



# General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter

An informative publication for members of the General Conference Executive Committee as a service through the office of the Chair

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*The leader wasn't aware* of Israel's crisis. As Moses was nearly six weeks in the very presence of God, his people in the valley below thought him dead. So, they returned to their familiar complaining, doubting, and worrying. Placating them, Aaron built a golden calf and planned worship to the Lord in front of this metal object.

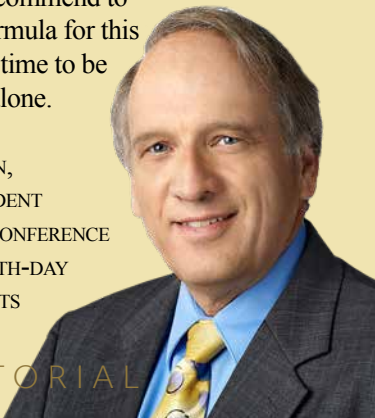
Recognizing their rebellion, God told Moses, "...Now therefore let me alone... that I may consume them..." (Ex. 32:10, adapted). Moses immediately interceded for his people and God "relented" from the threatened destruction.

Moses did not know what was happening until God told him. And Israel did not imagine God's displeasure until Moses told them. While the guilty were not spared, in the end God was glorified. Moses, empowered by much time in Yahweh's presence, received a clear vision of God with his people through to the promised land and beyond.

Today, we are in a time of global crisis. The church isn't spared economic fallout, the membership isn't immune to viruses; tomorrow's details are unclear. But time alone with God, is the way through every crisis.

Leaders, I commend to you this formula for this crisis, take time to be with God alone.

TOM LEMON,  
VICE PRESIDENT  
GENERAL CONFERENCE  
OF SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTISTS



EDITORIAL



## LEADERSHIP DURING A TIME OF CRISIS

BY TED N. C. WILSON, PH.D., PRESIDENT  
GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

*Editor's Note: This article is adapted from a presentation given by Ted N.C. Wilson to the Inter-American Division's 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Segment Leadership Development Conference (SeLD) on July 6, 2020. Elements of the oral style have been retained.*

Let me share with you some thoughts on the subject of leadership response in emergencies. This is a fascinating and difficult subject, but we all will have to face serious challenges as we come to the very end of time. We know that Christ is coming very soon, and what an opportunity for you as leaders to be part of meeting emergencies, not through your own

power, but through the power of God.

Through all of the many challenges we are facing and will face, God is going to guide us. He will bring what is important to the forefront so we keep in mind that our mission is to proclaim the Three Angels' Messages, to live out the life of Christ, pointing people to His

—continued, next page

righteousness, and to live out Christ’s ministry found in Luke 18—helping the oppressed, the brokenhearted, those who are imprisoned, helping people who need Jesus.

So, when you find yourself in an emergency as a leader, what do you do? Well, my sharing with you today is just very simple—I’m going to share with you from my heart.

## GOD’S WORD FOUNDATIONAL

First, you must realize as a leader the wonderful privilege you have of following Micah 6:8. Now, you know that beautiful text, and you use it. I use it when I meet many world leaders. I challenge them with this beautiful text, but as a leader in an emergency, this is a *key* for you:

“He has shown you, O man, what is good.” He’s shown you, leader—whether you’re a man or a woman—whoever you are in your leadership capacity, God has shown you what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you as a leader? To do that which is right, just, appropriate. That’s why we have policies. That’s why we take actions. And that’s why we have the Word of God, of course.

Do that which is right as a leader. But we don’t always do that. And others don’t always do that. And so, the next line is also for you and me as leaders—”love mercy.” Do that which is right as a leader, but love mercy.

In an emergency situation, don’t forget these amazing

principles. The next one is the most important, in an overall sense, perhaps: “Walk humbly with your God.”

The Bible says don’t think of yourself more importantly than you are—humble yourself. We need, as leaders in a crisis situation, to walk humbly with God because that is where we get our source of power.

God’s Word is foundational. As a leader, never forget that. I need to remind myself—stay in the Word. Also, use the Spirit of Prophecy; it is marvelous instruction for all of us. In *Principles for Christian Leaders* we read: “Whatever the position we are called to fill, our only safety is in walking humbly with God.”<sup>1</sup> That’s the only safety we have.

“The man who glories in his supposed capabilities . . .” thinking thoughts such as, “Oh, I’ve been elected to this, or, people think I’m a pretty wise person. . . .” Well, remember—“The man who glories in his supposed capabilities in his property, in his position of power, in his wisdom, or in anything else than Christ, will be taken in Satan’s net.”<sup>2</sup> So, when you’re facing an emergency, don’t lean on yourself—lean on the Lord completely. “Not a ray of glory is to be diverted to any human agent.”<sup>3</sup> Give God the glory.

## PRAY. SEEK. TRUST.

What do you do in an emergency situation? First, pray earnestly. You know that marvelous text in James



“  
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facing an  
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completely.”

1:5—“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him.” This is real. Claim it. I try to claim it every morning, falling on my knees out of bed, praying earnestly for the Lord’s guidance and wisdom. And I ask for the Holy Spirit, and that the latter rain will fall. I pray that quite often. We need the falling of the latter rain. Please join me in that.

Another favorite passage of mine is Psalm 37:3-7 — “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness . . .” not your own. *His* faithfulness. “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord . . .” and in an emergency situation, when a crisis comes, when things are pounding down on you, “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him. . .” that’s the only source of strength you’re going to have, “and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.” Here is wonderful, tremendous counsel for each of us.

