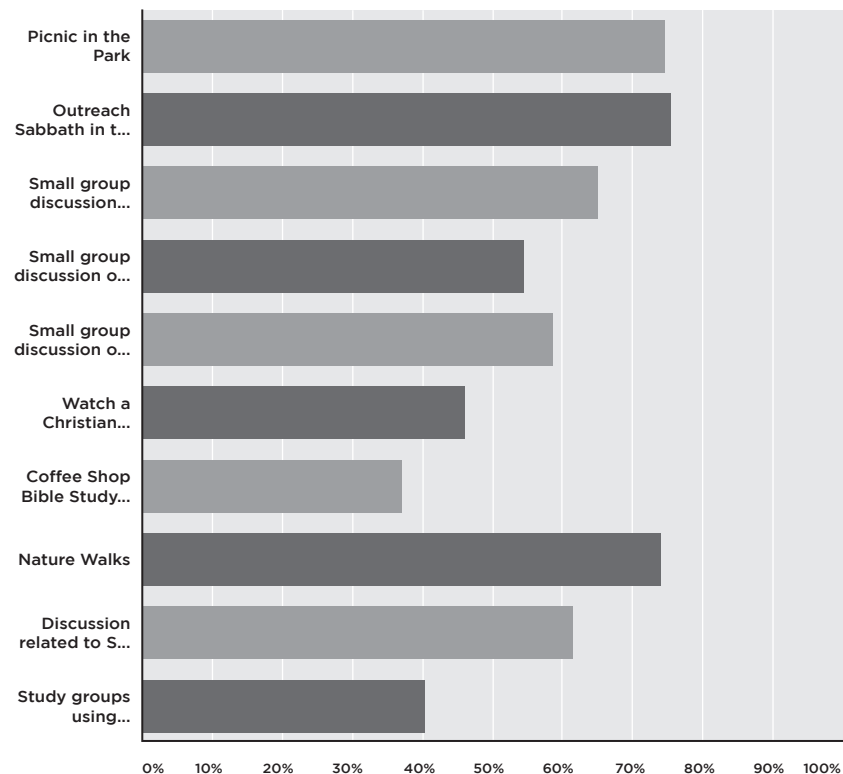
Digital culture has penetrated the lives of almost every human being. But not everyone has the same relationship with technology as Millennials or Generation Z. There are three kinds of relationships with technology and all of them exist within the church. First, we have the digital aliens. These are the individuals who have a critical approach to technology and believe it can damage the heart of biblical Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Second, we have the digital pioneers. These individuals see technology as a potential tool for evangelism, discipleship, and community.<sup>9</sup> Third, we have digital natives. These have never lived outside of the digital world and see their relationships living in both virtual and embodied spaces.<sup>10</sup>

Although digital aliens would like to take up arms against the digital culture some are taking a more inclusive tone towards it. Instead of fighting the culture, there is a call to embracing it as prophetic, letting us know what the future holds for us as Christians. Digital culture is “...increasingly abandoning top-down controlled systems and embracing networked, dispersed systems of mutuality and interdependence.”<sup>11</sup> Although this may sound problematic for the church, it calls us to reevaluate some of our approaches to evangelism. The digital natives are not looking to be part of a church that is formulaic and controlling. They want to be part of a connected reality where everyone can contribute to the greater story of the group.<sup>12</sup> Our problem is that the church has been seen as an entity that is homogenous instead of heterogenous. That is not attractive to the digital native.

The digital native challenges the church to enter the common spaces of the digital world and participate in the building of a better culture, to share, not command or demand. The challenge for the church is that to be a member of the common spaces within digital culture means a surrendering of absolutes and an embracing of humility, recognizing that there is still more to learn about God and the world, and that knowledge can come from places other than the Sacred Word.<sup>13</sup>

### Contextualization

An understanding of the culture is critical in an effective evangelistic approach. “To reach and have an impact on the current generation, the church must develop an awareness of the cultures and subcultures of the emerging generations and be willing to redefine and reinvent its methodologies with the aim



of impacting the youth culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup> The culture we wish to impact is digital. For this reason, we seek a way to communicate the gospel in a language that digital natives can understand and embrace. But we also realize that this pursuit may have an effect on us, those bringing the message of the gospel to the digital world. “Like mission workers in a foreign land, we must learn the language and customs of a new culture and risk being changed by it for the sake of the Good News.”<sup>15</sup> The greatest risk we face is not in the changing of our theology, but in the changing of our traditions, practices, and spaces which we must be willing to sacrifice to reach this generation.

To reach the goal of speaking the language of the digital culture we turn to contextualization. Enoch Wan’s definition of contextualization is “the efforts of formulating, presenting and practicing the Christian faith in such a way that is relevant to the cultural context of the target group in terms of conceptualization, expression and application; yet maintaining theological coherence,

biblical integrity and theoretical consistency.”<sup>16</sup> We look to find the language and concepts that will clearly present a gospel that is faithful to the Scriptures.

Contextualization takes reflection and planning. It is a process that, if done prayerfully and thoughtfully, can have positive results in reaching a culture. Song took a four-step approach to contextualize material to help reach and disciple the people of the Philippines.<sup>17</sup> This approach can be taken and applied to have a contextualized approach to evangelism that can reach the digital culture.

#### *Declare*

“State the supra-contextual message of the Bible.”<sup>18</sup> A decision needs to be made by those delivering the message. What will be communicated from the Bible that is above culture? What narrative will be brought forth? A declaration must be made, and it must be simple and unitive. We must remember that the members of the digital culture are looking for cooperative connection. They want to connect and contribute. The message brought forth from the gospel will only be attractive if it offers these elements.

The story of Jesus is one of reconnection. A lost race, disconnected from their Creator because of sin, finds a way back to their heavenly Father because of the sacrifice of a son. And now, because of that sacrifice, all those who are disconnected can once again live in connection with their creator. And if that wasn’t enough, that connection with God cannot be eternally lost as long as one is willing to repent and reconnect. And now a connection with God means a connection with His body, a group of believers, who lovingly accept all people.

A mistake that we make is to bring a message that has no meaning to the culture we are trying to reach. Lectures on timetables, prophetic interpretations, temperance, and apocalyptic scenarios, although valuable at the right time, will detract from our evangelistic pursuits with the digital culture. The message must be simple and clear.

#### *Discover*

This may be where the greatest investment must take place. Efforts should be made to discover what are the greatest needs of the culture. Multiple conversations must be had with members of the culture to find out how they live, what they are dreaming about, and what they are missing. With this kind of information, the message of the gospel can be fine-tuned.

To do this, those who are carrying the message must spend time in the spaces where the digital natives live. Coffee shops, internet cafés, high schools, college campuses, and online communities are just some of the places where you will find digital natives. The messengers need to understand what the latest digital crazes are. What movies are being watched? What books are being read? What shows are binge-watched on Netflix? An interest must be shown in their world. And when you are welcomed into their world you are allowed to bring a piece of your world into theirs. Then, and only then, one has earned the right to speak and share about what he or she believes and thinks. A door has opened that was not there before.

The challenge is that the traditional method of evangelism is more instantaneous. What I am suggesting above will take time because relationships, deep relationships, must be formed. Remember that digital natives are looking for connection, both online and offline. They will listen to the message from

someone they have a connection with, especially if that connection exists in virtual and embodied spaces.

### *Design*

Here is where a decision is made on the form of the message. Maybe the message will be shared as a blog, Instagram or Facebook post, YouTube video, website, or face-to-face interaction. Maybe your church will design an app or create printed and digital material to be distributed in your online and offline community. Or maybe it will be all of the above. Taking into account budget, time, knowledge, and personnel will help narrow down the options. The message must come in some form, the decision of which is in the hands of the individual and the church.

We are proud of our traditional strategies for evangelism and they have had success. It is difficult to set some of these methods aside to find new ways of bringing the message of the gospel to a new generation. It is also hard to justify investing in something new that does not have a proven track record of success in reaching youth. It is much easier to continue to do what we have always done and hope for the best. This has been our method of youth ministry for many years; however, new methods must be explored in order to be more effective in reaching this generation.

### *Deliver*

Once the form of the message has been created it is now time for it to be delivered to its intended audience. The message must always come from a person, whether online or offline. This message is not a billboard saying, “Jesus Saves!” It comes from someone who has earned the right to share in the space with those of the community. This is not the preacher on the street corner asking if people are going to heaven or hell. This is the person who is embraced and embraces and has something to share to add value to the group.

The danger is that there is risk in sharing, especially online. This is not for the faint of heart. But if we think of the apostles, their sharing also had risk. The risk we face is that someone will tell us to “die” or that our comments “hurt their eyes”. The apostles faced beatings and death for sharing their stories about Jesus. I’m not sure we have much of an excuse.

## **Conclusion**

Evangelism in a digital culture is a new frontier that must be explored. Traditional methods of evangelism may not bring the church the results it is looking for. There is a need to contextualize the gospel so that it can be understood and embraced by the digital natives. The process I am recommending to help evangelists deliver that message is to choose the clear and simple message that will be shared, take time to discover the needs of the digital culture, design the form in which the message will be shared, and deliver that message on a personal level, whether online or offline.

Although this approach can bring some positive results, it is still necessary that the evangelists delivering the message be disciples of Christ. “The foundational issue to be addressed, therefore, is the need for whole-life disciples who live as a missional presence in the midst of our digital culture.”<sup>19</sup> When we have true disciples of Christ, whether they be digital aliens, pioneers, or natives, who are connecting both in virtual and embodied spaces, we have the

opportunity to share the gospel with a digital culture that is seeking connection and cooperation.

*Ready Player One* presented us a future that is immersed in the virtual world. Is the author a prophet, showing us what we should look forward to? Maybe, but that does not change our mission. We are still to bring the Good News to all the world, even the digital one. This is not an impossibility, because ultimately everyone needs to know Jesus and this can happen in the virtual and non-virtual world. Our new reality may be that we must work within both of these worlds. Even the protagonist from *Ready Player One* came to this conclusion, “That was when I realized, as terrifying and painful as reality can be, it’s also the only place where you can find true happiness. Because reality is real.”

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**Youth  
Evangelism  
on Campus**

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## SHARING CHRIST IN OUR CLASSROOMS: LESSONS FROM TEACHING RELIGION AT LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY

Theodore N. Levterov

### The Context

Teaching religion at Loma Linda University is both challenging and exciting. On one hand, it is challenging since religion is *not* the main concentration for most of my students. They have joined Loma Linda to become medical professionals such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other health related specialists. Each student, nevertheless, is *required* to take one religious class per year. Loma Linda University is part of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system which emphasizes the “wholeness” in its educational curriculum—in other words, education must involve the development of the whole person. Students are encouraged not only to develop their academic skills, but also their emotional and spiritual capacities.

But to ask medical professionals to take “religious classes” amidst their heavy and burdensome academic schedule is challenging. I have found that many of my students (at least initially) wonder why they must take such a class. Maybe their reaction would be different if they knew that in the early 1900s the first medical students at the College of Medical Evangelists (what later became the Loma Linda University) were required to take mostly religious classes and very few medically specialized courses. That being said—the challenge remains real.

On the other hand, teaching religion at Loma Linda University can be an exciting adventure since the classroom is a mixture of students from various religious traditions—Catholic and Protestant Christians, Mormons, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, to mention a few.<sup>i</sup> Even students that are Seventh-day Adventists differ in their commitment and understanding of their own denomination. To complicate things, it is not unusual that few students will be atheists or agnostics.

Since my narrow specialty is Adventist studies, my classes have been related to Adventist history and its health traditions. So the question is: How do you introduce such topics to such a vastly diverse group of students with no particular interest in religion or Adventism? Could it be that our classrooms have become a “mission field”? Or as Dr. Richard Hart, the president of Loma Linda University, has recently asked: “Has the time come when we should openly invite students of other faiths to join our campuses as we look to share our message and strengthen our academic offerings?”<sup>ii</sup>

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i As Jared Wright has reported recently, recruiting non-Adventist students is already “the norm” in Adventist Higher Education outside of North America. The data also makes clear that Adventist Colleges and Universities in North America have begun to go into the same direction. Instead of being “centers” of learning primarily for Adventists, our campuses are increasingly joined by students of other faith traditions. See: Jared Wright, “Recruiting Non-Adventist students Already the Norm in Adventist Higher Education,” *Spectrum*, Apr. 26, 2017. <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2017/04/26/recruiting-non-adventist-students-already-norm-adventist-higher-education>.

ii Richard Hart, “Being Distinctive or Being Inclusive?,” *Newsletter*, April 6, 2017.

Now, let me be clear: I do not believe that the classroom is a place for proselytizing. My job is *not* to make my students Seventh-day Adventists. However, I do think that it is my obligation to share and present Adventism and make students aware of my faith tradition in the best possible way. After all, I have personally decided to be a Seventh-day Adventist and my students have the right to know why I have made this choice and commitment.

So the question is—how are we to share the Adventist story in the classroom? And can it be relevant to this new generation of youth in the 21st Century? In the next section I will give three perspectives (approaches) that I have found helpful as I have taught Adventist heritage of health at Loma Linda University. Then I will conclude with some general observations of how these perspectives can be used in doing youth evangelism today.

### Sharing Adventism in the Classroom

Since I am teaching mostly classes related to Adventist history on health, my experience has taught me to use three major approaches in order to make “religion” classes interesting, informative and exciting.

First, I have begun a “new-old” technique of teaching Adventist history through the means of “stories.” There are several benefits of teaching through stories. First, it makes learning “enjoyable.” Second, it puts the academic information within its proper context. And third, it helps students to learn and retain information much more effectively and efficiently. As John Walsh has pointed out, the majority of our audiences today “think in stories, they remember stories, and they will listen if you tell stories.”<sup>iii</sup> Melanie C. Green, whose research examined the impact of narratives on individual beliefs also writes that “the power of stories has been recognized for centuries, and even today, in Hollywood and beyond, storytelling is a multi-million dollar business. Stories are a natural mode of thinking; before our formal education begins, we are already learning from Aesop’s fables, fairy tales, or family history. Indeed, some researchers have even claimed that all knowledge comes in the form of stories...Although this strong claim has been questioned, it is generally agreed that stories are a powerful structure for organizing and transmitting information, and for creating meaning in our lives and environments.”<sup>iv</sup>

In my particular context of teaching the Adventist heritage of health, I have observed that using this method helps student to understand both – the development of the Adventist thinking on the subject of health and to appreciate the Adventist contribution to health and healthful living. What is fascinating, however, is that through the Adventist story I am able to share significant issues that relate to morality, ethics, social justice, culture, etc. Ultimately, I am able to share the “supernatural story” of God and guide students to realize (or at least become aware) of their spiritual needs. As noted above, this is a unique part of the Adventist educational tradition. The use of stories, therefore, is a useful tool for such educational purposes.

A second perspective that I have found helpful when sharing Adventism in the classroom has to do with the concept of “being real.” I not only tell the Adventist story, but I share the “true story” of my church. Seventh-day Adventists have

iii John Walsh, *The Art of Story Telling: Easy Steps to Presenting an Unforgettable Story* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 21.

iv Melanie C. Green, “Storytelling in Teaching,” *Observer*, Apr. 2004. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/issue/april-04>.

often had the tendency to idealize their movement. (To be fair to my own faith tradition, such tendencies are tempting for any religious group or organization). Take for example one of the main founders and visionary leaders of the Adventist denomination: Ellen G. White. Possibly because of her prophetic status, her image has often been *mis*-represented. Perhaps, we—as Seventh-day Adventists—have unintentionally created this “unreal” and “unrealistic” holy persona that nobody can relate to. Consequently, two extreme attitudes toward Ellen White have developed over the years: those who reject her and claim she is no longer relevant and those who magnify her beyond her prophetic significance. Both extremes are particularly damaging to Adventism and its mission.

Sharing the Adventist story is important, but sharing the *true story* of Adventism is by far more important and essential in explaining our heritage to the world. One example that I often give to my students is the marriage relationship between Ellen White and her husband James White. While it seems that they truly loved each other, like all families—they also had their marital struggles. In 1876, for instance, James was in the East doing evangelism while Ellen stayed in the West. Judging from some letters that Ellen White wrote to her friend, Lucinda Hall, we know that the Whites went through some major disagreements. In fact, Ellen and James White were contemplating living and working “apart” from each other (at least for a while) since they could not stand each other’s company. The tone in the letters was anything but Christian. It took several correspondences until Ellen White realized that she needed to apologize to her husband and ask for forgiveness. She also asked Lucinda, her friend, to burn her letters as she felt embarrassed that she had written them.<sup>v</sup>

The point being is that giving the “true story,” helps students to relate to the Adventist story and consequently to apply and relate it to their own story. After all, the candid reality of Adventist history reveals the principle that God is more than willing to work with imperfect, struggling people who desperately need Him and His amazing grace. This is the “good news” that we find in the Scriptures. In fact, this must be “the core” of any evangelism that we attempt to do. The story of Adventism is not a perfect story, but that is precisely why it can, if presented accurately, be attractive and appealing to students and people in general.

My third perspective relates to the above point. I challenge my students to “try” and “experience” God personally before making any judgment about the importance of spirituality in their own lives. My logic is simple: You cannot evaluate a “chocolate” before you taste it. From an Adventist context such a challenge is logical. Writing on the topic of education in the 1900’s Ellen White noted that its primary aim was (and still is) to bring students into a personal relationship with God. Within the context of the Great Controversy story she penned: “In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one. . . . To aid the student in comprehending these principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher’s first effort and his constant aim. The teacher who accepts this aim is in truth a co-worker with Christ, a laborer together with God.”<sup>vi</sup>

Beyond that, she saw the ultimate revelation of true education in *service* for the good of humanity. “Our ideas of education,” she wrote, “take too narrow and

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v I am personally glad that Lucinda Hall did not burn the letters. See: Ellen White’s letters to Lucinda Hall, May 10, May 12, May 16, May 17, 1876, Heritage Research Center, Loma Linda University, CA.

vi Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 30.

too low a range... True education means more than pursuing a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It *prepares the student for the joy of service in this world*, and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”<sup>vii</sup>

In line with that, I ask all of my students to read the book *Ministry of Healing*. For one, it was written to help Loma Linda and the Adventist medical education financially. The book curiously, was published in 1905 – the same year when the Loma Linda Sanitarium was purchased. And two, the book explains the general Adventist philosophy of health and its relation to mission. Surprisingly (or maybe not so surprisingly) this book has had a huge impact on many of the students as they read and study the Adventist story of health and healthful living. So, let me share with you some of their responses before we make some concluding remarks on how one can apply the above principles to youth evangelism today.