The next thing you need to do, of course, is seek counsel from the Bible and from the Spirit of Prophecy. Trust in God in all that you do.

Another beautiful text I enjoy sharing with leaders who are facing crises is Nahum 1:7—“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.”

You’re facing an emergency, a trial, a difficulty, “and He knows those who trust in Him.” God knows you, and He’s going to lead you, so seek counsel in the Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy, and through prayer.



## TEAMWORK IS VITAL

A really important aspect of leadership is—and I know you can resonate with this—after you personally connect with the Lord, then work closely and carefully with your team.

For example, if you’re the president of an organization, don’t think that you’re just going to “call all the shots.” You must work with the secretary and treasurer, the undersecretary and undertreasurer (if you have them), and the vice presidents—you need to work with your team. Set up working groups that can work on particular aspects of whatever it is you’re facing, and then work with the groups that you as officers set out. *Work with your team.*

You know that beautiful verse in Proverbs 15:22, “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established.” In other words, without working with a team that will give you counsel, your plans are just not going to work. But, “in the multitude of counselors,” the plans are established.

That’s why we work with a

committee system. For example, although the Lord has asked me to be in this position, I’m not the “Big Boss.” I work reporting to the executive committee. The Secretary reports to the executive committee. The Treasurer reports to the executive committee. They don’t report to me. We don’t have a “presidential system” in the Seventh-day Adventist Church structure, although institutions do. They have presidents, vice-presidents, and these are in charge of certain areas and they look to the president in a more direct presidential system. But in the Church administrative structure, we report to the committee, and we work together. *Work with your team.* I cannot overemphasize that.

## BE AWARE

As a leader, be aware. Be understanding. Don’t consider yourself to be more than you are. You need to be focused in your activities, and to be aware of what’s going on.

In Romans 12, Paul provides very practical counsel, encouraging us to see that in a crisis we must have a bigger picture than simply what we

think ought to happen. In verse nine we read, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”

So, in an emergency, we must focus on the actual problem *and* the ultimate goal, understanding that God wants to work through you to bring glory to His name. And, as verse 10 indicates, have “brotherly love.”

This passage is very practical when dealing with people during a crisis. Don’t “lag in diligence, serve the Lord, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation . . .” (vss. 11, 12).

Patience in a crisis? The leader must be patient, and that comes as you’re connected with the Lord every day, walking humbly with Him, otherwise, you’re going to get anxious. We all need to be patient, and we can obtain that only by connecting with the Lord, continuing steadfastly in prayer and being hospitable.

### BLESS, DON'T CURSE

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (vs. 14). Now, when you get into a big situation in a crisis, you’re going to have all kinds of people aiming at you and sending all kinds of negative messages. With social media today, you can’t avoid it—you become a target. Don’t worry about that. Bless those who seem to be taking snipes at you or pointing fingers and yelling at you, or denigrating you, or whatever it is.

In Romans 12 there is much beautiful, practical counsel for many situations, but especially in a crisis, “Do not repay evil for evil, but have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (vs. 17). And then Paul says, and this is really amazing, “If it is possible . . .” and in a crisis situation you’re going to be pushed from all sides, “if possible . . .” then he gives even *another* qualifier, “as much

as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”

In a crisis, the leader must be calm, tranquil, patient, “living peaceably” with people—even if they’re aiming at you. And if they aim at you, verse 19 says, “‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

So then, you feed those who are hungry, those who are your enemies.



In an emergency, we must focus on the actual problem *and* the ultimate goal, understanding that God wants to work through you to bring glory to His name.

You give them water and you surprise them—that’s what the last part of Romans 12:20 says, quoting from Proverbs 25:21, 22. You will “heap coals of fire on his head.” The person will be so shocked to see that while they are treating you badly, you are giving them a good response! Especially during a crisis, treat people with the greatest respect and dignity, and you will change even those who are harassing you.

### DO NOT BE OVERCOME

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). This is an amazing opportunity for focusing your attention during a

crisis situation. Don’t ever forget that you are not working for yourself—you are working for the Lord. This is *His* work. You know that beautiful text in Joshua 1:9—“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

You know, sometimes after a tough meeting, you come back to your office, or you go home, and you just don’t know where to turn and you don’t know what to do because people in this emergency situation were just throwing everything at you. But you’ve got to keep your attention focused and remember that God is with you wherever you go.

### TIMELY AND APPROPRIATE

Another important aspect—once you understand your practical approach to a situation, and to be calm, tranquil, patient in a crisis—is to have, as much as possible, a quick response.

Don’t let something continually fester for a long period of time, because it will overtake you. Work closely with your team, with the working groups, and come up with a quick response. Now, that doesn’t mean a knee jerk response; it means *an appropriately timed response*.

You need to work carefully with your communication department, with the communicators—those in media. And have those small groups working so that collectively you’re staying in touch with them. As a leader in crisis times, you have so many things you’re working on at the same time, and you must stay on top of it. It’s important to be in touch and not isolate yourself. You have to listen to people, and you have to listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit, asking God to guide you in a very special way.