At the end of my classes, I ask students to respond to a question on how knowing the Adventist story of health may impact their future practice of medicine and/or their personal life.<sup>viii</sup> One student, a Christian, wrote:

Before entering Loma Linda University, I knew very little about Seventh-day Adventists, their mission, and their works. Since entering this school, interacting with SDA classmates, and of course, after having taken this class on SDA history, I have come to greatly appreciate the SDA mission and to understand the meaning of “To Make Man Whole.” I absolutely love the wholistic approach to healing – mind, body, and spirit. As Ellen White emphasized in her book, *The Ministry of Healing*, the three are interconnected and to be sick in one area will affect all others as well... This course has been very enjoyable for the background of why LLU has its motto: “To Make Man Whole”... and why our very education is structured the way it is. This course has made me even more appreciative to be receiving my education here.

Another student, not particularly religious, noted:

I came into this class very skeptical of a religious class, for I don’t consider myself of a particular religion... As the class progressed through the weeks and I began to understand the SDA philosophy I found myself agreeing more and more [with it]. I believe this class has strengthened my relationship with God immensely. Especially from reading *The Ministry of Healing*—the concept of prayer became more clear to me as a personal connection with God... I intend to bring prayer in my [future] medical practice.

Here is a short excerpt from a non-Christian student:

Coming into this class, I had no idea what to expect or how to relate it to my future occupation. Was it going to be a boring history class that enumerates dates after dates in a chronological order? I was dreading that. However, halfway through the class, I started to get interested

vii Ibid., 13. (Emphasis supplied).

viii These responses comes from an essay that I ask students to write as part of their final exam. I have kept the original writings as the students had expressed themselves.

and started to realize that all these [health] principles are applicable to me and my future occupation. Subjects like a balanced life and wholeness are absolutely essential in PT. As a physical therapist, I try to think of preventive care versus immediate symptom treatment. This absolutely overlaps with the principles that Seventh-day Adventists follow... Knowledge of how to live a balanced life will benefit me and my patients in the long run.

And here is a writing from a Seventh-day Adventist student:

This class has given me a more wholesome view of Adventist practices, the reasons behind them, and the health message. I was actually born into the Adventist church, but didn't grow up going to Adventist schools. Though my parents and church taught me about God and the Bible, I must confess I didn't know much of the background of my own church... This course has helped me reflect on my beliefs and look into the reasoning behind why I have always lived a certain way. Many times, growing up, Seventh-day Adventist beliefs just seemed like silly rules—not being able to go to a friends' birthday party on a Friday night or eat a pepperoni pizza.

After much reading and pondering on Ellen G. White's writings (which I hadn't done much of before), I realized that there is a reason to it... It is about choosing to live a better life; to be able to hold an even better relationship with Christ; and be more able to do God's work.

I think many of the things will be of value to me because I do want to live a life to serve God, and this class has not only helped me learn how I can do that but has also encouraged me to do so.

### Conclusions: Perspectives on Youth Evangelism

There are several conclusions that can be drawn as a result of the experiences I have had with my students that could be useful for reaching the youth of today. These principles can be applied in various context, such as church, home, or schools. First, teaching the Adventist story may help young people with their sense of “identity.” Knowing who you are gives one a sense of belonging, a sense of being a part of a community – something bigger than your individual self. Richard Rice is right when he notes that “community is the most important element of Christian existence. Believing, behaving, and belonging are all essential to the Christian life, but belonging is more important, more fundamental than the others.”<sup>ix</sup> In fact, the first church of Christians grew rapidly because believers belonged to a community that cared for one another (See: Acts 2:46; Acts 4:32; Gal. 6:10).

Second, the Adventist story could be used as a tool for teaching Biblical beliefs and practices. For instance, the Adventist story is fascinating because it attempts to resemble the two major concerns of Jesus – the “future” and the “now.” On the one hand, Jesus taught people about the “kingdom of God” that was coming—the “future.” On the other hand, however, He was constantly concerned with people and their present needs—the “now.” Ellen White points out that “Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching.”<sup>x</sup>

ix Ricard Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Finding New Love for the Church* (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2002), 6.

x Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1942), 19.

In a similar way—Adventism has the same two concerns. The Second Coming of Jesus is a major Adventist belief. Its significance is underlined in the fact that it is even a part of our very name. The concept of the coming of Jesus is especially comforting since it gives hope and meaning to a world that endures suffering, injustice and fear because of sin and its consequences. However, Adventists are also concerned with life here and now. It is no accident, I think, that our church has the largest Protestant health and educational systems in the world. Adventist missionaries are literally serving humanity in all parts of the world. This is a crucial component of Adventist “mission and evangelism.” Knowing the Adventist story, then, is essential for one’s identity and mission.<sup>xi</sup>

Third, successful youth evangelism involves being “authentic” or “real.” Authenticity is a tool through which others see your vulnerability. In addition, it builds trust. The Adventist story can be used for evangelism because it is a real-life story of struggling people. We may note that the whole Sabbath-keeping movement was started by young people who were not perfect, but willing to serve God despite their flaws and disappointments. What is distinctive about Seventh-day Adventists, then, is not their vast Biblical knowledge of prophecy or their peculiar theology—but their willingness to serve God and fulfill His mission by bringing the “everlasting gospel” to a dying world. It is an authentic and down-to-earth story. It is a story of youth for youth.

A fourth lesson for successful youth evangelism is the emphasis on “personal experience.” By its very essence, faith in God cannot be forced on people no matter how logical one’s reasoning may be. In fact, logic cannot fully explain the Divine. Spiritual realities, therefore, cannot be imposed; they must be experienced. True evangelism must encourage young and old to take time and “experience” God for themselves in order to make an intelligent decision about Him.

Thus, I propose that the Adventist story can be a great tool for mission and evangelism to the youth. Young people are drawn to communities of like-minded people with stories similar to theirs. They also are willing to listen to those who are “real” and “authentic” and dislike artificiality. And they desire to “experience” things for themselves. Youth evangelism will do well to work with these principles in mind.

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<sup>xi</sup> It is interesting to note that during each of the 2018 Spring and Autumn Councils of the General Conference Executive Committee, time is set aside for personal testimonies addressing the question, “Who Are We and Why Are We Here?”

## PCM: EVANGELISM IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

**Israel Ramos**  
**Director of Michigan Conference**  
**Public Campus Ministries Department**

### **A Case for the Public College & University**

It is estimated that more than 75% of our Adventist college students are attending non-Adventist institutions of higher learning.<sup>1</sup> The challenges are many and complex. First is the financial challenge. Simply put, Adventist education is significantly more expensive than public education<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, a growing segment of the North American Division church membership is made up of minority groups. These individuals—especially African-American, Asian, and Latino students are viewed as a growing asset by colleges and universities in some of our nation’s most populous states. Backed by substantial government support, these state colleges heavily target minority groups in an effort to “embrace our demographic future.”<sup>3</sup> This poses a significant problem for Adventist institutions of higher learning.

Another major challenge lies in Adventist attitudes toward and differing views on Adventist education. For example, a crucial question is whether Adventist professors teaching in Adventist schools should be at liberty to promote educational material that is contrary to the teachings of the church (even though the church funds and owns the school). While some advocate for academic freedom, others argue for the protection of the youth of our church. The resulting point is that some have concluded that Adventist Education should be blamed for the estimated 50% of our Adventist young people that are leaving the church.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the validity of the arguments, the reality is that an increasing number of Adventist students are finding a growing list of reasons for not attending Adventist colleges and universities.

In essence, Adventist education is facing several challenges so that a much higher percentage of our youth are attending public colleges and universities. While Adventist education is still very relevant and important, and while much efforts and many resources should be invested to reach the youth in our universities, at least equal energy and resources should be dedicated to ministry on public campuses.

### **Reach the Campus, Reach the World**

Another good reason to make intentional and dedicated efforts to do evangelism on campuses is the high number of international students that attend colleges and universities in North America. According to the Institute of International Education (the leading non-profit educational exchange organization in the United States), more than one million or 10% of students studying in our country’s colleges and universities are international students. The majority of these individuals are studying at universities offering doctoral degrees, indicating that many of them are seeking graduate education. The international



student's family provides an overwhelming 60% of their primary source funding. These statistics indicate that the international students on our public college campuses are highly educated and financially wealthy. There is also a significant possibility that many of these individuals will return to their homes to become their country's leaders.

Compounding the missional significance of their education, wealth, and future are the countries of origin of most international students in the United States: Saudi Arabia, China, India, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan make up more than 60% of the international student population on public college campuses<sup>5</sup>. These countries are from a region of the world known as the 10-40 Window—the area with the greatest number of unreached people groups. Thirteen of the top 25 places of origin for international students are nations whose populations are predominantly or entirely non-Christian.<sup>6</sup>

Although sending missionaries on overseas mission trips is critical to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is hard to justify a more efficient method of world mission outreach than reaching international students on public university campuses. In addition to engaging the future leaders of the world and the wealthy and educated, public campus ministry is more effective from a pragmatic standpoint. International students of non-Christian religions who are studying on American college campuses have already overcome the language barrier. Also, we are engaging them on safer grounds. Furthermore, in many cases, we have an easier time engaging with them on a cultural level than we would if we were guests in their home countries.

In essence, reaching the public college campus has the potential of being the most effective missional way to reach the world of non-Christian global religions, as well as the North American Division's largest unreached people group in its territory.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it places the youth and young adults of our church at the very center of this crucial evangelistic endeavor.

### **Evangelism on Campus: Four Suggestions, One Goal**

Although there are many creative approaches for evangelism on the public college campus, the next section provides four suggestions and an overarching goal:

1. **Build Community.** First, community is becoming more crucially important for college students. For many students, loneliness—the feeling that social needs are not being adequately met—is a common experience on college campuses.<sup>8</sup> In fact, some experts say that loneliness has hit epidemic proportions among millennials in the United States.<sup>9</sup> If this trend is true with American students, how much more true is it with international students who are separated from their family by greater distances? Providing space for wholesome community and simply being friends with students can be a great way of ministering to their needs. Having barbecues, wholesome game nights, and meaningful meetings are simple, effective ways to build community among students.
2. **Facilitate Cultural Acclimatization.** Second, many international students have an appreciation for American Culture. However, students from other countries often discover that there are major differences between our educational system and what they're accustomed to at home: professors have office hours, the grading system is different, group projects

are sometimes required, and more.<sup>10</sup> The Harvard International Office describes three phases of culture shock that are typically experienced by international students: the Honeymoon, the Rejection, and the Recovery.<sup>11</sup> Becoming aware of these phases and applying them to campus ministry in the local context is a good way to culturally engage and minister to international students. Inviting international students to celebrate holidays—American or from their native country—or learning about other aspects of our culture is a good way to reach them.

3. **Provide Tutoring.** Tutoring is a third significant way to reach the needs of students. Helping others academically is a strong way to serve others and practice Christ's method of reaching people. For instance, in the case of international students, English is not their first language and they'll have to study longer hours in order to fully grasp material; this provides a great opportunity to meet a real felt need as well as to build community.
4. **Foster Spiritual Conversations.** Fourth, students welcome spiritual conversations more than many anticipate. The reason why some do not experience successful spiritual conversation with students is usually because they lack a tactful approach or unwise timing. In most cases, it is fairly easy to engage in spiritual discussion when it becomes a natural part of your everyday living. When spirituality is not something we put on and take off, but is instead who we are, spiritual conversations lose their awkwardness and become meaningful for the Adventist student and the non-Christian student, alike.

Ultimately, the main goal of campus evangelism should be, not only to share truthful biblical information, but also and especially to reveal Christ in one's life. In the early Christian church, as Ellen White puts it, "one interest prevailed; one subject of emulation swallowed up all others. The ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom."<sup>12</sup> In other words, central to any evangelistic effort, and particularly to evangelism on campus, is the goal to share the person and the character of Jesus Christ.

In closing, public campus ministry today, has the potential of being one of the most effective models of ministry, mission and evangelism, by and for youth and young adults, both from North America and beyond. Now, more than ever, the church cannot afford to neglect that.

## Endnotes

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## THE STRENGTH OF WEAK TIES

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Weak ties that connect social networks have been proven to be critical to exposing individuals to opportunities in the workplace, novel ideas, and personal enrichment as members of society. Evangelism, particularly during the formative years of young adulthood benefits by mission driven individuals who have developed social networks in which they maintain and nurture weak social ties. The following story illustrates this point well.

### **Masitewal, Abeba, and Weak Ties**

Masitewal had been a graduate of Salem State College in Salem, MA for three months when she received a phone call from a college acquaintance. “I’m ready to know more about the Bible,” said Abeba. Masitewal, agreed and an appointment was made for that Thursday evening. Little did either of them know that God had much more in mind for them than a quiet, unassuming Bible study. “I’ll see you later at the library” Said Abeba. “Oh, and I’m bringing three of my friends.” Masitewal’s eyes widened as she heard the news that in a few hours she would be giving her first Bible study to not one, but four students. “I was so nervous!” Masitewal admits. “I was afraid they would be bored to death!” So she took a deep breath and, like so many times during her enrollment as a student at Salem State, prayed that God would work a miracle for her school.

For four years Masitewal had prayed that God would start something on her Campus. “As soon as I arrived there I realized that there was no community of believers for me to be a part of. I had no one to talk to about my faith and found myself hungering and thirsting for God.” That’s when the praying began: “Lord, if only there was a group of students who could gather and strengthen each other in their faith... I know it can happen.”

During her last year at Salem State, Masitewal was introduced to a group of young people in her home of Cambridge who were taking Campus Ministries seriously. Seeing the work being done on the campuses around Boston, she remembers asking herself “Why can’t we do that here in Salem?” The only problem was that Masitewal was extremely shy and didn’t have any close friends at Salem State. She didn’t feel capable of evangelizing the students on her Campus. That’s where the Holy Spirit and the strength of weak ties stepped in.

“I knew there was something different about her.” Abeba remembers referring to first meeting Masitewal at a gathering of Ethiopian students attending Salem State University. “I was afraid of her at first because I was told how committed to here faith she was. As I got to know her though, I realized that she was just like any other person. She was just committed to serving God. And that’s what interested me, because I was searching for answers.” So Abeba decided to keep her eyes out for Masitewal. They didn’t become close friends right away; much of their interaction was casual, usually at the cafeteria or a gathering of

the Ethiopian student group. But they maintained their weak tie, until one day, Abeba decided to make the phone call.

### The Strength of Weak Ties

In his work on Social Network Theory, John S. Granovetter laid out three basic categories of social ties: strong, weak and absent. Strong ties can be described as those close friends and family members who make up your inner circle. Absent ties are people with whom you have no to negligible interactions. You may recognize each other due to your proximity (neighbor, classmate, etc.) but your interactions are limited to a head nod or occasional “Hello”.

Weak ties lie somewhere in between. They are acquaintances with whom we may share some common interests and friends but with whom we rarely interact. This is someone you would be surprised to receive a personal message or text from, but whom you would recognize if you did so.

One of the significant discoveries of Granovetter’s research is that most of the new job opportunities that individuals received, came from their weak ties rather than their strong ones. It is reasoned that this is because strong ties tend to create redundancy in ideas, information and opportunities. It is the weak ties that create the connections between one node of social interactions and another, and that which builds the bridges of new opportunities, ideas and relationships.<sup>1</sup>

These insights into social network theory are significant when considering the opportunities for evangelism on public university campuses. Many Adventist students who attend public universities develop weak ties with an extremely broad spectrum of students, faculty and staff. Whether through their housing situation, class projects, intramural sports or cultural clubs, Adventist students are developing the very kinds of relationships that are most conducive to introducing others to the Gospel message and a Christ centered, biblical world view.

What I have found though, is that many students do not realize the potential in their weak ties, or have developed a protectionist view of their faith that keeps them from being intentional in their conversations and interactions with their weak ties. This leads them to either develop social networks that are disengaged from each other, or to only invest in the strong ties of their inner-faith circle without sustaining their weak ties, eventually leading them to become absent.

As leaders, I believe we have a role to play in modeling and training young adults in the development and maintenance of weak ties. This, I believe is entailed in the “mingling” outlined in what Ellen White describes as “Christ’s Method” when it comes to the personal work of evangelism. She writes: “Christ’s methods alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior *mingled* with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”<sup>2</sup>

### Social Convoys

In their book *Consequential Strangers: Turning Everyday Encounters Into Life Changing Moments*, Melinda Blau and Karen Fingerman describe the weak and strong ties that we carry with us through our life as a “Social Convoy—A

Caravan of the various connections you make as you travel through life. They are resources, available as the need arises.”<sup>3</sup>

As Seventh-day Adventists, are we intentionally traveling through life in the social convoys of those outside our faith? Are we maintaining the loose connections and weak ties that allow people to think of and reach out to us when they encounter a particular need? Maybe a neighbor who’s dog needs a last minute sitter, or a classmate who needs a last minute ride to the supermarket. Perhaps a friend of a friend who is going through a spiritual crisis and is searching for answers to life’s deepest questions.

In my experience as a campus minister and local church pastor, I regularly witness how weak ties serve as the vital bridges leading people into saving faith and Christian community. More often than not, however, we don’t take time to discover ways to intentionally nurture and expand these weak ties in ways that would maximize their gospel effect. I believe that Adventists should be at the forefront of joining the social convoys of as many people in their community as possible. Whether through joining neighborhood organizations, social justice campaigns, cultural clubs, or by being present and mindful of the natural ties that they experience through the everyday stuff of their lives, there is huge potential for evangelistic labor in the great harvest field of our social networks.

### **From Weak Ties to Strong Results**

The day of the first Bible Study arrived. Masitewal presented a simple study on the validity of the Word of God. “They loved it...and I was shocked!”, Masitewal recounts. They agreed to meet again the next week and Abeba decided to keep inviting people. Soon the group had outgrown the library space and moved to the student center lobby. More than a dozen of Abeba’s friends were gathering for the weekly study. One week the number swelled to over 50.

“What amazes me the most is that we never put up one poster. We never did one survey,” declares Masitewal. “Without much learning about the Bible, Abeba allowed the Holy Spirit to use her to invite one person at a time and now we see the amazing results.” Masitewal was unaware of the vastness of Abeba’s social network on campus. She was a social butterfly with many friends and acquaintances. When she got excited about the gospel she would spend her week insisting that her friends attend the weekly Bible study. Because of the social capital of her weak ties, her friends complied to her invitation with gladness. If it meant this much to Abeba, there must be something to it. When asked to explain her boldness, and success in bringing others to the studies, Abeba simply replied, “When I started, I liked it. And as much as I was learning, I wanted my friends to know too.”

### **Conclusion**

The apostle Paul understood the power of weak ties and used them for the benefit of the work of the Kingdom of God. His connections to Hellenistic thought, Roman citizenship, Jewish ritual and Pagan mythology allowed him to build the kind of bridges across which the message of Christ and Him crucified could be carried throughout the world. As a church planter and tent-maker, Paul developed weak ties with his colleagues in enterprise and ministry.<sup>4</sup> We would do well to take his example as our own.

I have seen in my work on campus and in the local church that, when we do engage in mission, we often do so by seeking to engage strong ties or absent ties. While we do meet with relative success at times, I have seen the most evangelistic success through capitalizing on weak ties, some of which laid dormant for years before coming to fruition.