I want to share with you this quote

“

Let every department of our work, every institution connected with our cause, be conducted on considerate, generous lines. Let every branch of the work, while maintaining its own distinctive character, seek to protect, strengthen, and build up every other branch.

that points out the importance of working together in a cooperative way. In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 7, we read, “Let every department of our work, every institution connected with our cause, be conducted on considerate, generous lines. Let every branch of the work, while maintaining its own distinctive character, seek to protect, strengthen, and build up every other branch.”<sup>24</sup>

You see, in a crisis situation, we have to work together. And we can only do that as we are connected to “The Vine”—to Jesus, who will bring us together by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The quote continues: “Not consolidation, not rivalry or criticism, but co-operation, is God’s plan for His institutions, that ‘the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual, working in the measure of every part,’ may make ‘increase of the body unto the edifying building up of itself in love.’”<sup>25</sup>

### LOVE IS KEY

So really, love is the key to bringing all of your team together. As the leader, do more listening than talking. I need to remind myself of this. All this counsel I’m giving you, it’s not that I’m the “big, wise person.” Absolutely not. We all go through crises. I’ve been through so many crises, and so have you. But these are practical aspects that you learn as you move along: Listen to people. Work together. Don’t have silos; let everybody work in a united way. Listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Act carefully, but decisively, with the Holy Spirit leading you in a powerful way.

And never forget, my dear leaders, that you can be caught up in responding to an emergency rapidly,

appropriately, and even with the Holy Spirit’s leading, and yet forget what the full mission of the church is all about—even in an emergency—and that is to bring hope and the Three Angels’ amazing messages of Revelation 14. We are told in the Spirit of Prophecy that nothing should absorb our attention away from the Three Angels’ Messages.

My dear friends, leaders, be proponents of the historic understanding of prophecy. The understanding that we are not people who rely on the historical-critical method of understanding Scripture, but people who use the historical-grammatical, the historical-biblical approach, understanding that Scripture speaks to us, and that Christ is right now in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary interceding for us.

In a crisis situation, people need to know, our members need to know, that Jesus is listening, that we can come directly to the throne of God, and that the Lord will hear us in these situations. And the Three Angels’ Messages are absolutely crucial. The devil has done his best to confuse people, but these messages remind us of who God is—the God who made heaven and earth, and the sea and the springs of water. They remind us that Babylon is full of confusion—tradition mixed with truth leading people to a false understanding. And, of course, the third angel warning us against the Mark of the Beast, which is representing a false worship.

So, we’re in a crisis situation all the time as we face the world, helping them understand that God wants to turn people back to the true worship of God. “Here is the patience of the saints”—that’s you and me—“Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

“Be a pillar of hope. Be someone who, in a crisis situation, is patient, tranquil, willing to listen, leaning on the Lord, working quickly and working with people, but relying completely on the power of the Lord. Lean on God, and He will be your guide and strength.”



## OUR REAL PURPOSE

Never forget in a crisis situation what our real purpose is as leaders in God's church—it is to lift up Christ and His righteousness, for the righteousness of Christ is the central core of the Three Angels' Messages, pointing people to the true worship of God. And, of course, the fourth angel's message recorded in Rev. 18:1-4, telling us that “Babylon is fallen” and that God is calling out His people. In the crisis situation we're facing right now, we are being given a wonderful opportunity to call people to an understanding of who Christ really is, and that He is the answer to the problems we face in these crises.

So, my dear friends, be an anchor of stability. Be a pillar of hope. Be someone who, in a crisis situation, is patient, tranquil, willing to listen, leaning on the Lord, working quickly and working with people, but relying completely on the power of the Lord. Lean on God, and He will be your

guide and strength. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

## FACING THE FUTURE

In the future, we will face many more crises. We will not just get through this and then relax. We know that the future will not be easy, but the Bible is filled with assurance, such as found in Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear” (verse 1). Don't be fearful. The last thing God wants is a fearful Seventh-day Adventist leader. Lean on the Lord. “Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled . . .” (vs. 2).

And verse 10 tells you and me, in a crisis emergency situation, what to do. “Be still, and know that I am God.” I will help you through this, God says. “I will be exalted among the nations.”

That's God. “I will be exalted in the earth.” That's God—not you or me. We are His hands and feet. We are the vehicle through which He works to bring encouragement to people in a time of emergency and crisis. And will face unbelievable crises in the future. We know what *The Great Controversy* says.

“The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge” (vs. 11). What a mighty and wonderful thing that is. And I love the beautiful verse in Joel 2:21. It's probably my favorite verse—“Fear not, O land; Be glad and rejoice, for the Lord will do great things!” He'll do great things through you as a leader, if you lean completely on Him.

## LOOK TO JESUS

In the marvelous book, *Christian Service*, we read, “We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for

the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the Word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”<sup>6</sup>

Then a little further we read, “God asks us to give His service the first place in our lives,” whether it’s in a crisis and emergency or just in daily living. And who knows what the “new normal” is going to be? I have no idea. But she says, put the Lord, “His service the first place in our lives, to allow no day to pass without doing something to advance His work in the earth.”<sup>7</sup> Even in a crisis.

We’re going to face all kinds of emergencies and crises. And how are you going to respond? What do you do? “There are stormy times before us, but let us not utter one word of unbelief or discouragement.”<sup>8</sup>

As a leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, be positive. Be focused on our goal. Give the Lord the power, the opportunity, to work *through you* with *His* power. “Let us remember that we bear a message of healing to a world filled with sin-sick souls.”<sup>9</sup>

## LET GOD WORK IN YOU

In closing I would like to refer to the beautiful chapter of Galatians 6. It speaks about bearing one another’s burdens, and cautions us not to think too highly of ourselves. . . It’s just marvelous counsel. And in verse nine we read: “Let us not grow weary while doing good.”

As you face crises, remember to get enough sleep, drink enough water, eat the right things. Take a little time to have a good walk—it doesn’t cost you anything to take a walk. Don’t get weary. And in a crisis, you can get tired—I know that. Don’t get weary in doing good. Why? “For in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal. 6:9).

My dear leader, let God work in you to make you a powerful leader as you humble yourself before God, allowing Him to help you do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him, leaning on Him for everything, because Jesus is coming soon!

As we face that beautiful, wonderful time when Jesus’ coming is upon us, you and I know God’s people are going to go through the most horrendous situation ever—the worst crisis, the worst emergency, that we will ever

face. And we can only get through it as we lean completely on the Lord. But then that final, wonderful reward will come!

## THE END OF THE EMERGENCY

*The Great Controversy*. I hope you know this book. I hope you are reading in this book. Nancy and I are re-reading some of the last chapters. It says there on pages 640-641, “Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this

to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror.”<sup>10</sup>

That’s going to be the end of the emergency. Jesus will be coming to take us home. And we’ll look up and say, “Here is our God! Here’s the One who is going to save us!” And He’ll say, “Well done, good and faithful servants, leaders who have depended upon Me and have shared with others the wonderful message that they, too, can participate in God’s final proclamation.” Yes, we will go through horrible crises in the future, but don’t give up, because if we don’t faint and if we lean on the Lord, we will reap. What a beautiful promise! And I claim that promise for you and for me.

Be God’s servant, His leader in responding in emergencies, not through your power, but through God’s power.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Principles for Christian Leaders*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>White, *Christian Service*, p. 99.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 640, 641.



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# CONDUCTING CHURCH CEREMONIES IN EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES



## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

**T**he situation prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the efforts to reduce the risk of infection as expressed through physical distancing and other safety precautions has posed new challenges to the church, not only in regard to conducting religious services but also certain ceremonies of the church, such as the ordinances of baptism and communion, as well as weddings. This brief document is the product of thoughtful reflection by BRI scholars in response to three main questions received from various parts of the world.\*

**Can a “virtual” baptismal service be conducted during the current lockdown? Can a pastor keep physical separation by praying from a distance and allowing the baptismal candidate to immerse himself or herself under the water for baptism?**



**R**egarding whether a “virtual” baptismal service may be conducted during the current lockdown, depends on what is meant by “virtual.” The question needs to be clarified as to who has to be physically present because the New Testament does not define fellowship as virtual. Even if the baptismal candidate should stay at home the pastor (or the elder in some cases)<sup>1</sup> who officiates in the baptism has to be present physically and the church members should be able to witness the baptism as well. It may, for example, be appropriate to livestream a baptismal ceremony via the internet, or on a more restricted online platform, for a larger segment of the church. However, the suggestion that the candidate could immerse himself or herself under the water to prevent physical contact with the pastor who baptizes them raises serious theological issues. Nowhere does the New Testament prescribe self-immersion as a form of baptism. Jesus was baptized by John (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23), the eunuch was baptized by Philip (Acts 8:38–40), and Jesus commanded His followers to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

Baptism, as biblically understood, requires another person than the one being baptized to administer the ordinance. There seems to be no scriptural justification for a baptismal rite in which the candidate performs the symbolic act of immersion without the agency of a

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person duly appointed by the church to administer it. Baptism is carried out by the church and received by the candidate. It is not something self-administered. That baptism is something a person receives is indicated among other things by the passive voice of the verbs in Romans 6:3 where the apostle Paul states that we “have been baptized” into Christ Jesus and “were baptized” into his death. This passive formulation requires an external agency to effect the action.

We acknowledge that difficult times may occasionally require making certain adjustments so that we can perform the ministry God has entrusted to us for the benefit of the church. However, as we do so, two important aspects must be considered: First, any adjustment of the baptismal rite must not violate biblical teachings. Second, in cases such as the current pandemic, we should take into account the protocols recommended by the

proper authorities to protect the health of baptismal candidates and pastors.

Thus, we suggest that pastors explore some of the following options, which are by no means exhaustive: In areas still subject to restrictions related to the pandemic, the pastor and all baptismal candidates should keep appropriate physical distancing and should wear masks when they are in close physical contact. Physical attendance at these services should take into account the protocols of the proper authorities and church officials should strive to abide by these protocols. Livestreaming the baptismal service and/or utilizing an online platform may be a way of enabling the entire congregation and many others to participate in this beautiful ceremony. Since baptism also signals one’s entrance into the body of Christ, the church, it is important also to secure the vote of the church for accepting the person

being baptized into its fellowship. But in circumstances where the health or safety of any participant is likely to be endangered, it may not be advisable or even necessary to hold gatherings that require personal contact. In such cases, it may be more prudent to delay or reschedule baptismal services until it is safe to conduct them.

Nevertheless, we must also recognize that, even in extenuating circumstances, a situation may arise in which a baptismal candidate is under the conviction of the Holy Spirit to be baptized immediately when he or she has been duly prepared for baptism. In such cases, pastors should evaluate the situation prayerfully. Like medical missionaries on the front lines fighting COVID-19, pastors are fighting the powers of darkness. In the case of a baptismal candidate, for example, who has a very short time to live, it is important for the pastor to decide how to move forward conscientiously with baptism in such a case.