As leaders, we should do more to encourage the creation of, and stepping into already established third spaces that form the weak ties necessary for effective mission. We should also model the development of a rich network of weak ties by engaging the marketplace, our neighborhoods and campuses in creative and disinterested ways.

### Endnotes

- 1 Mark S. Granovetter. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 1973 78:6, 1360-1380.
  - 2 Ellen G. White. *The Ministry of Healing*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2003), 143. Emphasis provided.
  - 3 Melinda Blau and Karen Fingerma. *Consequential Strangers: Turning Everyday Encounters Into Life Changing Moments*, (NY: W.W. Norton and Company Incorporated, 2009), 41.
  - 4 John Lee. "Learning From Paul to Leverage Networking for Missions." *Christianity Today International Journal*, August 2017.
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# 3

## Mobilizing Our Youth for Evangelism

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## A FRESH LOOK AT SUMMER CAMP MINISTRY

**Erik VanDenburgh**  
**Hawaii Conference Youth Director**

There have been many studies as to why youth and young adults are leaving the church; however, there seems to be little to no research on the effects of traditional evangelism within this demographic. Many ministries in the church serve these groups, but as of yet, there is nothing established in terms of public evangelism designed specifically for them. Thus, it seems as though traditional adult public evangelism is the main method by which the church has attempted to reach into the community and grow the kingdom of God for all ages.

In his book *Everlasting Gospel, Ever-Changing World*, Jon Paulien says that, “People need to be addressed in a language with which they are familiar. The reason that the Adventist message is spreading like wildfire in places like New Guinea, the Philippines, Kenya, and parts of the Caribbean is that Adventism as we normally express it is exactly what those people are looking for. But in other places, the same message seems out of context. God meets people where they are, and He invites us to follow His example and do the same”<sup>1</sup>. He goes on to say that, “Meeting people where they are means that analyzing the audience is the first step in reaching out to the secular mainstream, whether modern or postmodern. We need to listen before we talk. People have the power to tune out the gospel. If we fail to meet them where they are, the message will not reach them even if it is staring them in the face. We need to spend time discovering the felt needs of individuals and groups before the gospel can be presented to them in power”<sup>2</sup>.

It is easy to make assumptions as to why traditional adult public evangelism isn't working with youth and young adults, but in order to have a more accurate perspective we asked those who are trying to be reached. A group of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) young adults between the ages of 25 and 30 were asked what they thought about how the church conducts evangelism, and by-and-large their sentiment is that traditional evangelism lacks intentionality, high-quality programming, authentic community, and practical life applicability.

One interviewee, Danika Ouzounian said, “Evangelism fails because it's not done well. I want excellence in everything I do and am a part of. I often feel that the church settles for mediocrity and does not strive for excellence. I want a program that is intentional”. In addition, she said that, “Evangelism excels when it makes the young adult feel a part of the ministry. You want to be spiritually inspired and feel like a contributing part of the community”.

Another young adult, Nic Reichert, stated, “ ‘Evangelism’ in the traditional sense doesn't appeal to our age demographic. That term is associated with isolated events where someone shows up, preaches, and then leaves. Our age demographic wants more of a relationship. To be talked with and not ‘evangelized’ to. I would like to feel like I am part of a community that actively does things

and makes a difference, as opposed to showing up to a place or meeting and that's it. This generation, generally, likes action and service in my experience”.

Finally, Zachary Surovec, the young adult chaplain at Thunderbird Adventist Academy, shared, “I think there is something to be said about intentional programming. I enjoy going to something that is ran well. It makes me feel that people are intentionally trying to connect with me and it communicates that I'm important to them so maybe they should be important to me. If that's the case, I'm always more likely to take time out of my schedule to listen to them. I want to believe that by having gone to this event I'll will be a better person because of it. There's so much that fights for my attention and I want to know that the time I'm giving up to be there will be worth my time and not a waste of it”.

### **Summer Camp Participation as Evangelism Model**

Youth and young adult evangelism, at least in the traditional sense, seems to be somewhat ineffective within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, there is a ministry of the church that seems to be reaching our youth and young adults, both in the church and those from the outside. This ministry is summer camp. Every summer, our camps are full of youth and young adults who are eager to be at a place where God is alive and present. Thousands of decisions are made each summer, including campers and staff alike who sign up for Bible study lessons, baptism and who commit or re-commit their lives to Christ. Campers often make comments to the tune of, “Camp is the best place in the world” or “I wish I could stay here forever.” However, these types of comments are not just isolated to campers, traditionally thought of as being the ones ministered to. They also regularly come from the staff.

Jared Siok, a young adult and long-time camp staff member, said, “Camp, when I look back on it, feels like a sliver of what Heaven is like, in all honesty. After my experience at camp, I have a prayer that every day that I live, every day that I can be alive, it can be like a day at Camp Waianae<sup>3</sup>, where everyone was just loving on each other—connected harmoniously in peace and serenity. Working at Camp Waianae has been a wonderful experience. It's been so rewarding for me. Being able to serve, being able to step out of my own self and into the lives of these kids at this camp, it's impacted me, I believe, for the rest of my life. It's something that I carry with me every single day knowing that I'm not just Jared, living for myself, but that I can be an influence on others. I love working with kids. I love youth ministry”.

Simply put, summer camp is a place where youth and young adults are grounded in their relationship with God and a place where they long to be. They take these experiences with them through life and hold onto them hoping to find something in the church that is as meaningful and fulfilling as their experience over the summer. In the next few sections we share some ideas on how to utilize summer camp for effective youth and young adult evangelism, based on recent experiences at Camp Waianae.

### **Importance of Staff Mentorship**

Camp Waianae piloted a staff mentorship program that had intentionality, excellent programing, provided authentic community, and possessed practical life application. Over the summer, our staff pastor focused on three main areas dealing with their identity, purpose and worth, which helped to ground them

in their identity as sons and daughters of God. On the last day of camp, these young adults had grown so much in their walk with God that ten of the staff were baptized (30% of the total camp staff). This mentorship also impacted the campers as well, which led to many baptisms and requests for bible studies. These types of experiences are not isolated to just one camp. They happen all across North America.

### Key Elements for Successful Summer Camp Ministry

An important question worth asking is: What makes summer camp have such a positive impact in the lives of youth and young adults? Here are a few key ingredients that deserve a closer look:

- Camp is a place that is built around **friendship**: camper to camper, camper to staff, staff to staff, staff to supervisor and God to all.
- Camp is a place with **fun and engaging activities**. These activities provide a safe, non-threatening environment for relationships to be formed naturally between campers and staff.
- Camp is a **safe place**. It seeks to provide physical, emotional and spiritual safety.
- Camp was and is a concept **created specifically for youth and young adults**. It's a place where they can be fully themselves; they are embraced and encouraged for who they are.
- Camp is a place where **everyone has opportunities to serve** and thus feel needed and valued.
- Camp is a place where **intentional mentorship** takes place on all levels and fosters an environment that empowers young adults to lead.
- Camp has a **defined goal** with a plan in place to achieve it. It takes months of planning and investment, and everyone is part of the planning process.
- Camp has a **message of hope**. It tells people there is a God who loves them, cares about them and has a plan for their life.
- Camp sessions end with **an invitation for everyone to accept Jesus** as their personal Lord and Savior. Everyone is encouraged to make a new commitment or strengthen one they have already made.
- Camp challenges participants **to live a life of service**. Campers and staff are invited to share what they have experienced and to commit their lives to service.

When these key ingredients are put together, they make a profound impact on the lives of our youth and young adults. The summer camp environment has all three areas that many young adults desire: authentic community, intentional and excellent programing, and practical life applicability. What would it look like if we applied these same key elements to evangelism in our churches?

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### Application of Summer Camp Principles for Yearlong Youth Ministry

Looking at the summer camp model, the Youth Department of the Hawaii Conference resolved to apply the same principles to a yearlong evangelistic effort. Over \$60,000 dollars was acquired and a plan was put in place. A group of young adults would assist in putting on a nine-day series at eight different churches throughout the year. A 'Week of Prayer' would take place in the mornings at the local elementary school(s) followed by a youth and young adult meeting in the evening. The afternoons were designed to allow for day excursions and fellowship. Everyone on the team was assigned a responsibility and was part of the entire planning process.

The series message was simple and clear: God Loves You. It covered topics such as identity, purpose, worth, how to be free from sin, living in the Spirit and walking by faith, forgiveness, righteousness and destiny. Programming was contemporary, modest, and would not exceed an hour each night. It targeted those between the ages of 14 and 35, although it was open to all. Refreshments or a light meal were provided each night to create and foster a relaxed environment in which to discuss the message that had just been heard. At the close of each series, a decision card was shared where people could make a commitment to Christ along with a survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the evangelistic effort. What took place far exceeded our expectations:

- All age groups attended and were engaged (6-80+ yr. olds).
- The churches were full all week long.
- Mentorship took place between leadership and young adults (life and spirituality) and teamwork was found to be essential.
- Participants experienced revival in all age categories.
- Young adults started inviting their friends to join the ministry team.
- Churches saw their youth involved in service with a clear sense of ownership.
- Due to the success of this initiative, other conferences and churches have decided to fund future meetings.

When asked how they felt in relation to the Love Reality Tour (LRT), its effectiveness and what it meant to be a part of the leadership team, young adults responded in a variety of ways. Gabriel Riojas said, "I believe LRT was successful because its message of confident gospel living is steeped in scripture. There was clarity in explaining portions of scripture by giving examples, having Q&As, telling personal testimonies, and having conversations after the message. Also, LRT is very intentional in creating a unique program experience through videos, worship music, aesthetics (lights, presentation, stage), and program layout. There are greeters that help people feel open and comfortable which is important for those who receive the message. Afterwards, the refreshments help create a sweet environment for active dialogue and authentic fellowship to occur. Finally, there is a lot of intentionality within the team. From the worship leaders to the greeters, there is deep spiritual bonding, prayer, honesty, and fun fellowship that helps LRT have a lasting experience on local church communities".

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Additionally, Mikey Archibeque noted that, “People felt comfortable actually worshipping in the way they liked. People were comfortable singing with their spirit as well as their voices. They learned songs that they had never heard and they began to embody the songs as much as the messages so that by the end, LRT was roaring in worship. I’ve never seen as many people come during the middle of the week as with these meetings. More people definitely came on the weekends, but most of the churches were consistent the whole week, and by the end they all wanted more. They saw that they were just starting to see God’s goodness and that they were taking their first steps into the discovery of it all. It also brought the churches in the Conference closer together. There seemed to be a commonality among the churches we went to and I think with the Conference sending such a high quality event to churches that don’t often get this kind of communicator, with a great team of professionals, it really helped get Conference buy-in from the churches and their members and vice versa. It helped heal the community of Hawaii”.

When asked what they thought was unique about LRT, the leadership continued to share what they thought made the program so powerful and effective. JR Bonilla said, “Part of what makes LRT great is that it seeks to involve young people, yet while young people are the target, it involves and appeals to all generations resulting in unifying the local church from old to young with the solid message of love from the Bible. I believe younger and elder people value from inter-generational experiences and LRT is one that fosters a welcoming environment for both to come together. [It] was [also] successful in sharing the gospel message from the Bible in a way that is normally ignored or forgotten by many. For myself, it has been liberating to hear the message of love and grace, which drives and motivates a deeper & richer time in scripture and service to others”.

While these comments came from just a sampling of the young adults who helped run the series, similar sentiments were shared by almost all who organized and attended the events.

### The Survey

As mentioned previously, all participants were given a survey at the conclusion of the series. Below is a table noting the ages of the respondents and the results of the questions that were answered with a yes/no response.

<b>Survey Results</b>
9% were between the ages of 6-12
12% were between the ages 13-18
23% were between the ages 19-35
22% were between the ages 36-50
34% were over the age of 50
8 meetings were held; 545 registered, with 267 completed surveys

1. **Was LRT beneficial to your spiritual life?** 99.2 % answered “Yes”.
2. **Was the Love Reality Tour helpful in understanding your identity as a child of God?** 99.6% answered “Yes”.
3. **Was this the first time you had heard the gospel presented in a way that gave you confidence in your standing with the Father?** 75% answered “Yes”.
4. **Would you like to see more of this style of programming at you church?** 98.5 % answered “Yes”.
5. **Would you feel comfortable bringing your non-Adventist friends to LRT?** 95% answered “Yes”.

### Points Worth Noting

The answers to the above questions are very revealing in terms of where our church stands as a whole. Based on the survey and follow-up talks with attendees and staff:

- People want to have a biblical message that feeds them spiritually. While facts are nice, they want to be led into a closer relationship with God.
- Our church has an identity crisis and most people don't know who they are as Christians. It is hard to invite someone else into something you are not firmly grounded in yourself.
- Most people are afraid of and are not confident in how they stand with God. Salvation is one of the most basic elements to the Christian faith and a good number of church members lack confidence when it comes their personal salvation.
- Style is a package deal; it's not just one aspect. During the LRT series, everything matched from the moment you were invited with a personal invitation card to the conclusion of the series. Graphics, decorations, music, and message all went together along with everyone who helped.

In relation to this last point, theologian Lesslie Newbigin makes the following claim: “[The Christian message] can fail by failing to understand and take seriously the world in which it is set. The gospel is not heard but remains incomprehensible because the Church has sought security in its own past instead of risking its life in the deep involvement with the world” (12).

The church is at risk by allowing a small percentage of its attendees to stop it from moving forward in implementing a “package” that is contemporary with the time in which it serves. Many times the blame is placed on the older generation, however 100% of those over the age of 50 said they would like to see more of “this style” of programming in their church. If the church does not adapt its presentation style to its surroundings, it could prevent itself from keeping and evangelizing to youth and young adults both in and out of the church. Jon Paulien validates this point when he writes: “If a local church is comfortable only with the ways they have done things in the past, secular Postmoderns will not stay long. If you are part of such a church, serious outreach to secular people will likely fail in the long run” (72). Not only did LRT's attendees enjoy the evangelistic series, but 95% felt comfortable enough to invite their friends

to a future series. This is exciting, as most people can be hesitant or afraid to invite their friends to church.

### Conclusion

When we look at the summer camp model of evangelism, we see that it is successful both in the camp environment and also in youth and young adult evangelism outside of summer programming. Perhaps what's even more exciting is that the summer-camp model of evangelism is successful in reaching all age demographics. While the meetings primarily targeted those under the age of 35, many people from various age groups attended and were extremely blessed. In other words, the summer camp model of evangelism is effective for all ages!

In essence, if the church were to invest in the summer camp model of evangelism—making sure to include excellent and intentional programming, provide authentic community and practical life applicability—many currently inactive young adults would most probably decide to get involved and lead the way.

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### Definitions

Secular: “A secular person is someone who lives from day to day with little or no reference to God or the practices of formal religion” (Paulien, 27).

Postmodern: “In many ways, today's younger generations, often called “post-moderns,” are the polar opposites of traditional secular people. Where traditional secular people live life without significant reference to God, post-modern secular people tend to be very spiritual” (Paulien, 32).

### Endnotes

1 Jon. Paulien, *Everlasting Gospel, Ever-Changing World: Introducing Jesus to a Skeptical Generation*. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing, 2008), 24.

2 Ibid.

3 Camp Waianae is a Seventh-day Adventist camp in Hawaii.





## CREATING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING FOR AUTHENTIC YOUTH EVANGELISM

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*“How do I get past Jesus and go directly to God?”* I was very intrigued by this question as I engaged in conversation with a 22-year-old young adult at my church in New York. Oddly enough, the question was directed to me by this young man during a Christmas party last year while we were celebrating the centrality of the work of Christ in our lives. I wanted to understand the assumption behind the question, so I inquired, “What is your perception of Jesus?” To which he responded, “I believe he was a good man, and I enjoy his teachings.” We went on to have a more in-depth conversation in which he opened up to me about his hesitancy to accept the Bible as historical, seeing that our society is moving away from trusting written material. He confided in me, however, about his struggles in approaching God, which had led him to ask that particular question. Even though he might have a skewed idea about God, I was positively pleased that his new year’s resolution was to understand what it takes to build a solid foundation for faith.

This young man, however, is not just a casual visitor at our church. He regularly assists in the audiovisual department and often sits in on our board meetings and attends our leadership training sessions. Like him, other young adults are attending our church, who belong to different Christian denominations, religious traditions, or who do not believe in Jesus. They participate regularly and help in various aspects of our services, including things like singing on the praise team, reading Scripture or offering a public prayer. There are some that have been given the opportunity to lead out Bible study and even preach for the main service. Though they are not adherents to the Adventist faith, if you were to ask them what church they belong to, they would not hesitate to say that they are members of the One Hope Church in Queens, New York, a church planting project where I have been pastoring for the past eight months.

I share my story with you to draw your attention to the fact that postmodern philosophy<sup>1</sup> has affected the concept of spiritual development, explicitly changing the way in which youth and young adults come to faith. The primary ideological shift that we have seen in recent years, especially amongst evangelical churches, is the movement away from the modern idea of “believing before belonging” towards the current notion of “belonging before believing.”<sup>2</sup>

As Richardson points out, “Most people today do not ‘decide’ to believe. In community they ‘discover’ that they believe, and then decide to affirm that publicly and to follow Christ intentionally.”<sup>3</sup> As the concept of community has regained value in the postmodern age, the modern idea in which spirituality was formed by an individualistic search for truth has now taken a back seat to the postmodern desire for a more communal form of spiritual exploration.

With this in mind, this ideological shift has brought to the forefront different questions regarding the idea of belonging to religious communities. How do individuals, specifically young people, belong? And to what do they belong to? In this paper, I want to propose that our concept of church is in need of a redefinition within the postmodern context. Therefore, I will explore the function of community within postmodernity and how it affects the idea of belonging. Second, I will look at different approaches to ecclesiology that have been proposed in response to the dilemmas of belongingness in connection with church membership. Finally, I will conclude by looking at the missiological implications for a redefinition of our ecclesiology for more effective evangelization within the postmodern context.

### **The Function of Community Within Postmodernity**

There are varying postmodernist approaches to the idea of community that impact the role of religious bodies for individuals searching for spiritual experiences. There are three main influences that I believe have redefined the concept of community within the postmodern paradigm: the culture of authenticity, consumerism, and the fragmentation of culture.

#### *The Culture of Authenticity*

Postmodernity has also seen a rise in the sense of authenticity rooted in a search within to find one's true self. Charles Taylor points out that this culture of authenticity fosters a self-fulfilling approach to identity that has caused association to communities to be seen as merely instrumental for the purpose of receiving recognition from the group. Taylor demonstrates that identity was once thought to be formed by a dialogue between oneself and one's community.<sup>4</sup> Now, however, the forming of identity has become an individual project. A person is not defined by societal roles, tradition or any other outside influence, but by the discovery of the self within.<sup>5</sup> The community only serves to recognize what the individual establishes himself to be.