## Can communion services be held online?

In order to answer this question, we need to consider the following points:

1. Communion is not a sacrament<sup>2</sup> as in some Christian denominations. From the biblical standpoint, the communion service was established by Christ as a holy memorial of His sacrifice and a witness to the hope of His second coming. Although extremely significant, the Lord’s Supper is not a means of grace, as it is for Christians who view it as a sacrament. It serves as an affirmation of our salvation but is not itself a means of salvation.



2. Although not a sacrament on which we depend for grace, the communion service is a sacred biblical ordinance that, together with baptism, the church is commanded to observe. Regarding its sanctity, the *Church Manual* states, “The service of the Lord’s Supper is just as holy today as it was when instituted by Jesus Christ. Jesus is still present when this sacred ordinance is celebrated. ‘It is at these, His own appointments, that Christ meets His people, and energizes them by His presence.’ — DA 656.”<sup>3</sup>

3. Fellowship as the body of Christ in communion with our Lord is an essential aspect of the communion service. This is best achieved through “the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb 10:25) as believers, washing each other’s feet (John 13:1–17), and partaking together of the emblems of His body and blood as a symbol of our unity. As Scripture indicates, we do not eat and drink of these emblems in isolation.<sup>4</sup> The ordinance of foot washing and the Lord’s Supper belong together and, by definition, foot washing is a congregational activity. As an expression of humility, repentance and love among fellow believers, this ordinance has always served as a testimony of willing service to one another and is one of the strongest signs of Christian discipleship.

4. Neither the Bible nor the writings of Ellen G. White prescribe the frequency for the communion service. In the early days of the Adventist Church, it was held when an ordained minister was present. This could take months and sometimes years. While the communion service should be conducted by an ordained pastor or local elder,<sup>5</sup> the frequency of this ceremony is not stipulated in Scripture. Therefore, there has never been an official position taken by the Seventh-day Adventist Church on this point, although our congregations generally celebrate communion once a quarter. The sixteenth Fundamental Belief does not prescribe a frequency, and the *Church Manual* only mentions that “usually it is part of the worship service on the next to the last Sabbath of each

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We risk  
trivializing the  
ordinance of  
communion by  
celebrating it in  
an inappropriate  
manner that is  
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biblical principles.

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quarter,”<sup>6</sup> without setting an absolute standard.

5. In a virtual celebration, it would be much more difficult to follow the stipulation that an ordained pastor or local elder administer the emblems in the proper way.

Thus, virtual communion (through Zoom or any other platform) is a contradiction in terms. The fact that the communion service is sometimes given to individual believers who are sick constitutes an exception that does not break the rule of the communion being a corporate experience and an expression of the unity of the church with their Lord.

In view of the above considerations, a virtual celebration of the Lord’s Supper does not seem possible, because it would not adequately reflect the sanctity and communal character of this sacred biblical ordinance, nor would it be in harmony with the *Church Manual*.

The best approach, then, would be to wait until the church as a congregation can resume worshipping together in person. Otherwise, we risk trivializing the ordinance of communion by celebrating it in an inappropriate manner that is incompatible with biblical principles. Under the present extenuating circumstances or similar circumstances that may arise in the future, we deem it prudent to patiently wait until the crisis passes so that we can celebrate the Lord’s Supper in harmony with the Scriptures and the guidelines given in the *Church Manual*.



## Can a “virtual” wedding be conducted because the pastor cannot come to the church (or location) where the couple are to be married?

When God created Adam and Eve, He joined them together in a wonderful lifelong union, called marriage (Genesis 2). In a Biblical marriage a man and a woman covenant before witnesses to have an exclusive, caring, and loving relationship with each other.<sup>7</sup> In the Old Testament, elders of a village were involved in wedding and marriage arrangements (Ruth 4). Later, in Christianity, the leaders of a church were and still are involved. Thus, a Christian wedding is a ceremony in which the church seeks God’s blessing on behalf of a man and woman who want to be joined together as husband and wife. However, it should be recognized that, biblically, marriage is not a sacrament, as some Christians hold, nor an ordinance. While always bearing in mind the biblical guidelines as they are applied in the *Church Manual*, we should be aware that wedding stipulations vary from country to country, making it difficult to establish guidelines that would be applicable everywhere. In some countries, the civil and religious wedding ceremony are one and the same, performed by a minister duly authorized by the church who is also invested with civil authority to issue the marriage certificate. In other places, separate civil and religious wedding ceremonies must be carried out. In such situations, the couple receives the marriage certificate from the proper civil authority and the religious ceremony is conducted by the minister soon afterwards.

Whatever the legal requirements may be, a “virtual” church wedding, in which the officiating pastor joins the couple in holy matrimony from a distance, should only be conducted in extenuating circumstances and when witnesses are present who can legally testify to the marriage ceremony. But every situation should be carefully weighed by the pastor in dialogue with the bride and groom. For example, are the extenuating circumstances such that the pastor would be unable to perform the wedding in person? In the case of a pandemic in which larger gatherings are not allowed by the civil authorities, various measures could be taken to reduce the risk of infection—for example, requiring masks to be worn or reducing the number of attendees. In such cases,



the ceremony could be livestreamed to allow for additional invited guests.