This self-fulfilling way of forming identity also threatens commitment to any particular community in the sense that allegiance to a group is only valid if a person can live out their authentic self within that nucleus. If the community does not recognize the person's authentic self as legitimate, then it ceases to serve its purpose, and leads to a disconnection with that individual.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Consumerist Culture*

Another agent within postmodernity that has affected religious institutional affiliation is consumerist culture. In the modern era that was characterized by the idea of production as an agent for building meaning; belonging to and participating (or producing) within a specific community of believers was once done out of a sense of sheer obligation to prove one's worth. However, with the rise of pluralism and the consumerization<sup>7</sup> of religions, membership to a particular body is now a matter of choice. Peter Berger describes it in this way:

The religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be marketed. It must be "sold" to a clientele that is no longer constrained to "buy." The pluralist situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities.<sup>8</sup>

This has also led to the formation of syncretistic religious practices and even the idea that one can belong to different religions.<sup>9</sup> Other individuals value the ability to garner from the marketplace of religions available to them and create a personalized religious experience. Knebelkamp describes it in this way, “Religion has made the transition from the altar to the individual. In this transition everyone helps themselves to religious symbols and sews together his or her own religious blanket and biography.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, although one can participate in and appreciate the positive aspects of a specific religious body and value the ability to explore faith in community, total commitment to that denomination or system of beliefs is seen as rather limiting.

Consumerism destroys any idea of community and focuses the attention of religion on the self. However, if community plays any role, it is based on the idea that consumerism turns religion into another brand that one wears in order to feel accepted by one’s peers.<sup>11</sup> Participation in a religious movement is done by following the latest spiritual trend in culture as a means for social validation. People would “wear” a particular religion just because it is the hottest thing on the market to try at the moment.

#### *The Fragmentation of Western Society*

It is also noticeable that one of the biggest threats to the formation of religious commitment has been the atomization of western society into subcultures that are categorized by things like political views, religious backgrounds, and different forms of lifestyle that offer multiple paths by which one can approach life. Bombarded with so many options, this fragmentation of culture causes post-moderns to become hesitant about the validity of each particular ideology as being the sole possessor of truth and leads to a greater distancing from institutions in general. When faced with societal dilemmas, in the postmodern mindset, society is too complex to be taken on individually, and thus, exploration of the outside world is submitted to be critiqued, evaluated and affirmed by individuals within one’s inner circle who help in making sense of it all.

The community, thus, functions as a safe space against the fear of grappling with the complexity of the surrounding world. As Kinnaman points out, “Young adults also look to their peers to be their moral and spiritual compass. They tend to base their views of morality on what seems fair-minded, loyal, and acceptable to their friends.”<sup>12</sup> In this condition, postmoderns are more willing to commit and are more faithful to their tribe or intimate circle of friends rather than an institution or system of beliefs. Therefore, they are more open to testing out a new religious movement only if they have seen it lived out by a person within their social network.

#### **Redefining The Idea of Church**

Although the ideas above about community may present different threats to religious institutions on the level of commitment, they also offer an opportunity to rethink evangelism. Postmodernity begs for a return to a form of evangelism where community and intimate relationships are central. Depersonalized evangelism, including public evangelism, flyers and other forms of literature evangelism, and other traditional methods will be less effective in reaching millennials and the younger generation. However, I do not think that changing our evangelistic approaches alone will be enough. I believe that our whole idea of ecclesiology needs to be evangelistic.

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In his book, *Deep & Wide*, Andy Stanley explains that the church must answer two main questions in order to determine its ecclesiology: 1. “What is the church?” 2. “Who is it for?”<sup>13</sup> Our response to the first question changes the way we answer the second question. Stanley argues that the first-century idea of church, *ekklesia*, centered on a gathering of people in which witnesses of a significant event—the death and resurrection of Jesus—were able to share their experience. In this sense, church life centered around believers sharing the Gospel with unbelievers. He argues that it wasn’t until the legalization of religion under the reign of Constantine in the 4th century that church became more centralized, focusing on events within the physical space of meeting and its liturgy. The church eventually lost its evangelistic flavor.

#### *Center-Set Churches*

Following Stanley’s thought, Weyers and Saayman call for a “missionary ecclesiology”<sup>14</sup> based on Murray’s idea of a center-set church model. In *Church After Christendom*, Murray distinguishes four models: “bounded-set”, “fuzzy-set”, “open-set” and “centre-set” churches.<sup>15</sup> He explains that bounded-set churches are clear in setting boundaries of belief and behavior that determines if one can belong within an organization, and those who miss the mark are excluded. However, this model seems to be seen as very oppressive. Fuzzy-set churches have some boundaries set in place, but these are not rigidly defined. It still focuses, however, on building the idea of belonging by adhering to the rules of the community. Furthermore, the lack of clear boundaries makes the model unstable because it lacks a clear anchor and center, making it susceptible to compromise. Open-set churches have no boundaries. As the name suggests, everyone can become part of the community without any adherence to rules or regulations. This lack of boundaries applied especially to state-churches where all parishioners were seen as members of the church. Their behavior or beliefs were not taken into consideration, thus making the model unfit for any Christian growth.

Center-set churches function differently. Drawing from Hiebert,<sup>16</sup> Murray explains that center-set churches shift their focus away from the boundaries and emphasize a clear and definite center that holds the community together. In the church’s case, the center is the story upon which the church is built, the death and resurrection of Christ. There is no compromising of the story. However, those who belong are those who are moving towards the center, no matter how far or near they may be. This focus on orientation allows the church to be open to newcomers that are wanting to know more about Jesus and move closer towards Him, and yet it can be a bounded community in that it will not compromise its message. It can also be fuzzy because no clear boundary defines what a true “member” should look like from a behavioral standpoint. Yet, it still calls for the belonging to be based on the evidence of one’s orientation towards the center.

Ayers, looking at the formation of groups and boundaries in the book of Acts, sees this concept of belonging before belief exemplified in Paul’s mission in Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:1. Paul is said to have “found some disciples” on his missionary journey to that region. The story records that they had only heard of the baptism of John, and had no idea of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains to them the differences and then baptizes them again in the name of Jesus. Ayers notes,

In Acts, “disciples” is used to indicate valid members of the true faith community; the term is not used for members of other sects. Yet, at Ephesus, these “disciples” are not “believers,” who are identified via faith in Jesus. Neither are they “brothers,” who are identified through association. They are “disciples,” a term that identifies them by one’s status as a learner. This is appropriate to the story, for they are in the process of coming to full knowledge. However, even though these are in process, Paul treats them as fellows from the outset, and legitimate adherents who only need to walk through the lacking identifying centers of belief, filial association, and spiritual experience.<sup>17</sup>

What if the church came to the same terms to label its youth and young adult as disciples, not when they have come to believe in all our doctrinal beliefs entirely, but instead, by their heart orientation and willingness to know and explore more about faith as they journey along?

### **Missiological Implications for Youth Evangelism**

Attitudes and dynamics within the church would need to change if we ought to adopt the center-set model to do evangelism amongst young adults. First, we must transform our concept of conversion. Instead of focusing on conversion as an event, we need to view it as both event and process. In his book *Reimagining Evangelism*, Rick Richardson proposes a different imagery of evangelism to be used, one where we see ourselves less as a salesmen pitching the gospel to others to close out a deal, and more like travel guides inviting friends on a journey towards faith.<sup>18</sup> This approach imagines both young believers and unbelievers walking side by side<sup>19</sup> as they explore faith within a community that invites doubt, is open to question their own doctrinal beliefs, and is less judgmental towards those who are on a different point on the path. Our evangelism amongst youth and young adults, therefore, will have to focus less on events that force a one-time grand decision. Instead, we need to build evangelistic approaches that involve community and discipleship where deep relationships over time will play a significant role in the conversion process.

Second, adopting a center-set model also requires youth ministers to establish other points in the conversion process to measure spiritual growth. There is a tendency, especially for parents, to focus singularly on baptism as evidence of the faith of a young person. Due to pressures from higher administrative bodies within the church, our evangelism has focused too much on baptism, and less on teaching younger generations how to build a relationship with God and live out their Christianity in their everyday lives. We need to learn to not only celebrate baptism but to identify and acknowledge other major points of decision in the faith journey of young adults. We have grown accustomed to determining someone’s growth only through the public expressions of faith because we do not spend enough time building deeper relationships with our youth. In the center-set model, the youth worker is obliged to develop intimate relationships that help in discerning other steps along the journey of faith that may reflect a movement towards the center.

Lastly, youth workers must recognize the importance of church-planting for this current generation if evangelism to youth is to be effective. Within an established church body that has been accustomed to boundary-based evangelism for many years, it may be hard to establish the type of culture that center-set churches require to be effective. As different studies have shown, it requires a

lot of effort to change the DNA of a church that has been harvesting a particular approach over an extended period. I must be clear in saying that I am not advocating for youth churches; there is a strong need for intergenerational ministry to continue happening. However, I am advocating for new expressions of churches where individuals from both younger and older generations can come together understanding the need to create a culture where unchurched young adults from all walks of life may be able to belong and have an opportunity to explore their faith in a safe space.

### Conclusion

Postmodernism brings with it new challenges, but throughout the ages the church has had to reinvent itself as culture continues to evolve. Therefore, these newer times necessitate newer forms of expression that are relevant to the context of today. If not taken into consideration, the effects of postmodern philosophy on the concept of community may become a barrier to reaching young adults if the church continues to hold on to the traditional forms of evangelism.

Therefore, postmodern criticism towards the religious movements and the ecclesiastical institution should not be wholly disregarded. It has caused the church to look inwardly and to see if it has indeed lived up to the purpose that Christ has for it. If we are honest with ourselves, the church will need to recognize that it has often been too judgmental, exclusivist, perfectionist, self-concerned and has lost its missional vigor. No ministry model is perfect, but the concept of a center-set church provides a glimpse of what the Christian community could be if its evangelistic focus were rediscovered. In essence, in order for effective and relevant evangelism amongst youth and young adults to take place today, our churches need to become communities of belonging, in which evangelism is seen as a process that leads eventually to believing and behaving.

### Endnotes

1 Dennis M. Doyle, Timothy J. Furry, and Pascal D. Bazzell, *Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times*, Kindle Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books) Kindle Locations 11-12. Postmodern philosophy “looks suspiciously upon dogmatism, close-mindedness, and the insistence of any culture or society, religious or not, that claims for itself the fullness of truth.”

2 Kara Powell, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker: 2016), 170. Powell notes “As young people are choosing a church, warm community is often a stronger draw than belief.”

3 Rick Richardson, *Evangelism Outside The Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 100.

4 James W. Fowler, “Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges,” *The International Journal For The Psychology Of Religion*, 7/3 (2001): 159-172. Fowler explains the dialogical process of forming identity: “There is the self, there are the primal and significant others in the self’s relational matrix, and there is the third center of relational engagement—the ultimate Other, or the center(s) of value and power in one’s life structure.”

5 Andrew Root “Toward Further Illusions of Youth Ministry—An Affirmation and Response to David White,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 7/1 (2008): 80-81.

- 6 Charles Taylor. *Ethics Of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 43–44.
- 7 For more on the consumerization of religion, read John Drane, *The McDonalization of the Church* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2000).
- 8 Peter Berger, “Sources of Secularization” in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 244.
- 9 For more on the idea of multiple religious belonging, see H. L. Richard “New Paradigms for Religion, Multiple Religious Belonging, and Insider Movements,” *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 43/3 (2015): 297–308
- 10 Ari Knebelkamp, “Believing Without Belonging? In Search Of New Paradigms Of Church And Mission In Secularized And Postmodern Contexts: Brazilian Insights And ‘Outsights’,” *International Review of Mission* 92/365 (2009): 193.
- 11 Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham, *Children as Consumers: A Psychological Analysis of the Young People’s Market*, International Series in Social Psychology (New York: Routledge, 1998), 170.
- 12 David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 172.
- 13 Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide—Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*, Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), Kindle Locations 505–507.
- 14 Mario Weyers and Willem Saayman “‘Belonging Before Believing’: Some Missiological Implications of Membership and Belonging in a Christian Community,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34/1 (2013): 7.
- 15 Stuart Murray, *Church after Christendom* (UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 13–15.
- 16 Paul Hiebert, “Conversion, Culture and Cognitive Categories,” *Gospel in Context* 11:4 (1978): 24–29.
- 17 Adam D. Ayers, Gallagher, Rogert L.; Hertig, Paul. *Contemporary Mission Theology: Engaging the Nations*, Kindle Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), Kindle Locations 3930–3934.
- 18 Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism: Inviting Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 15–30.
- 19 David J. Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 391. According to Bosch, “The individual is not a monad, but part of an organism. We live in one world, in which the rescue of some at the expense of others is not possible. Only together is there salvation and survival.”





## RESOURCING OUR YOUTH FOR EVANGELISM

**Ron Whitehead**

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Michigan**

Why is it important to engage this generation with their local church evangelism goals? This generation seeks to be participants and not just spectators in their local church. A church spectator feels more like a visitor than a valued member. This is reflected in a recent research conducted by the Barna Group. This study shows that, when given the space, young adults become engaged and really active in their local church; however, they tend to have little participation in committees, church boards, and leadership in general. Here is what the report says:

The majority of engaged young adults are actually involved in a variety of activities—not just attending services. The majority also pay tithe (71%) and more than half contribute additional offerings (60%), attend Sabbath school regularly (61%), participate in church social functions (60%), or attend other types of meetings (52%). It is less common for them to participate in share-your-faith activities (40%), hold church office (35%), or serve on committees (34%).<sup>1</sup>

Not all the youth and young adults are necessarily engaged in God's mission. However, to be invited, to be encouraged, and supported will create an opportunity for a decision that may not be possible without such support. This bears the question: Are youth and young adults not involved in church activities because they have an attitude of disengagement? Or, are they unengaged because they have not been invited and supported to participate? This is what Barna's study has to say:

As expected, the unengaged are unengaged across the board. About half (52%) do none of these activities. Fewer than one in three attend services more than monthly (29%), pay tithe (26%) or offerings (21%). Fewer than one in six attend Sabbath school regularly (15%), attend social functions (12%) or other meetings (13%). One in ten hold a church office (10%). Slightly fewer participate in share-your-faith activities (7%) or serve on a committee (3%). (Barna Group, Seventh-day Adventist | Young Adult Study, 26)<sup>2</sup>

The objective of this chapter is to find an answer to the following questions: Why is it important to engage this generation to be part of local church evangelism? What can the Seventh-day Adventist Church do to support youth/young adults to do evangelism at their local churches? Many answers to these

important questions will be explored; particularly, a tested model to assist and resource this generation to get engaged in evangelism will be featured.

### Inspiration from the Bible and Ellen White

The church needs its youth's energy and creativity for new evangelism approaches. Ellen White describes this with these words: "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might **furnish** how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!"<sup>3</sup>

The previous quote describes both, the attitude Adventist pioneers had towards the involvement of youth in evangelism and the role of the church in supporting them, as well as what seems to be God's *modus operandi* with His prophets and chosen leaders (young leaders included): 1) He calls them, 2) He tells them what to do, and then 3) He provides them with the necessary resources ("furnish") to accomplish their mission.

This is the case of the Apostle Paul when he was called in his way to Damascus, most probably at a young age. He was sent/guided by God through the Early Church, and even though he was self-employed (Acts 18:1-3), he also managed local churches' donations for his missionary endeavors:

Although he did not request personal support, he spent close to ten years soliciting funds for what is commonly referred to as the Jerusalem collection. This was a collection he took up among the Gentile churches to help Judean believers who were facing harder than usual economic times as a result of a famine during the mid to late 40s. Paul and Barnabas made an initial famine-relief visit to Jerusalem in A.D. 46 and delivered a monetary gift from the church at Antioch (Acts 11:29-30). At that time the Jerusalem church expressed the hope that the believers associated with Paul would continue to remember the Judean believers, which Paul was more than eager to do (Gal 2:10)<sup>4</sup>.

Paul received the full support and trust of God through the resources of many churches, and his mission was accomplished as he wrote in Colossians 1:23: "the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister." Simply put, evangelism should be at the heart of the church, and a most fundamental way to make it happen is to support and empower those who God calls to fulfill His mission.

Hence, a crucial element of youth evangelism, is for the church to find ways to "furnish" its youth, which is to provide them with the necessary means so that they can fulfill the mission God is calling them to live out in their lives. Of course, church support does not guarantee that the results will be always positive; not all evangelistic efforts will bear the same fruits. However, the effort is always more than worth it.

### Learning From Experience

One setting where we see many successful young leaders today is in the world of business. As one looks closer and explore the reasons for this phenomenon, it becomes obvious that many of those reasons are the same reasons our young pioneers became successful leaders. Among other things, young leaders in the business world are successful because:

1. They value and adapt to new and creative ways.
2. They obtain financing from investors that believe in them to develop new and creative ideas.
3. They are not afraid of failure. For them and their investors, controlled risk is a good thing.
4. They have access to good mentors.
5. They are placed in positions of governance.
6. They see change as normal and necessary.

As the introduction to this book clearly demonstrates it, way before many of today's successful companies even existed, our pioneers were already implementing these practices, empowering young people for mission. As we think of ways to "furnish" our youth for evangelism, as we empower and train them to share God's love with the world, these points ought to be considered.

### **A Proven Model for Youth Evangelism**

The Lake Union Conference has developed an interesting initiative called "Youth Evangelism Congress". This event has taken place three times (2013, 2016, and 2018) and has developed effective practices for youth evangelism. Some distinctive activities at this event reflect the intention of this Union in providing youth/young adults resources for evangelism along with leadership opportunities.

In this Congress, the "training" section is intended to be more inspirational than instructional. In fact, the speakers are (in their majority) lay church members, youth and young adults that have created or adapted a successful ministry. In other words, presenters and attendees are peers with the same opportunities to start a new ministry.

After 10 minutes for each presentation in a general session, the attendees have some time for "table talk". This is when they process the information with young people from different churches, analyzing if the ministry presented is feasible or adaptable to their local church reality. When all the presenters have finished, there is 40 minutes "breakout sessions" where each attendee can choose to learn more about a specific ministry.

Finally, as soon as the Congress is over, each attendee has the right to apply for an Evangelism Fund that will cover 50% of the budget for an evangelism project that the applicant will develop under the support of their local church board. The applicant has to present a project description, including a budget detail and the commitment of its local church board to cover the other 50% of the budget with a vote stated in church board minutes.

This is an collaborative work between:

- A young person or a group of youth engaged with the Church's mission.
  - A local Church Board that decides to trust that young person with a leadership position to lead its project, and 50% of the budget necessary for that project to take place.
-

- Lake Union administration, local Conference administration, and their Youth Ministries and Evangelism departments that supports this initiative by covering the other 50% of the evangelism project budget.

The outcomes of this initiative are reflected in the next reports:

*2013 LUC Youth Evangelism Congress—JESUS, ALL OR NOTHING (1 Timothy 4:12)*

1. When and where: **February 8-10, 2013 in Chicago, IL.**
2. Total attendance: **452**
3. Overall evaluation (survey): **71% Excellent / 28% Good**
4. Presenters evaluation (survey): **77% Excellent / 18% Good**
5. Evangelism Fund amount offered by LUC: **\$16,000.**
6. Amount requested by attendees in Evangelism projects: **\$8,383.**
7. Number of evangelism projects that requested sponsorship: **8**
8. Percentage of the evangelism fund claimed: **52%**
9. Average budget for each project (LUC \$ + local Church \$): **\$2,095.75**

*2016 LUC Youth Evangelism Congress—CALLED TO SERVE (John 3:16)*

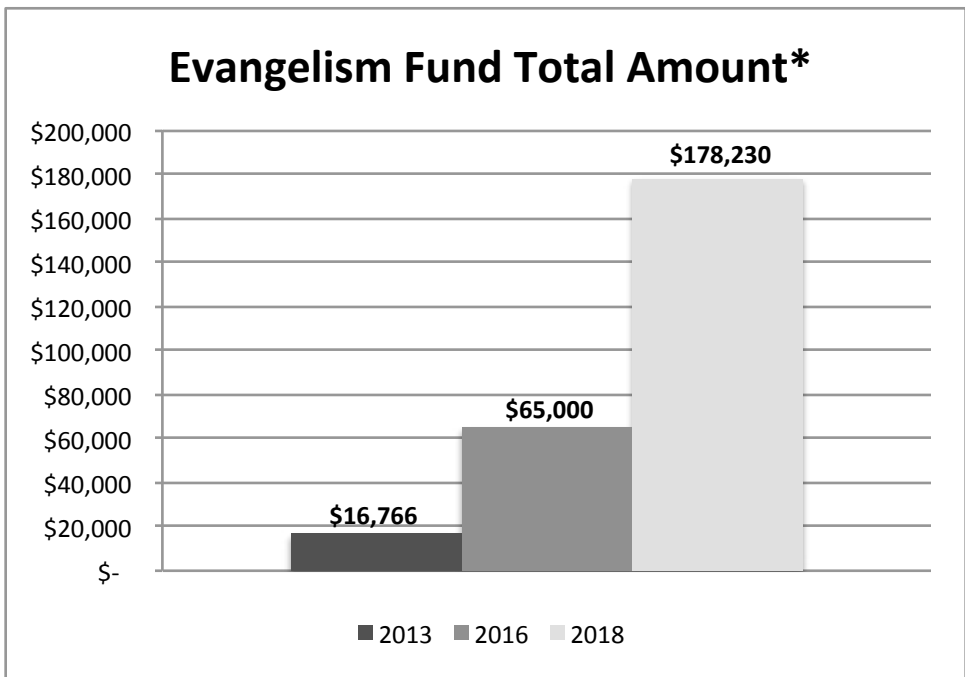
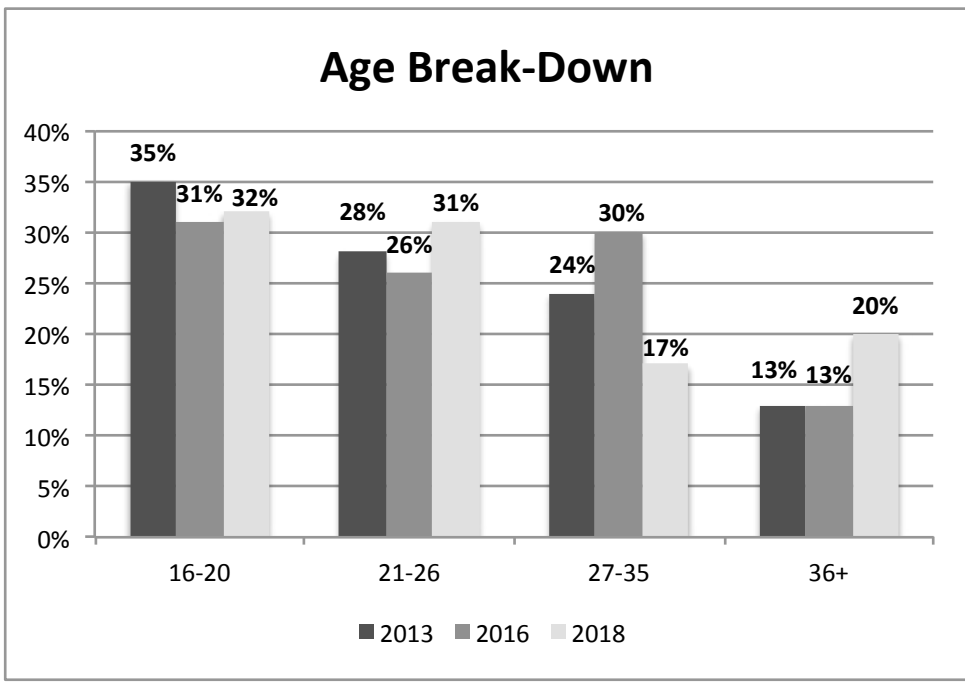
1. When and where: **February 12-14, 2016 in Chicago, IL.**
2. Total attendance: **301**
3. Overall evaluation (survey): **81% Excellent / 18% Good**
4. Presenters evaluation (survey): **90% Excellent / 10% Good**
5. Evangelism Fund amount offered by LUC: **\$32,500.**
6. Amount requested by attendees in Evangelism projects: **\$32,500.**
7. Number of evangelism projects that requested sponsorship: **14**
8. Percentage of the evangelism fund claimed: **100%**
9. Average budget for each project (LUC \$ + local Church \$): **\$4,642.85**

*2018 LUC Youth Evangelism Congress—IMAGINE (Ephesians 3:20)*

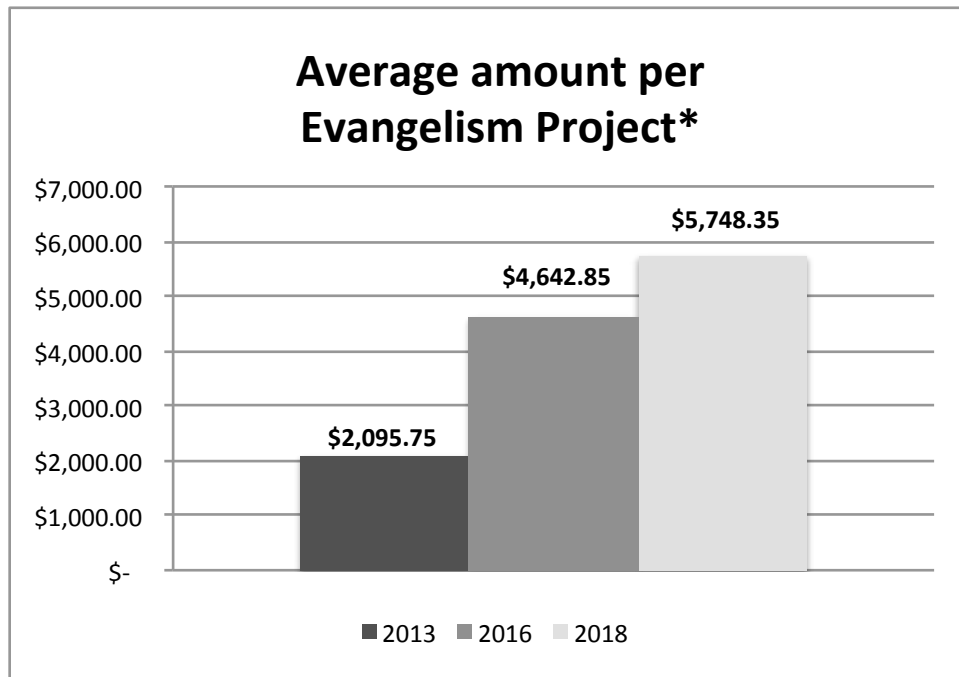
1. When and where: **February 16-18, 2018 in Shipshewana, IN.**
  2. Total attendance: **351**
  3. Overall evaluation (survey): **71% Excellent / 27% Good**
  4. Presenters evaluation (survey): **79% Excellent / 20% Good**
  5. Evangelism Fund amount offered by LUC: **\$50,000.**
  6. Amount requested by attendees in Evangelism projects: **\$89,115.**
  7. Number of evangelism projects that requested sponsorship: **31**
-

- 8. Percentage of the evangelism fund claimed: **178%**
- 9. Average budget for each project (LUC \$ + local Church \$): **\$5,749.35**

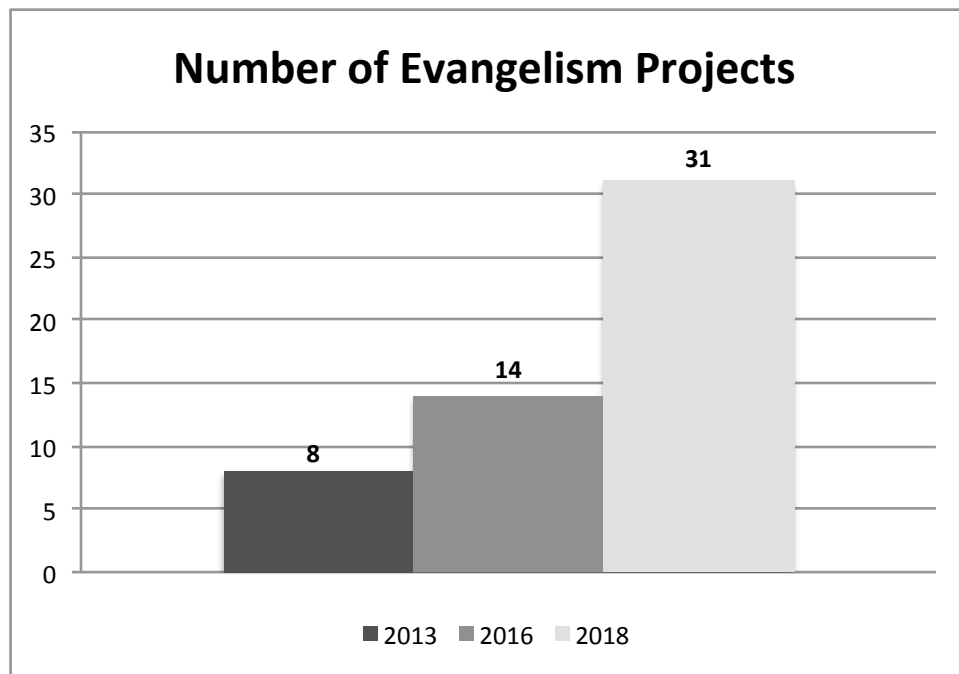
LUC Youth Evangelism Congress 2013, 2016, and 2018 Comparison



\* Including dollars from Lake Union, local Conference, and local Churches.



\* Including dollars from Lake Union, local Conference, and local Churches.



### Conclusion

Beyond the strategy and the evangelism funds, the intentionality of this event is clear: to support youth and young adults not only with words but with votes and resources. The rationale is simple: church members can't wait for a pastor to do all the evangelism, but need to see youth and young adults as potential missionaries here and now, as Ellen White clearly saw it more than hundred years ago:

“In order that the work may go forward in all its branches, God calls for youthful vigor, zeal, and courage. He has chosen the youth to aid in the

advancement of His cause. To plan with clear mind and execute with courageous hand demands fresh, uncrippled energies. Young men and women are invited to give God the strength of their youth that through the exercise of their powers, through keen thought and vigorous action, they may bring glory to Him and salvation to their fellow-men” (*Gospel Workers*, p. 67).

In the words of Patty Dmytriev, one of our presenters in Lake Union Youth Evangelism Congress 2018, “It is not about your capability but about your availability for doing God’s will”. It is truly not a matter of age or capability but availability.

While we should always strive for success, we can’t expect infallibility, particularly from young people. In fact, mistakes should be welcomed as a way to learn lessons on how to improve in our missional endeavors. On this Ellen White writes: “If you fail ninety-nine times in a hundred, but succeed in saving the one soul from ruin, you have done a noble deed for the Master’s cause.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, avoiding failure is not as important as trying as many times as possible.

The Lake Union is planning for the Youth Evangelism Congress in 2020 under the theme “Courageous”, based on Joshua 1:9. There will probably be different presenters, different speakers, and a different amount for evangelism funds. However, the vision to resource youth and young adults for evangelism will remain the same. This vision is well reflected in these words: “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!”<sup>6</sup>

It is our prayer that God will inspire His church in these last days of earth history, to train its youth and young adults, to inspire them, to “furnish” them with resources and leadership opportunities and then to let them decide which direction for mission to take.

### Endnotes

1 Barna Group, Seventh-day Adventist | Young Adult Study, 26 <https://www.scribd.com/document/353932065/Barna-SDA-Millennials-Report-final-pdf>

2 Ibid.

3 Ellen White, *Education*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002): 271

4 Belleville, Linda L. *2 Corinthians*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 34

5 Ellen White, *Christian Service*. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999): 101

6 Ellen White, *Education*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002): 271





# 4

## **Creating a Culture of Youth Evangelism**

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## ADVENTIST MILLENNIALS' PERCEPTIONS OF TRADITIONAL EVANGELISM

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The Seventh-day Adventist church has a long history of public presentations on Bible prophecy, reaching back to our Millerite beginnings. Adventists drew some of their prophetic understandings on a Reformation (and therefore American Protestant) tradition that had historically identified the antichrist as the papacy.<sup>1</sup>

However, over time, Protestantism has generally changed its stance on the identity of the antichrist, making the prophetic interpretations of the Adventist Church on this subject a point of disconnection with wider views. A recent survey by Pew Research indicates that seven in ten Americans have a favorable view of the pope (including 53% of white evangelicals).<sup>2</sup> Another survey by Pew Research shows that “the majorities of both Protestants and Catholics in America say the two traditions are, religiously, ‘more similar than they are different.’”<sup>3</sup>

Adventist young adults in North America are leaving the church at an alarming rate (which in some places seems to be as high as 70%<sup>4</sup>) leading us to question an approach that may alienate more people, especially young adults, than it brings in.

In this project, we particularly wanted to look at how Adventist millennials perceive traditional Adventist evangelistic presentations, and to examine their views of the antichrist and the Reformation. We also wanted to examine what might be the motivational or contextual factors for their perceptions.

### Methodology

There were three phases to the survey. We began with two focus groups made up of diverse millennials to help us draft the survey. We followed this with a paper survey distributed to three general education classes at Southern Adventist University (SAU). The last phase was an electronic survey on SurveyMonkey. There was a total of 2,660 responses gathered, with 1,680 responses from the millennial age group. Social media was the primary tool of recruitment for the electronic survey (1,410 responses from Facebook and Twitter), with a number of organizations also providing a strong secondary source of respondents.<sup>5</sup>

### Demographics of Survey Respondents

In this paper we will look primarily at the young adult response (18–34 years old). It is important to note that the respondents in phase three were self-selected. The demographics of the respondents are therefore important in understanding their responses. First, the respondents were educated: about 55% had already completed more than 4 years of college, while about 39% were

still in college or had recently graduated from high school. Theology, business, nursing, and education (in that order) were the most common majors. Most respondents were from SAU (65.60%), although other colleges and universities were also represented.<sup>6</sup> There were more female (56.12%) than male (43.41%) respondents.<sup>7</sup>

The majority of the respondents were baptized Adventists or connected with the Adventist church (95%) although about 11% no longer attended regularly (less than once a month). They largely grew up in the Adventist church, with 83% born into Adventist families. 65% of the respondents described their ethnicity as White/Caucasian.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the respondents were from the South and West.<sup>9</sup> 51% described their religious views as moderate, and 25% described their views as conservative, with just 13% describing their religious views as liberal.<sup>10</sup> The fact that most respondents wanted to be identified as “moderate” suggests that while a polarizing climate does exist, many younger adults wanted to be seen as “middle of the road.” However, this moderate group can be called the silent conflicted majority. They are less vocal than the conservatives and liberals, and more conflicted, rather than consistent, in their views.

In a similar vein, Thom and Jess Rainer state that, “Millennials represent a group of young adults who are weary of divisiveness and polarized views” and that Millennials view institutionalized religion as just another divisive voice in the world. However, the authors also note that millennials who are highly committed to their faith tended to be more vocal about defending their beliefs and resist the popular cultural perceptions.<sup>11</sup>

As is to be expected with self-selected respondents, the demographics skew towards those interested in the topic and are biased by the methods of recruitment. This was confirmed by a comparison with the sample group selected from General Education classes, which showed the self-selected survey respondents to be more conservative, educated and white than the typical Adventist student population.<sup>12</sup>

### Results of the Survey

We had several research questions going into the project, and the findings of the survey will be categorized by these research questions: How do Adventist Millennials perceive Adventist prophecy meetings; How do Millennials perceive the messages preached at these meetings; and, How do Adventist Millennials relate to presentations on the antichrist?

To begin, we wanted to understand the amount of exposure millennials had with evangelistic series. A remarkable number of millennials in the survey had attended evangelistic series (over 90%) with nearly half attending multiple prophecy-based series, and a significant number having preached their own (15%). While we do not have data on how this has changed over time, it is suspected that these numbers are much higher than in the past. This is likely due to the increased prevalence of graphics and sermon packages that have increased the number of meetings being held at local churches, as well as opportunities to preach abroad.<sup>13</sup> This may not necessarily mean that more young adults are present at meetings. Recent research shows that the majority of attendees at evangelistic meetings are older, and even when young adults do attend, they are not consistent.<sup>14</sup> Increased exposure may simply be because of the frequency of public meetings.

However, even though millennials had experience with these meetings, very few saw these meetings as their first introduction to Adventism. In fact, less than 2% of all respondents said that they first heard of Seventh-day Adventism through a brochure or invitation to an evangelistic series. It appears that more millennials became Adventist as a result of marrying an Adventist than as a result of a prophecy meeting. This may suggest (tongue-in-cheek) that “dating evangelism” has been more effective in reaching millennials than public evangelism.

To understand how millennials felt about evangelistic series in general, we asked them to rate their overall impression of Adventist evangelistic meetings on prophecy on a scale of 1 (highly negative) to 5 (highly positive). The responses indicated a neutral view of these evangelistic meetings ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ). Interestingly, there were two large contingents of people indicating opposing viewpoints. There was a polarized response with a group of people demonstrating very negative views and another demonstrating very positive views. This theme of polarization occurred throughout the survey and will be explored further.

Next, respondents were asked how likely they were to invite a friend to a evangelistic meeting. Here the response leaned more negative than neutral ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ). There was a common criticism that the meetings had nothing new to offer. “Most series are all the same, just reiterating the same dates, points and verses; the only difference is the packaging.” There was some frustration that we seem to focus more on doctrines than on Christ, and that the content was irrelevant or even offensive to others. “How could I bring my Catholic friend to these meetings, when he is going to hear that we think his church is the antichrist?” However, those who had the most positive impressions of the meetings were also the most likely to invite a friend.

We also wanted to know the motivation behind millennials’ attendance at evangelistic meetings. The number one reason for attending an evangelistic series by all millennials in the survey was “spiritual growth”, followed by “interest in prophecy”, and “family expectations”. In the comments section, however, there appeared to be some frustration between the expectation of spiritual growth and the more information-based content of the meetings.