For a virtual wedding conducted by a Seventh-day Adventist minister, two considerations apply:

1. If the minister is invested with civil authority to perform the wedding, it must be ascertained whether a virtual wedding ceremony would be legally recognized, given the potential absence of other legal procedures that may be required. If a virtual wedding ceremony can be validated by the appropriate civil authorities, there may be reason to move forward.
2. In countries where civil and religious ceremonies are separate, one should ask the question whether it is also possible for the civil wedding to be done virtually. If so, there may be a case for a virtual religious wedding. But, on the other hand, if the civil wedding requires the personal presence of the couple before the proper authorities, there may not be plausible justification for a virtual religious ceremony; otherwise, the message may be conveyed that the church wedding is on a lower level or somewhat less important, when in heaven’s view it is just as important as the civil ceremony, and perhaps more so.

Therefore, in view of the above considerations, it seems clear that we cannot be dogmatic as to the appropriateness of virtual weddings. Each case must be assessed individually, paying close attention to biblical principles, the *Church Manual*, pertinent legal requirements, and common sense. If, in some very exceptional circumstance, a pastor is not legally allowed to be present, then there may be justification even for a virtual wedding ceremony to be remotely conducted by the minister in the presence of witnesses. However, it should be noted that a virtual ceremony

can never fully substitute for the physical presence of a minister who administers the charge, the vows, and makes the declaration of marriage.

In any case, we should welcome those who have made the commitment to be united together as husband and wife in holy matrimony in accordance with biblical principles. Thus, we should do everything possible to help such couples faced with exceptional circumstances, such as the current global crisis of COVID-19, to realize their dreams even if some adjustments need to be made.

## CONCLUSION

Experience from the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that technology can provide resources to help us cope as families and as a church, as well as offer some solutions in certain circumstances that involve our relationship with God. However, we should be aware that virtual technology can never replace the physical presence of believers

gathering together to worship the Lord. Virtual technology may bring the voices and images of preachers and sacred music into our homes, but cannot, by itself, generate real Christian fellowship, commitment, and love. We should keep in mind that worship via Zoom and other virtual platforms are a welcome, temporary contingency during these times of social isolation. It is our hope and prayer that the effects of COVID-19 can be mitigated so that we can return to a real communion of God's people. Despite some necessary innovations during these trying times, let us not think or act as if the fellowship of believers were a thing of the past. After all, heaven is a real place where real people will be gathered around a real Person—Jesus Christ Himself.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The *Church Manual* permits an elder to baptize in the absence of an ordained pastor as long as permission to do so is granted by the local Conference (General Conference of Seventh-day

Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2016], p. 75).

<sup>2</sup>A sacrament is a Christian rite that is held to be an automatic means of divine grace, typically working independently of the attitude of the one who receives it and the one who administers it.

<sup>3</sup>*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>In all the passages dealing with the communion service, the commands and references to “you” are plural (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; John 13:12-17; 1 Cor. 11:20-26).

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup>On the biblical concept of marriage see Frank M. Hasel, “The Biblical Concept of Marriage in the Bible” in Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza, eds., *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*. Biblical Research Institute Studies in Biblical Ethics, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2015), pp. 25-48.



# PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL CRISIS

**T**he great crisis is just before us. To meet its trials and temptations, and to perform its duties, will require persevering faith. But we may triumph gloriously; not one watching, praying, believing soul will be ensnared by the enemy.

In the time of trial before us God's pledge of security will be placed upon those who have kept the word of His patience. . . .

Brethren, to whom the truths of God's word have been opened, what part will you act in the closing scenes of this world's history? Are you awake to these solemn realities? Do you realize the grand work of preparation that is going on in heaven and on earth? Let all who have received the light, who have had the opportunity of reading and hearing the prophecy, take heed to those things that are written therein; "for the time is at hand." Let none now tamper with sin, the source of every misery in our world. No longer remain in lethargy and stupid indifference. Let not the destiny of your soul hang upon an uncertainty. Know that you are fully on the Lord's side. . . .

Is the softening, subduing influence of the grace of God working upon you? Have you hearts that can feel, eyes that can see, ears that can hear? Is it in vain that the declaration

of eternal truth has been made concerning the nations of the earth? They are under condemnation, preparing for the judgments of God; and in this day which is big with eternal results, the people chosen to be the depositaries of momentous truth ought to be abiding in Christ. Are you letting your light shine to illumine the nations that are perishing in their sins? Do you realize that you are to stand in defense of God's commandments before those who are treading them underfoot?

It is possible to be a partial, formal believer, and yet be found wanting and lose eternal life. It is possible to practice some of the Bible injunctions and be regarded as a Christian, and yet perish because you lack qualifications essential to Christian character. If you neglect or treat with indifference the warnings that God has given, if you cherish or excuse sin, you are sealing your soul's destiny. . . . While mercy lingers, while the Saviour is making intercession, let us make thorough work for eternity.

The return of Christ to our world will not be long delayed. Let this be the keynote of every message.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pages 404-406

# Kyoshin Ahn Voted NAD Secretary

**O**n August 20, 2020, the General Conference Executive Committee met virtually to vote Kyoshin Ahn as the new North American Division (NAD) secretary. Ahn was confirmed in a vote of 118 to 2. Previously, he had served as the NAD undersecretary. Ahn replaces G. Alexander Bryant, who was voted NAD president to replace the newly retired Daniel R. Jackson. The process to elect an individual to the position of undersecretary is underway.