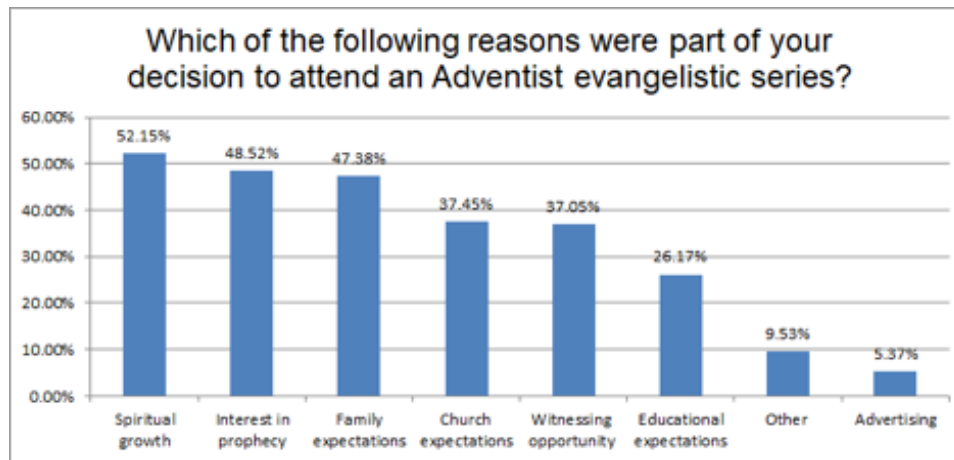


Figure 1: Reasons for Attendance

To answer our next question on millennials’ perception of the messages at these meetings, we gave respondents a list of descriptors and asked them to rate the descriptors on a scale of 1 (not at all accurate) through 5 (very accurate).

Respondents generally stated that these meetings were biblical (84% rated this statement as very accurate or mostly accurate), but once again, there was a conflicted response, with a number of respondents also seeing it as speculative (48% rating this description as somewhat to very accurate).

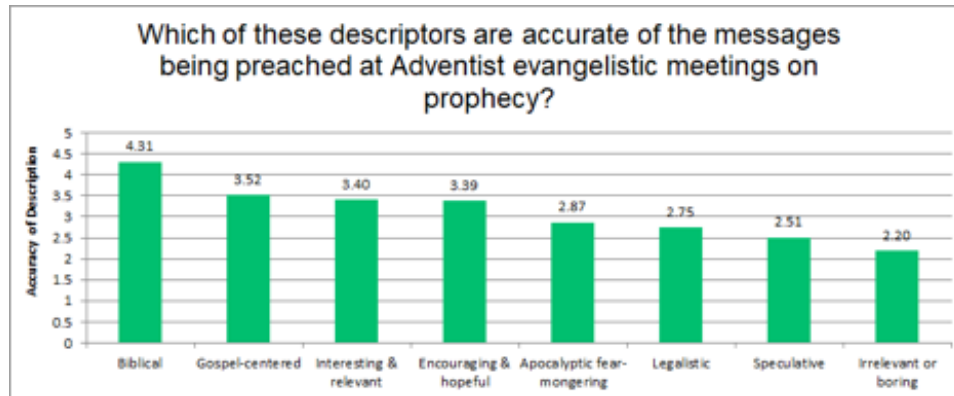


Figure 2: Descriptors of Evangelistic Meetings

In their comments on the question, these respondents felt that there was a lack of context provided to biblical passages, and a tendency to proof-text in the presentations. Some felt that while the meetings were biblical, speculative elements would be brought in. One respondent noted, "I love use of the Bible to explain the Bible, especially when the topic is presented with clarity and relevance. I dislike the use of non-credible media sources like conspiracy theory blogs/websites or opinion columns."

While the overall perception of the meetings was neutral to positive (but conflicted), the reaction to evangelistic advertising was mostly negative. There was a compelling sense that our advertising was aimed at Adventists, conspiracy-theorists and fanatics. As one respondent stated, "This is for people who find sensational images appealing." They clearly did not see millennials as the intended audience.

Many respondents were critical of the advertising used. The following comment was typical, "I find the advertising used to be a bit sensational and out of touch. I personally feel the imagery (all the beasts, etc.) and such is outdated and off-putting to many in my generation."

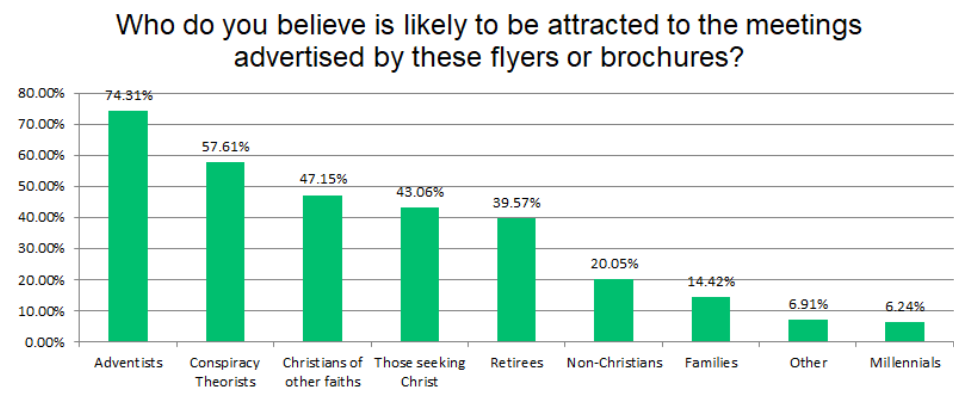


Figure 3: Perceptions of those attracted by evangelistic flyers

Those from a graphic design background were particularly annoyed by the outdated look and wondered why we were using the same artwork from

decades ago. “Flyers and brochures are so old school that they fail to have much relevance.”

To answer our third research question how millennials related to the antichrist, we asked our respondents their level of interest in finding out the identity and activities of the antichrist. Only 12% of millennials said they were extremely interested in this topic. An additional 25% indicated that they were very interested. This means that six out of ten millennials in this study had only a minimal to mild interest. A common refrain among all millennials was stated by this respondent, “We should know our enemy, but more so we should know our Saviour.”

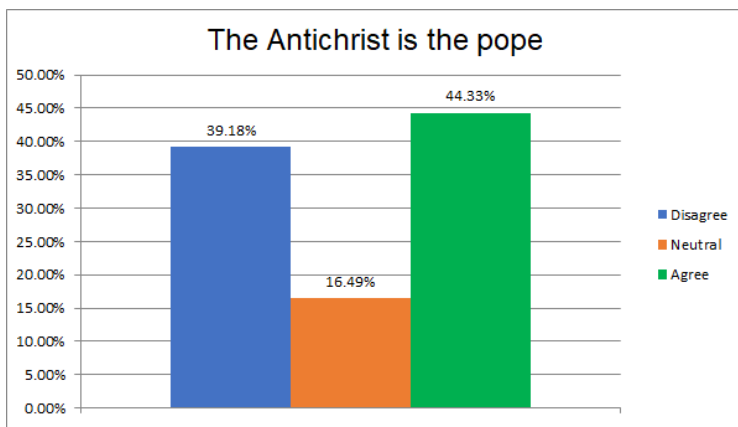


Figure 4: Perceptions of the antichrist being the pope

This was an interesting response because Adventists do not officially teach this position. We do not believe that a single individual is the antichrist but that the institution of the papacy has fulfilled this role by placing its leaders in the place of Christ. It’s a subtle but important distinction. Once we phrased the statement to reflect that it was the system, we got much more agreement, although there was a strong minority dissent.

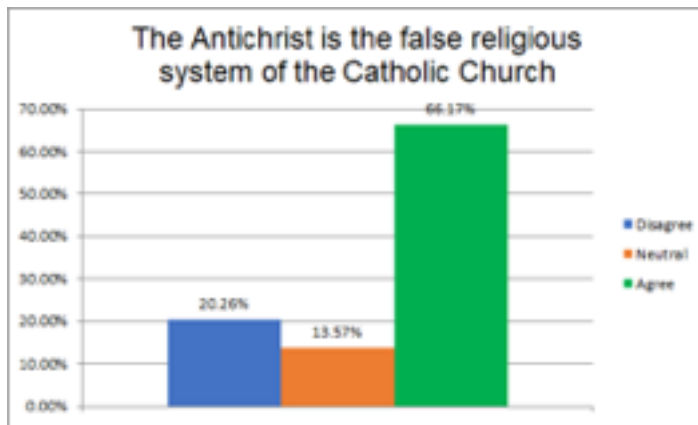


Figure 5: Perceptions of the antichrist being false religious system

### Analysis of Correlation Factors

We wanted to know the characteristics that could make someone be more negative or more positive about evangelistic meetings. We looked at a variety of variables, such as gender or exposure to evangelistic meetings, in an attempt to answer this question. However, none of them showed large enough



correlations to help explain the disparity, that is, until we considered religious identification. Those who identified as “conservative” were likely to have a positive impression of prophecy meetings ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ). Those who identified as “moderate” were more neutral about prophecy meetings ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ), and those who chose “liberal” were likely to have a negative impression of prophecy meetings ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ).

Religious identification also moderated a person’s reasons for attending an evangelistic meeting. Whereas a “conservative” millennial attended because of internal motivation (spiritual growth, interest in prophecy and desire to witness), a “liberal” millennial attended because of external motivation (church or family expectations). This would seem to be a significant factor in the positive or negative view of evangelistic meetings. The “moderate” millennial group fell between these two sets of motivations.

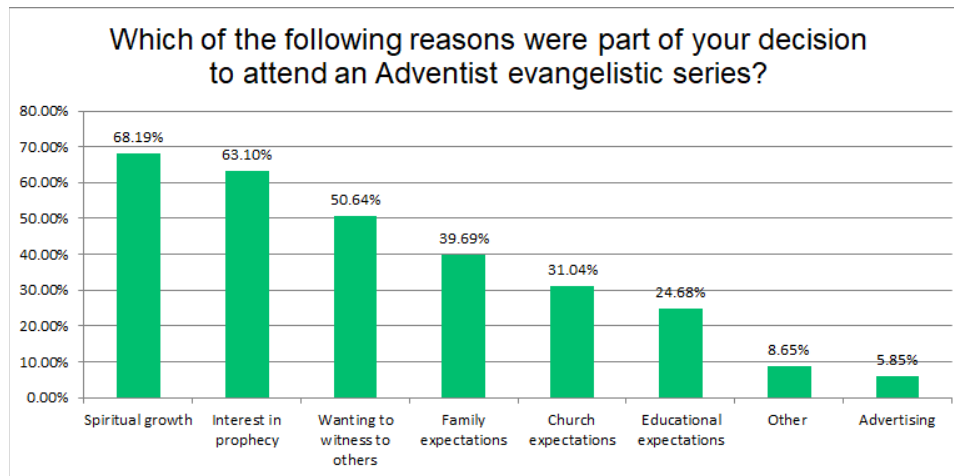


Figure 6: “Liberal” reasons for attending evangelistic meetings

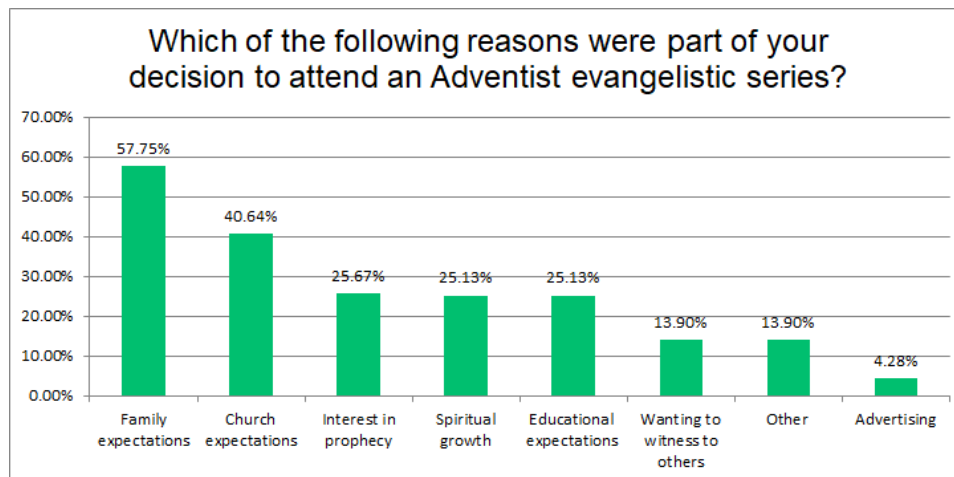


Figure 7: “Conservative” reasons for attending evangelistic meetings

When it came to descriptions of the evangelistic meetings there was once again a clear distinction between the liberal /moderate/ conservative identifiers in their description of evangelistic meetings. The conservative group felt that the presentations were gospel-centered, whereas the liberal group saw the presentations as leading more legalistic.

In the comments, most suggested that it depended on the presentation and the speaker. For example, they stated that while some messages might be gospel-centered, others in the same series might be legalistic.

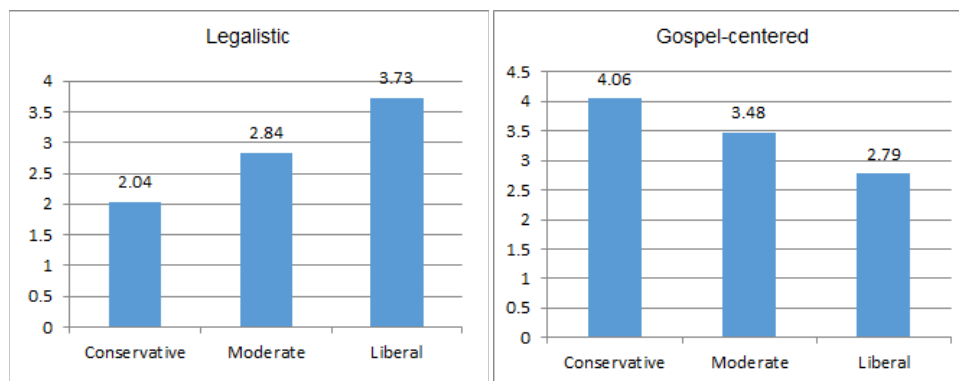


Figure 8: Millennial Perceptions of Gospel vs. Legalistic Elements in Prophecy Meetings

The greatest division in this area seemed to be around the perceived atmosphere of the meetings. As the figure below shows, the conservative group tended to see the meetings as hopeful, whereas the liberal group tended to see it as fear-based.

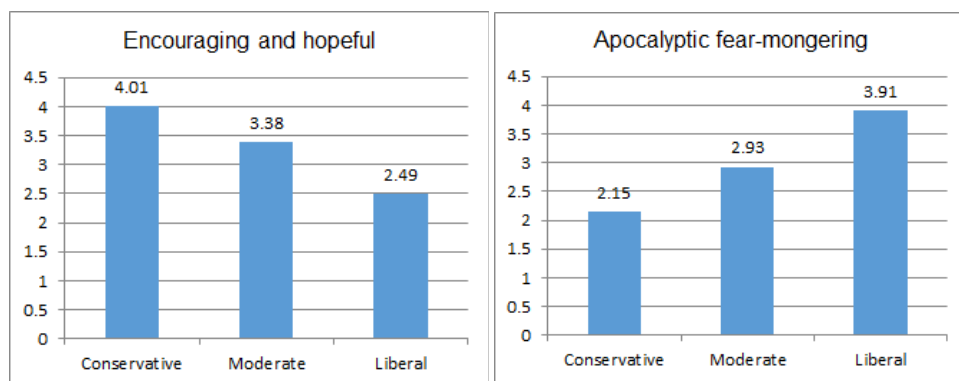


Figure 9: Impression of Hope and Fear in Evangelistic Meetings

### Analysis of Religious Orientation on Views of the Antichrist

We also wanted to see if religious orientation affected how millennials viewed the Antichrist. We examined their responses to an open-ended question: “What message about the antichrist should Adventists be sharing?” Over 1,000 millennials responded to this question, many of them with extensive comments.

Four strong themes emerged from the conservative group: (a) warn people of the coming danger so that they are not fooled; (b) make sure we point out that this is not about people but a system; (c) show that the papacy is sharing a false gospel and non-biblical teachings; and (d) show that it is more than just a system, and that we should be concerned with the spirit of the antichrist rather than just the papacy. This last view appeared to be a newer conservative view that was gaining traction. Most in this group felt that we should definitely share on this topic and that we should not water it down.

This “new” view of the antichrist was particularly fascinating to us, because it appeared to be shared across all three groups. In this view, any person or group

could be the antichrist because they saw the antichrist as a spirit rather than a system. Here are some sample comments: “Personally, I think the Antichrist is any type of false Christianity, whether it be Roman Catholic, evangelical, or even misguided Adventism. Anything that elevates human tradition and salvation by works is the Antichrist.” Another person stated, “The Antichrist is also a spirit anyone can allow to grow within them of boastful, little-horn-like attitudes.”

The moderate group generally agreed that the papacy as a system represented the antichrist, but they wanted to see that definition broadened and were concerned with *how* the message was presented. Themes that emerged from this group were (a) whatever we do, let's make sure we reveal Jesus first; (b) it's a matter of timing and we should wait until we've won the trust of the individual; (c) the antichrist is more than a system – it is any false gospel; (d) make it a message of hope and love, rather than focusing on the papacy. A significant number were unsure or felt that they didn't have enough information to make a suggestion in this area.

The liberal group was more likely to indicate that Adventists had missed the mark on this topic and that we should never be presenting it publicly. “Can we just not?” was a common response. Themes that emerged were (a) let's focus on God's character and on love; (b) the antichrist within is more worrisome than the external system; (c) stop labeling and excluding others by creating an us/them mentality; and (d) stop creating fear in people and point them to a relationship with God/Christ instead.

Thus, the response to this question was not monolithic, but was dependent on the person's perspective as to whether the antichrist was more internal (the spirit of the antichrist) or external (the papacy). The conservative group was most concerned that we didn't lose sight of our responsibility to declare this truth to others; the moderate group was most concerned about our method of sharing these ideas; and the liberal group was hoping we could avoid talking about it at all and focus instead on the gospel.

### **Millennial Suggestions for Adventist Public Evangelism**

When asked to respond to the open-ended question, “What would make you want/likely to attend an Adventist evangelistic series?” there were several areas of consensus that emerged. Strong themes were (a) make sure we share the gospel and speak about Jesus; (b) make it relevant and practical to our lives; (c) use fresh material; (d) keep it biblical and not speculative; (e) make the meetings shorter; (f) serve food; (g) use engaging speakers – someone who speaks our language and isn't boring; (h) show how to grow my relationship with Jesus; (i) emphasize redemption rather than Revelation; (j) make them more interactive – perhaps using small tables; (k) be more inclusive of social issues; (l) offer something that is not in a church – maybe online; (m) advertise in a way that reaches the inbox (or the phone) rather than the mailbox; (n) use better visuals; and (o) involve millennials in the planning and presenting.

### **Conclusions**

Seventh-day Adventist young adults/millennials (aged 18-34) appear to have polarizing views of Adventist evangelism, and especially of presentations on the antichrist. Those with more conservative religious views are likely to see such presentations as a necessary part of the Adventist mandate to warn the world of the coming apostasy and false worship. Those who identify as “moderate”

appear to be less aware of historic Adventist views and more concerned that we might be sharing the message in a way that alienates others. They tend to see the antichrist as more than just a system, and as a spirit of deception or false worship. Those who identify as liberals, are the least interested in the identity and activities of the antichrist, and are also strongly negative toward Adventist public evangelism. They are not inclined to see the antichrist as a system, but rather as a way of life lived against God.

While this strong polarization exists, areas of consensus do occur. Almost all respondents agree that current Adventist public evangelism is not aimed at millennials. Prophecy presentations are generally seen as being marketed to Adventists, conspiracy-theorists and fanatics. And there were several helpful suggestions for how Adventist public evangelism could appeal to a millennial audience. Many millennials wanted fresh presentations, better visuals and more practical messages rather than a rehashing of old material that was largely information-based.

It is important to remember that more than half of the millennial group rejects the polarization perspectives of liberal or conservative. And whatever their perspective, we should focus on listening to each other's voices rather than rejecting them.

In closing, as the church projects its evangelistic efforts in a millennial context, it should pay attention to what millennials have to say. In this sense, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words seem relevant: "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear."<sup>15</sup>

## Endnotes

1 Le Roy Edwin Froom in *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* spends considerable time tracing the Protestant tradition of identifying the papacy as the antichrist, seeing its roots in Luther's interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel. Chapter Twelve, "Luther Sets Pattern for Reformation Interpretation" in *Vol. II*). Froom goes on to identify Calvin, Knox, and Cranmer as other Protestant Reformers who taught that the papacy was the antichrist. Thus, Froom argues that the Adventist interpretation is in harmony with the established Protestant view.

2 Claire Gecewicz, "U.S. Catholics, non-Catholics continue to view Pope Francis favorably" last modified on January 18, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/18/favorable-u-s-views-pope-francis>.

3 Pew Research Center, "U.S. Protestants Are Not Defined by Reformation-Era Controversies 500 Years later," paper released on August 31, 2017.

4 A recent research study found a 68% attrition rate among young people reared in the Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists (Rainer, 2009). Rainer and Rainer (2008) found that across Christian denominations in America, the attrition rate is at 70%. 'If this trend is not reversed, the viability of Christianity in America, including Adventism, could come into question' (Cross, 2011, p. 2). As a result of this youth and young adult attrition rate, almost half of white North American Seventh-day Adventist members are 60 years of age or older (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008)." 21st Century Adventist Retention Study Fact Sheet, Southern Adventist University, 1.

5 Southern Adventist University Email – 444; ARISE Institute Email – 318; GYC Social Media – 297; Disciples Software Email – 177; Union College Email – 110; La Sierra University Church Young Adult Email – 34.

6 Andrews University (15%), Union College (12%), Walla Walla University (6%), La Sierra University, Loma Linda University and Southwestern Adventist University (4% each), Pacific Union College (3%) and Oakwood College (2%). Other colleges or universities were 1% or less.

7 There were 8 respondents who identified as transgender or non-conforming.

8 Other groups included Hispanic (17%), Asian/Pacific Islander (11%), Black/African-American (10%), and Other (6%). Respondents could check more than one race/ethnicity.

9 33% of the respondents identified their home region as the South, 26% were from the West, 17% were from the Midwest, 11% from the Northeast and 13% identified themselves as International

10 The remainder described themselves as either non-religious (5%) or came up with their own label (6%). xii

11 Thom and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2011), 157, 163, 261.

12 A selected sample from three undergraduate general education classes (all students took the paper survey) was younger (89% from those 18–24), less educated (90% without a college degree), less conservative (only 13% described themselves this way) and more ethnically diverse (Caucasians were 46% of the group) than the self-selected sample.

13 ShareHim, ASI, NET meetings and others have brought a resurgence of the prophecy-style approach. Since many of the survey respondents are SAU graduates, it is likely that the Evangelistic Resource Center (ERC) is also responsible for these high figures. The ERC sends about 100 students (from all disciplines) to preach an evangelistic series overseas each year. SAU also requires all theology students to preach their own series.

14 Alan Parker, “Is Evangelism Still Effective?” *Ministry* (August 2017), 6–7. In Parker’s research, 354 public evangelistic meetings were examined and it was found that the average age group at a prophecy meeting was 50+ and retirees were the most consistent attendees.

15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 97–8.

## EVENT EVANGELISM VS. MISSIONAL LIVING

**Ron Pickell, DMin**  
**Pastor at Berkeley Seventh-day Adventist Church,**  
**Coordinator of Adventist Christian Fellowship—**  
**North America**

One of the main evangelistic challenges today, is to anticipate our audience and their comprehension of our gospel in hopes of providing the clearest and best broadcast of the message we are called to share. We may not be able to alter the skepticism of our hearers, but we can empathize with their unanswered questions, looming doubts and general misunderstandings. Don Everts and Doug Schaupp in, “I Once Was Lost”, refer to the five thresholds that most postmoderns have to cross to come to faith today:

- Trust a real Christian
- Become curious about the Christian message
- Become open to change
- Begin a personal seeking after God
- Enter the kingdom

Each of these thresholds present their own challenges. Meeting and trusting a real Christian is key since our story is often the crack in the wall of doubt many are up against in their discovery of authentic faith. Our story can be the beginning of another person’s doubt about their doubts. If people see us as real, thinking people, who also have struggled with legitimate questions like theirs, yet have worked through them to a faith that can also make sense to them—this can be the first step in causing someone to rethink their position of doubt. Our journey to faith can be the opening door to their own curiosity. If we believe, are thoughtful and have considered their questions and have found sufficient reasons to believe, maybe the Christian faith can make sense after all.

Of course, the real tough threshold is being willing to change. As people start to become curious by reason of our own faith, they also take notice of how different our lives are from theirs and the fear of becoming more like us can cause them to ricochet in fear. Being open to change can be the toughest threshold to cross. This is where patience, honesty, admission of our own struggles to believe, challenges with change coupled with much prayer, is the best and greatest help we can offer. If a skeptic can make the journey through the fear of change, they often begin a voracious search for their own belief in God. Entering the kingdom is the natural and final step.

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i Everts, Don. *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* (p. 23). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

We suggest the five C words for each challenging threshold:

1. Compassion—Trust a real Christian
2. Conversation—Becoming curious about the Christian message
3. Community—Become open to change
4. Conviction—Begin a personal seeking after God
5. Conversion—Enter the kingdom

### *Compassion*

The compassion of Jesus or the fruit of the Spirit witnessed in the authentic life of a believer is often the crack in the steel door of doubt. Seeing and experiencing the compassion of Jesus in one who professes faith in Christ is a powerful opening message. David Frost in “Surprise the World” reminds us how Christians in the third century were winning over their Roman skeptics by their treatment of the poor and those in need:

“The message they shared—that God loved the world—was patently absurd to the average Roman; the pagan gods cared nothing for humankind. And yet in the miserable world of the Roman Empire, the Christians not only proclaimed the mercy of God but also demonstrated it. They not only fed the poor; they welcomed all comers, regardless of their socioeconomic status. The nobleman embraced the slave. Moreover, Christians opened their fellowship to anyone irrespective of ethnicity, and they promoted social relations between the sexes and within families. They were literally the most surprising alternative society, and their conduct raised an insatiable curiosity among the average Roman.”<sup>ii</sup>

Compassion is what nonbelievers need to see in those who claim to follow Jesus. Compassion leads to conversation (“why do you care?”). The contrast of our lives reveal the source of selfless interest. We are called to be the aroma of God in Christ, 2 Corinthians 2:15. Conversation about faith in Jesus often leads to community, community between the one showing such compassion and the one experiencing it; similarly, compassion and conversation can become the opening doors to meeting and fellowshiping with other believers. Authentic Christian community—where broken people are being transformed by the power of Christ—leads to conviction in the gospel. Eventually, this growing personal conviction leads to the final step of commitment and conversion.

There are two internal challenges that Adventists must consider if we are to be appropriately prepared to share Christ with a skeptic and unreceptive audience. First is our lack of preparedness to connect and communicate with others outside of the Adventist faith—Adventist isolation. For the most part, Adventist youth ministry has not been active in reaching to non-Adventist youth. Simply put, in most cases, there has been no strategic evangelistic effort toward non-Adventist youth. Furthermore, our unique Adventist lifestyle, having our own educational system, as well as our Adventist subculture and a message directed mostly to people who believe and trust the Bible, are factors that contribute to the Adventist isolation mentioned above.

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<sup>ii</sup> Frost, Michael. *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (p. 10). NavPress. Kindle Edition.

It's not that there has been no evangelism done by Adventist young people. For example, Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC), Glo Tracts and the Mega Book summer evangelism programs—that train and send Adventist youth to sell Adventist evangelistic resources—they all encourage our youth to share our Adventist message. However, these efforts are generally broad in nature and do not specifically target non-Adventist youth.

The second challenge is related to the first one, perhaps even a byproduct of it. Traditional Adventist evangelism is program driven and has centered on sharing the Adventist message. Programs have their place, but they center on having people *come* instead of *going* and making disciples, like Jesus said to do. The emphasis is on “come to us” instead of going where they are. Our approach has also been heavy on content and biblical truth. It is more information based than relationship based. Yet when we study the method of Jesus, we see him going where people were and sharing a very simple message that God was present in him and through him the kingdom of God was at hand. Also, his approach was not event driven, but people driven. Jesus was the message and his followers were his messengers. Biblical instruction is best left for discipleship and not to be confused with the simple message of the Evangel - the kingdom of God is here!

Perhaps the most important message of all is that evangelism is not something to do to people. It's meant to be a shared experience with people - a dialogue about the meaning of life and great difference the message of Christ and his salvation can make for our life now and forever. It's about what God has done and what God is doing for us!

Taking all this into consideration, I am arguing that when it comes to teaching the church about sharing the gospel, we should scrap the word “evangelism” and call for what I believe Jesus was after all along—something Michael Frost refers to as *true missional living*. Frost reminds us that evangelism is one of the spiritual gifts which means not everyone has it. However, that does not release a believer from living missionally and being used by God to tell her story. Frost defines living missionally as “living questionable lives”, lives that are so radically kind, thoughtful and caring that we become subversive in our practice.

In essence, Frost proposes a two-fold biblical model of evangelism: a) trained evangel, and b) missional living. Of this he writes: “Evangelistic mission works effectively when we are living generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christlike lives as missionaries to our own neighborhoods—and when the gifted evangelists in our midst join us in sharing Christ with our neighbors. That's not just good evangelism strategy. That's the biblical model.”<sup>iii</sup> Frost also uses a table to visually explain this twofold model (see below).

Type of Minister	Priorities	Type of Spoken Ministry
Gifted Evangelists	Clarity in the Gospel; looking for opportunities	Bold proclamation
Evangelistic Believers	Prayer; watchfulness; wise socializing	Gracious answers

iii Frost, Michael. *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (p. 1). NavPress. Kindle Edition.



What does missional living look like? Frost shares a helpful acronym—*BELLS!*<sup>iv</sup>

- Bless: three people this week—at least one of whom is not a member of your church.
- Eat: with three people this week—at least one of whom is not a member of your church.
- Listen: Spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit's voice.
- Learn Christ: Spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.
- Share: Take note of the ways God has used you to alert others to the universal reign of God through Christ.

Frost summarizes the five aspects of the acronym with the following concepts:

Bless	Generosity
Eat	Hospitality
Listen	Spirit-led
Learn	Christ-like
Sent	Missionary

Getting into the BELLS rhythm helps us make God's kingdom our main focus, while keeping us from turning everyone into a mission project. It helps us along the way to live missionally with compassion and real interest in others. In fact, I have started to be mindful of BELLS and to bless others as opportunities arise. Already, I find I am more purposeful in kingdom living and more cheerful as I bless and am being blessed by others. I have even made some notes how to be a natural witness:

1. Pray for God to set up divine appointments.
2. Expect God to lead and use you.
3. Smile.
4. If someone returns your smile, ask about their day. If they don't smile back—move on.
5. Depending on their reply, ask what's so good or bad about their day? Be sure to let God lead.
6. Don't go for a "God sales" pitch. Let the conversation go, but look for opportunities to direct the conversation toward spiritual matters which may lead to a conversation about God or just important life issues that you can both converse about together.
7. It needs to be natural, sincere and authentic. They are not your project! The conversation may just lead to life issues and that's it. Demonstrate real interest in them and be open to the Holy Spirit.

iv Frost, Michael. *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (p. 98). NavPress. Kindle Edition.

8. Trust God for the outcome. Pray for them when they leave and offer future contact if it seems wanted and appreciated.
9. Be open to both, God using you to bless them or them to bless you. It almost always works both ways.
10. Celebrate Gods activity in your life by keeping a journal of your divine encounters with others.

While much more could be added to this list, I think the point is clear: we need to live a missional life and invest our lives in the lives of others as more and more we make the principles of the kingdom of God central in our lives.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, missional living keeps us prepared, interacting with people and current in our conversations. It also keeps us focused on the kingdom. It is more about living the gospel story than sharing it. It is process evangelism instead of program evangelism. Missional living will also prepare us to be better evangelists among young people, since it fits with the kind of approach Millennials and Gen Z's are looking for. Missional living is evangelism as a way of life. It is what Jesus modeled, how the disciples learned to become like him and his plan for transforming the world. It is also our best hope for sharing good news with people who have become unreceptive to our message. Missional living is slower paced, and it may appear to take longer, but will be shorter in the long run as others learn to follow our example and begin to live missionally along with us. For those who feel called to run with Jesus' message, let's invite them to live "questionable lives of compassion" that others can hear and receive with joy!



## TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

**Scott R. Ward**

**Assistant Professor of Discipleship and Religious Education at Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan**

I want to begin by challenging you to reflect with me and dream a little. What if Adventist school campuses could become vibrant centers of outreach and evangelism? What if all of our Adventist institutions could re-discover their original mission? Would the students attending our schools find spiritual vitality and satisfying meaning and purpose?

Do you think it's possible for American Christians to replace the materialistic American dream with God's dream of leading others to fuller lives in Him? Would the way we interact with and influence the world change? Do you think it's possible to re-claim that incredible early Adventist passion that seemed to flood down from heaven like the early rain of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? Do you think it's possible for Laodicea to give way to vibrancy in our denomination in north America once again? Indeed, this is possible! With God, everything is possible! I would LOVE to be a part of something like that—wouldn't you?

### **Campus-based Youth Evangelism and Adventist Mission**

Lisa Beardsley-Hardy chose to entitle her cover story for *Adventist World* (Feb 2017), "Adventist Education: Rediscovering Our Mission." This seems to be a very strong title coming from the Director of the Department of Education at the General Conference. In her article Beardsley-Hardy quotes George Knight as saying:

"Both the birth and the expansion of Seventh-day Adventist education were stimulated by the explosive fuel of apocalyptic mission as the denomination sought to educate the coming generation of young people not only about that apocalyptic mission but [also] to dedicate their lives to it."

In this quote Knight makes it clear that Adventist schools were indeed originally campuses focused on evangelism in every way imaginable. Training students to reach out to the world around them, both globally and locally, was the core of their *raison d'être*.

Do you think Beardsley-Hard is correct in her assessment that Adventist schools need to re-discover this original mission? In order to begin doing this, must we first come to grips with the fact that we have indeed strayed from our mission? Is it possible to admit that? What have Adventist schools become over the last 100+ years? Could the loss of identity and mission be at the heart of the decline in Adventist education? These are indeed difficult but necessary discussions for our churches and schools to have just as we must each look at our own lives and passions to see how we as individuals are doing in our walk with Jesus.

Laodicea is definitely a difficult culture to navigate and we will never navigate it well without regular, deliberate, Holy Spirit-led introspection and reflection.

But there is hope. There is always hope. In this case we have concrete examples of that hope and inspiring instances of schools that are in fact re-discovering their missions in the midst of Laodicean culture and they are beginning to thrive and grow!

### **Some Inspiring Examples**

Last Spring I took some of my *Collaborative Ministry* students (this course teaches seminary students—many of them will become pastors—effective ways of working with their church schools) on a field trip to visit some thriving Adventist schools near Portland, Oregon. Here’s what we found:

We found a large academy where the students testified that they felt like a big family. They said the school environment was loving and supportive and they felt like they could be themselves and that other students were there to support them. The students also attested to the fact that the faculty and staff were loving mentors whom they respected and that they loved the pastors who came on campus to interact and spend time with them. There were even young students at the Adventist elementary school across the street that talked about the love and respect they had for the pastors from their churches who would come on campus to spend time with them talking about God and getting involved in outreach. One student said that because of the time the pastor spent on campus he felt like that pastor was “his” pastor rather than merely “the” pastor from his church.

As I talked with the pastor of the large Adventist church that was right in between these two schools he told me about the dozens of outreach projects and opportunities that were available to the students on an ongoing basis. From a free health clinic, to community gym nights, to homeless ministry, to cooking schools, to evangelistic crusades and a variety of forms of personal evangelism. There are far too many ministries to list here but suffice it to say—there seemed to be a ministry that everyone would be able to relate to and enjoy being involved in. The students’ vibrancy and contagious spirituality were a testimony to the evangelistic partnerships between the schools and churches.

My students and I visited another school where the pastors from all the constituent churches spent time at the school every week. Each pastor adopted a classroom and lead out with spiritual activities as well as helping meet every other need they could find from maintenance to studying the Bible with the families of non-Adventist students. One of the core spiritual elements in that school was TAG time. TAG time stands for, “Time Alone with God.” The seminary students in my class witnessed 9 year olds being led by their teacher to engage individually in personal devotions for 45 minutes each day. One little girl testified that her life would, “fall apart” without this time!

The stories go on and on. Another small church school contained 80% community students (non-Adventist). The parents of several of these students stated that they were not church attenders at any church. They said that this Adventist School was the center of their spiritual community and that they felt like the pastor from the church that supported this school was “their” pastor even though they never attended his church services.

In these schools mission is happening. People's lives are being touched by the eternal gospel—both the students and the surrounding community. This is youth evangelism in one of its purest forms and is driving back at the core of what Adventist education was in its earliest days. This is all happening in a way that is contemporary and relevant to the world we live in now in 21st century America. These experiences are not limited to the Oregon Conference. Stories like this are coming out from across the country. It's not as widespread as we would like to see—but it seems that God is up to something special—He's on the move!