Ahn served as NAD's undersecretary since February 2016. Previously, he worked at the division as an associate secretary from 2013 to 2016.

While serving at the division, Ahn chaired several committees, including the NAD Church Governance Committee and the NAD Human Sexuality Statement Committee. He also helped in digitizing the NAD Secretariat functions.

During the past two decades, Ahn has assisted in church plantings for Korean congregations across the division, conducted seminars, trained local church clerks, and held evangelistic campaigns.

He began his pastoral ministry in 1995 in the Potomac Conference, and served there until 2001. He was then president of the Korean Churches Association in North America from June 2001 to October 2005. Before coming to the NAD, Ahn served almost eight years (2005-2013) as executive secretary for the Illinois Conference.

He graduated with a bachelor's degree from Sahmyook University in Korea, followed by a Master of Divinity from Andrews University Theological Seminary in Michigan, U.S., and a Ph.D. in New Testament and Early Christianity from Vanderbilt University.

Ahn is the first Korean American elected to serve as NAD secretary. He is married to You Mi Kim, and together they are the parents of two adult children.



NORTH AMERICAN  
DIVISION

*This news item is abridged from "Kyoshin Ahn Named North American Division Secretary" by Kimberly Luste Maran and may be read [in its entirety here](#).*

*Editor's Note: As the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic are affecting so many aspects of life, we hope these tips will be helpful as we continue coping with the "new abnormal" we face each day.*

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis. It's not only a threat to our physical health. Even those who haven't themselves been infected are still affected by the various consequences of the pandemic. Here are some ways to boost psycho-social-spiritual resilience in this and other crises we may face.

**1 IT'S A CRISIS. FACE IT.** Let it be what it is; not more, not less. There's no turning back nor running away. It's one step at a time on an unknown path into an unknown future.

**2 IT WILL BE DIFFICULT. ACCEPT IT.** Don't persuade yourself or others that all is well. It's not. Be honest, be real, be true. A crisis brings out the best and the worst in us. Therefore, be patient, kind and compassionate—with others and with yourself.

**3 WHAT YOU DO MAKES A DIFFERENCE.** Be intentional about it. Optimize your lifestyle. Stay connected with God and people you care about. Take care of others. It will help you keep things in perspective and give you a pause from your own worries and troubles.

**4 IT'S TIME FOR REFLECTION. ENTER INTO IT.** Take a time-out: Think, reflect, meditate, feel, talk, connect. Put first things first. Is it work? Is it money? Is it health? Is it friends? Is it family? Is it God?

**5 THERE IS HOPE. EMBRACE IT.** A crisis is a temporary thing. It will pass, whatever the outcome. As long as there is life, there is hope. And, for the Christian, even death is not the end. Trust that "God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28 NIV).

Good things may come out of a crisis. This is a time to care for oneself, for one's family and friends, for church members and for the communities we are in. It's a time to reach in, reach out, reach up! Let us grieve the losses well. Let us be open to God's work in us and around us so we may recover well. May we come out of this crisis more dedicated than ever to live the lives God has called us to live.

*From GC Adventist Health Ministries*



# GIVE ME ICELAND!

BY JONATHAN WALTER

**W**hat if we went to a country and claimed the entire place for Jesus?”

This was the question we asked ourselves as a GYC\* leadership team. “Jesus gave us the mandate to go reach the whole world. No mission endeavor is too big for Him. So, why not attempt it?” We agreed to organize some sort of mission project. But first, we had to determine our destination. We knew we wanted a country that presented a huge challenge to mission—somewhere that was highly secular and that had little Adventist presence and no significant church growth. Before long, we’d settled on Iceland, an island nation between the United States and Europe.

We spent months praying and talking about what this project should look like. This preparation included conversations with Gavin Anthony, the Iceland Conference president. He helped us understand that the most urgent need of Iceland’s postmodern society was an awareness that a God who answers prayer exists. Doctrinal presentations and evangelistic meetings have a role to play, but they’re not always the best starting point in today’s European context. With this in mind, we decided to make intercessory prayer our focus.

As we talked, our vision began to take shape. We would prayer walk Iceland’s capital region of Reykjavik and surrounding cities where 65 percent of the country’s



Fifty missionaries from six continents spent 10 days in Iceland, one of the most secular countries in the world. Their goal: to reach the entire nation through the power of prayer.

population lives. Prayer walking means walking the streets in a prayerful mindset, asking God to guide your thoughts and make you aware of people and institutions that might need prayer. It involves knocking on doors and asking people whether you can pray with them about their needs and concerns. It also includes interceding for the city itself, claiming it for God and asking Him to work in it in a powerful way.

Fifty of us arrived in Iceland to begin our ministry in August 2019. Every morning and evening we spent significant time together in united prayer, asking God to revive, forgive, and unify us

through the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. During the day, we spent the majority of our time knocking on doors and praying with people. We prayed for every home, business, and institution that we saw, leaving the outcome and any success with God.

Having grown up in Europe, I was quite nervous about how the Icelandic people were going to react to the offer of prayer. But to my astonishment, many accepted. Our group experienced hundreds of incredible divine appointments. I personally had a few powerful encounters as well. One woman told me, “God must have sent you to me.” Many were clearly touched by the Holy Spirit, and



some were moved to tears by their prayer experience. I learned that many had never prayed before. I will always remember what Daniel, a 13-year old boy, asked me after I had offered to pray for the depression he was battling: “What is prayer?”