### **Becoming Gospel-Centered Institutions**

I believe that one of the first and most foundational ways to change the culture of our institutions and to try and help more Adventist schools to re-discover their mission is to put the gospel at the very center of everything we do. The Three Angels' messages of Revelation 14 are at the heart of Adventist identity, and the first picture in these messages is that of an angel with the "everlasting gospel" (Revelation 14:6)

Simply put, Adventists must become preachers of the gospel! I believe this is also a core reason why we are losing so many children born into Adventist homes from the church—we seem to struggle with the basics of how to convert people to Christ before teaching them our distinctive, beautiful truths that describe God's character so well. But without the gospel foundation everything falls apart and we lose even our own children!

For this reason we must make our schools centers of gospel power and influence—not just for the spiritual health of our own children and families—but for the spreading of the good news about Jesus to the world around us as well. I believe that this gospel focus—without sacrificing distinctive truth—is the center of the core requirement for the revival of Adventist education and also for the revival of Adventism as a whole. Revelation 14:6 tells us that the gospel is "everlasting"—it never goes out of style and we can never live without it!

Also, if we do not have a gospel focus, we are straying away from the example set by one of our church's early founders, Ellen G. White, for she wrote far more on the life and teachings of Christ than she ever did on prophecy and doctrine. When I look at the books (not compilations) that Ellen White wrote, it seems to me that she focused far more on Jesus and the gospel than any other topic. *Steps to Christ*, *Desire of Ages*, *Confrontation*, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* and *Christ's Object Lessons*, are a few good examples of this Jesus-gospel-centered focus.

### **Transforming Adventist School Campuses**

In the Discipleship and Religious Education department of which I am a part of (at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary) we have worked together to develop a 4 step process for encouraging churches and church schools in a collaborative growth process that leads to greater institutional health, vitality and witness to the community, for both the church and the school.

#### *Pastoral Involvement in Schools.*

The first thing we do is to encourage pastors to get involved in their church schools. The brief overview of this concept is for pastors to show up at the school regularly and participate in activities like: Developing caring and

supportive relationships with the faculty, staff and students by simply showing up. Being involved in everything from work bees to teaching baptismal classes to being a spiritual companion and mentor for faculty, staff and students is key. Attending school board and committee meetings and frequently verbalizing support for the school and sharing good on-campus experiences at church on Sabbath is vital. Also, making sure the church members know and understand the tremendous benefits of Adventist education and all the in depth studies that are evidence of these benefits is important.

#### *Training Students for Community Outreach.*

The second step we encourage is for the pastor to work together with the school principal and staff to help teach the students how to get involved in community outreach activities. These activities can be humanitarian or overtly spiritual in nature. Things like: local park clean up, homeless ministry, highway cleanup, shut in visitation with the pastor or an elder, or being a partner in giving Bible studies. Another activity we encourage is going door-to-door in the community around the school spreading God's love through simple holiday greetings, baked goods, taking prayer requests or offering to help needy neighbors with yard clean up or other chores. These are all excellent ways to let your community know you care. It's all about breaking out of the fortress mentality and being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world around us.

#### *Inviting the Community to Entry-level/Non-threatening Events.*

The third step we encourage is to invite the community on campus to experience non-threatening events and opportunities that Ellen White refers to as, "dis-interested acts of kindness." These are events without a "hook." That means there is no catch at the end—we just want to help people where they are in life for the sake of helping them. This can include things like hosting cooking schools and financial peace seminars at the school instead of at the church. In most cases a school campus is a less threatening and a more welcoming environment for non-Adventists to come and get to know us than the church is—especially for the non-Adventist Christians and non-Christian families that may be sending their children to our schools. Other on-campus activities to invite your school neighbors to might be gym nights, softball games, craft fairs or even a 5K charity run benefiting a local community non-profit organization.

#### *Planning Special Worship Experiences Tailored for the Community.*

The fourth step is to develop some kind of spiritual worship experience that you can invite your newly found community friends to. Hosting a worship experience on-campus is an effective way to take the next step in your relationship with those who are now familiar with your campus and comfortable being there. As your sense of community and relationships deepen newcomers will be more interested in learning more about what motivates you to live life the way you do. Typically, trying to shift people to the church at this point is a real disconnect when it's the school that they have bonded with. These worship experiences can happen any night of the week or on weekends. In some instances, a youth or family oriented church plant may even be something to consider. Always move forward carefully with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

These 4 steps and the activities they entail work together to help the young people at your churches and schools to see and experience how to get involved

in non-threatening forms of friendship and evangelism that will help develop an outreach orientation in their own lives that will last a lifetime.

### **Testimony to the Effectiveness of these Steps**

I have experienced these first three steps in my ministry personally and have documented research in this area as a part of my Doctor of Ministry program. I got heavily involved in running Christian clubs every week at my local Adventist elementary school, academy and also on one public high school campus just as step one suggests. I was there every week with students engaged in spiritually nurturing activities and from there we led into step 2 as outlined above—outreach. We had outreach activities specific to my groups in some cases and simply encouraged greater involvement in school sponsored outreach events in others. Students claimed that this helped them to grow spiritually.

From there, my students on the Adventist campuses also became more involved in activities designed to invite the public on campus such as our annual pet and hobby fair that included a 5k run for a local charity. This was one of the initial activities to invite community members on campus and since I have left that area more activities like this are happening, with high student involvement and participation.

The fourth step in this progression comes from Allan Walshe, the chair of the department I work in at the seminary. He testifies of a school in Australia that was voted to be closed but after much prayer was reopened, followed these basic steps, including step 4 where they planned a youth church on the academy campus. In a few years this campus went from being closed to having a student body of 1,000 students who are mostly non-Adventist and are learning daily about Jesus as well as distinctive Adventist truth.

In pursuing these same initial steps, the Oregon Conference education department has even hired a full-time outreach coordinator for their schools—teaching them how to fully engage step 2 in a coordinated conference-wide manner.

### **Breaking the Institutional Divide**

When we can create this type of climate/culture change “within” our Adventist institutions I believe we will find much greater success in reaching out to the majority of Adventist youth who, unfortunately, attend school outside the system in public school settings. I say, “unfortunately” because somewhere near 70% of Adventist young people are not attending Adventist schools for a variety of reasons, such as proximity to a church school, finances or other extenuating circumstances.

Adventist students attending public schools are not necessarily there because they want to be—many would much rather be in a church school. Our goal is obviously to have more church schools rather than less, and to enable more children to attend through whatever means possible. But, until we can do that, we need to also reach out to our Adventist youth wherever they are attending, with whatever resources our churches and schools can muster. This leads us to yet another form of youth evangelism: public school outreach.

Right now there is too much of a feeling that “they” are not really a part of “us.” We absolutely **MUST** be more inclusive! As we develop more of an outreach orientation within our own schools, and as our members start feeling more



comfortable interacting with non-Adventists, it will help change our institutional mindset that has often times been an “us” vs. “them” mentality. Rather than condemning those outside our own system, we need to begin loving others in our communities. As this mindset develops it will become more natural for academy students to become friends with Adventist public school students and volunteer together with them in implementing many of the outreach ideas discussed above. This may take the form of adopting needy families during the holidays by giving Christmas gifts or food baskets. It may also be a way to find more community service projects or perhaps even another place to advertise the events being hosted at the church school. I have found that inclusion is a much better way to develop relationships than exclusion and by partnering very intentionally with our public school youth—even if they are attending schools some distance away—we can develop closer friendships with them and help them to feel much more a part of the Adventist church and school family. It also greatly expands the opportunities for all youth to participate in more forms of evangelism and thereby have their lives forever changed.

### **Conclusion**

It is time to re-discover, re-claim and begin to re-live the Advent vision that so inspired our founding pioneers so long ago. We need to work and pray diligently to re-claim those founding principles and find ways to apply them to the 21st century in which we now live. It most certainly begins with a relentless proclaiming and living of the basic gospel of Jesus Christ and from there leads to as many forms of outreach and evangelism as our members from every tribe, nation and tongue can dream of with their imaginations led and inspired by the Spirit of the living God. Studies have shown that the younger generations of our day are drawn to service activities and humanitarian outreach. If we can re-claim these activities for Christ it will help to draw our young people to Him and towards His kingdom and it will undoubtedly help to re-turn our institutions into the vibrant, Christ-filled centers of outreach and evangelism that they were originally intended to be.

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# 5

## Conclusion and Recommendations

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the paper presentations, on the afternoon of the second day, the 180 symposium transitioned into the formation of three focus groups: a) Administrators, b) Practitioners, and c) Public Campus Ministry leaders. These focus groups met for several hours, brainstorming and discussing ideas from their respective viewpoints, with the purpose of formulating a list of recommendations on youth evangelism, having in mind particularly the local context, as well as leaders at the various levels of our church. Below is a summary of those recommendations.

### Administrators Focus Group

The Administrators focus group provided a summary of their discussions in two sections: First, a section with the title “Top things learned”: in this section each administrator shared his/her top takeaway from the papers and why. This discussion served as preparation for the second section: “Things that administrators can do”; here, administrators enumerated several practical recommendations in order to improve in the area of youth evangelism.

#### *Top Things Learned*

- The importance of *PCM (Public Campus Ministry) in connection to the local church*
    - PCM is a mission field opportunity of the local church; as students go to college they will end up at a different church and they need to connect.
    - When PCM is connected to the local church this results in a high and positive impact on the young adults and the church in general. Usually a synergy develops for purpose in ministry and evangelism.
    - We need healthy local congregations close to public campuses where students feel welcomed and ministered to.
    - We need to consider a church planting strategy around public campuses. In this regard, we need to seek pastors that can minister effectively in these churches.
    - We need to stop looking at our young adults as a project and instead partner with them.
  - The significance of *intergenerational ministry*. What we want in a local church is to see young people active and involved, doing ministry together with adults.
  - The potential of *church planning with young adults in mind*. As local church as well as conferences and unions make plans, young adults should be at the heart of their agendas.
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- The value of *entrepreneurial evangelism*. This refers to using business opportunities for ministry, mission and evangelism. This is key for connecting with the unchurched and for developing relationships. We need to create mentors that can work with young people through this approach—we need to support them and walk beside them.

#### *Things That Administrators Can Do*

- Have a weekly “in touch with” other Conference/Union officers to keep them up to speed, telling them what is happening in young adult ministry this week and next week.
- Many local congregations want young adults to come to their churches, but don’t know where to start. Perhaps a local youth/young adult day on campuses could be organized, where churches come and meet with students, recruiting them to come to their churches.
- Similarly, plan a Sabbath at Adventist universities where we can meet young adult members from local churches in the conference – all universities doing it on the same Sabbath.
- Conduct “exit interviews” at universities, asking young adults if we can stay connected with them for the next few years, to help them identify and get involved with healthy local churches.
- Create an app and other venues of social media for churches to market themselves so that young adults can connect with them.
- If we believe that the young people are the evangelists, then our responsibility is to resource and prepare them for winning their peers.
- Each Conference should consider hiring a young adult and place him/her in a church near a campus to strategize and to develop an environment that is friendly to public campus students.
- Have Conferences commit a minimum of \$500 dollars as “seed money” towards planting a youth-friendly church near/at a university.
- Every conference should consider hiring a Public Campus Evangelism Intern for a minimum of one year.
- Urge Unions and Conferences to implement the “one year in mission” initiative, applied specifically to Public Campus Evangelism.
- Conferences and Unions are encouraged to consider the Lake Union Conference (LUC) Youth Evangelism Model, in which church funds are matched with union funding to resource youth for evangelism.

#### **Practitioners Focus Group**

This focus group chose to categorize their recommendations as follows: a) For all (individuals, pastors, congregations, conferences, unions, divisions, general conference, educational institutions), b) For individuals, c) For congregations and church leaders, d) For Conferences, e) For Unions, f) For Divisions, and g) For the General Conference. Here are the main recommendations:

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*Recommendations For All*

- Just do something! It is better to do something than perpetually delay action.
- Expect a combination of the divine with the human. Prayer and dependence on God is a must.
- Start small.
- Don't limit your dreaming and vision by money.
- Think "intergenerational".
- Think and plan from the perspective of the local church and community.
- Include discipleship as part of the evangelistic cycle (not just events and baptisms).
- Brand/package your project with excellence
- What you market has to be valuable, accessible and adaptable.
- Foster fun and enjoyment as positive environments for sharing the Gospel in the congregation and the community.
- Prioritize relationship richness by improving communication skills online as well as offline, especially in one-to-one settings and small group gatherings.
- Celebrate natural evangelism, yet still challenge intentional evangelism.
- Invest in technology, graphic design, social media, apps, etc.

*Recommendations For Individuals*

- Exemplify and increase "weak ties" (refer to the chapter in this book) in multiple places in the community, such as participation in public and private gathering places, etc.
- Prioritize relationship richness by improving communication skills online as well as offline, especially in one-to-one settings and small group gatherings.
- Use your profession to mentor young adults with similar vocational interests.

*Recommendations For Congregations and Church Leaders*

- Make Pathfinders more evangelistic. Invite children from the community.
  - Create an intentional church culture by purposely crafting stories to communicate the evangelistic emphasis of the congregation.
  - Emphasize, exemplify, and train for "friendship evangelism" both as an event AND as a process.
  - Provide systematic training on lifestyle evangelism that is culturally relevant.
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- Make community service and friendship evangelism, rather than public evangelism, the entry point for evangelism.
- Plan, evaluate, and adjust “sequence evangelism” (yearly cycle) for a flow of evangelistic activities.
- Repurpose the church facility to provide space and time for community usage, by making the church facility accessible daily through coordinated scheduling.
- Identify and match the community rhythms and cycles (holidays, school years, events, traditions, etc.) in a typical year.
- Coordinate with other Adventist groups and gatherings in your area.
- Envision and implement “Church without walls”—seeing and being the church in your home, neighborhood, and work.
- Encourage members to share their evangelistic experiences through personal testimonies.
- Teach church members how to create and share their personal narrative that can inspire others.
- Instead of simply creating events, create experiences that connect people.
- View all young people in the community (not just those that attend your church) as “our youth”.
- Invite individuals to commit to 8-10 hours/week of door-to-door evangelism.
- Identify older people who are “youth friendly” and take young people where they are for food and to hang out rather than always meeting at a church facility.
- Collect, process, and disseminate the evangelistic ideas and practices of young people.

#### *Recommendations For Conferences*

- Take a long-term view to measure evangelism, beyond a single event.
  - Emphasize, exemplify, and train for “friendship evangelism” as both an event AND a process.
  - Make community service and friendship evangelism, rather than public evangelism, the entry point for evangelism.
  - At summer camps provide intentional mentoring with a staff pastor for the staff who then mentor the campers.
  - Reverse the process of “Believe, Behave, Belong” so congregations practice “Belong, Behave, Believe”.
  - Conduct research of local contexts to analyze demographics, practices, and trends.
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- Teach church members how to create and share their personal narrative that can inspire others.
- Instead of simply creating events, create experiences that connect people.
- Provide systematic training on lifestyle evangelism that is culturally relevant
- Collect, process, and disseminate the evangelistic ideas and practices of young people.

#### *Recommendations For Unions*

- (See Conferences recommendations)
- Have administration empower youth ministry professionals with autonomy, authority, and accountability to implement youth evangelism.

#### *Recommendations For Divisions*

- (See Conferences and Unions recommendations)

#### *Recommendations For the General Conference*

- (See Conferences, Unions and Divisions recommendations)
- Continue Global Youth Day.

#### *Recommendations For Educational Institutions*

- (see Conferences recommendations)

### **Public Campus Ministry (PCM) Focus Group**

While generally speaking in the last few years the focus of youth ministry across the North American Division has been retention—and rightly so—Public Campus Ministry (PCM) has championed youth evangelism perhaps more than any other ministry involving Adventist young adults. At this particular symposium, we noticed that when the presentations moved into talking about PCM, we began talking more about reaching non-Adventist young adults, as well as engaging our own young adults in reaching non-Adventist friends. With its motto “Reach the campus, change the world!”, PCM should be seriously considered as a leading force in Adventist youth evangelism. Moreover, PCM is a place where experimentation in youth evangelism takes place on an ongoing basis. For instance, the proliferation of CRAVE events<sup>1</sup> throughout many public campuses in recent years is a good example. As the church considers PCM, particularly in relation to youth evangelism, here are a few questions to ponder:

- What place does PCM occupy in our administrative agendas? Do we talk and dream about it often?
  - How can we pay as much attention to PCM as we do to our own educational system? (About 80% of our own students attend public universities)
  - What sort of collaboration between Adventist campuses and PCM can be explored?
  - How much funding and resources are we dedicating to PCM? How can we improve in this area?
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*General Recommendations*

In light of the huge evangelistic opportunity with PCM as perhaps our greatest Young Adult evangelistic opportunity we recommend the following:


- Church leaders and pastors to physically visit PCM practitioners to see the growth and to learn about the success stories of PCM.
- Commission a research project to evaluate the present realities of PCM.
- Creating a new full time Director with PCM experience to oversee the growing PCM program at NAD level.
- Think of creative and effective ways to promote PCM at the NAD year end meetings.
- To explore how Adventist campuses can collaborate with PCM in their area to encourage and support PCM students and ministry.

*Recommendations on PCM Evangelism*

- Foster cultural change at local churches that engage PCM students - (consider core value paradigms such as Growing Young, COR, etc.)
- Develop a church planting movement focused on intergenerational churches that intentionally work with PCM.
- Promote PCM evangelistic resources like CRAVE for student ministries that want to reach out.
- Facilitate PCM training that encourages students to live missional lives on campus.
- Produce PCM resources for students not able to connect with local churches such as online materials, videos, etc.
- Form a team of student volunteers to help create a PCM brand and resources for online, digital resources.
- Provide financial support at local Conferences and Union levels to help further the PCM mission.
- Support PCM Spring Break mission trips that encourage students to help reach out with established ACF campus ministries within the NAD.
- Find ways to support SDA grad students (emotionally, spiritually and financially) since they may wind up teaching in an SDA university or represent the church on a non-Adventist campus.
- Develop professional training tailored for PCM (MA, DMin)

**Endnotes**

1 CRAVE is a model of public evangelism used in recent years on public campuses to reach out to young adults.



*Reach Out: Relevant Youth Evangelism* is a collection of presentations given at the 180 Symposium where a group of Adventist administrators, academics and practitioners met to discuss challenges and possibilities in the area of youth evangelism. The goal was to examine relevant and effective ways to involve Adventist youth and young adults in evangelism and effectively reach youth and young adults outside of the church.

This book is divided into five sections:

- Innovative Youth Evangelism
- Youth Evangelism on Campus
- Mobilizing Our Youth for Evangelism
- Creating a Culture of Youth Evangelism
- Recommendations for a Brighter Future

The last section presents the suggestions and recommendations that came from three focus groups: administrators, practitioners and public campus ministry leaders.

This resource is designed to give local church leaders ideas on how they can engage youth and young adults in their church's evangelistic plans to reach youth and young adults in their community.



Following more than 20 years of successful pastoral work, S. Joseph Kidder has been teaching at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological seminary at Andrews University for the last 18 years. He travels extensively, teaching people and churches how to have a vibrant and authentic walk with God.



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