Formerly Christian countries, such as Iceland, are full of people who are completely oblivious to the idea that there is a God and that you can communicate with Him. There is an entire generation that doesn't have even a basic understanding of who Jesus is and what He's done. And it's not because they're rage-filled atheists, as is often presumed. It's because God isn't a part of life in any way in these

secular societies. Yet, many of these people's hearts are open to the gospel.

As we ended our prayer mission, we had innumerable reasons to praise God. We had been able to pray with leaders of the country. We were blessed to share 150,000 GLOW tracts that pointed people to a website where they could request prayer and Bible studies and connect with a local church. This website has had thousands of visits. Some people have started attending our church and even enrolled their children in the local church school.

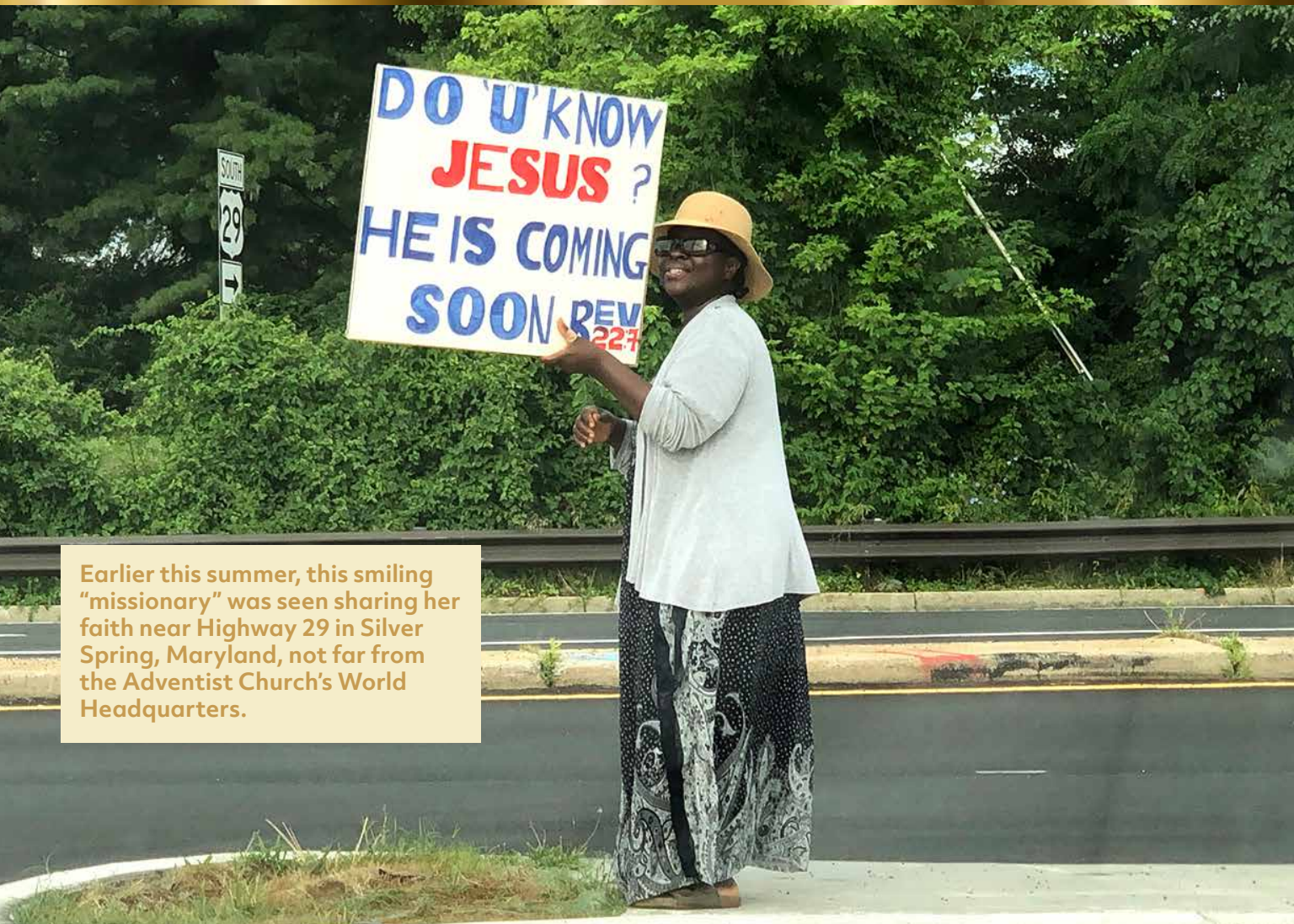
Intercessory prayer works! Combined with total surrender of our plans to God, prayer becomes the most potent weapon against Satan and the

most essential tool in mission. Prayer is not just an obligatory ritual for evangelism. Prayer *is* evangelism!

\*GYC stands for Generation. Youth. Christ. It's a youth-led supportive ministry that seeks to inspire and challenge young people to take sacrificial initiative for Christ.

Watch a short documentary on this mission [here](#).

*This story was first published in Mission 360, vol. 8, no. 2.*



Earlier this summer, this smiling “missionary” was seen sharing her faith near Highway 29 in Silver Spring, Maryland, not far from the Adventist Church's World Headquarters.



# THE BACK PAGE

**Directions:** For more information on an item, click on the corresponding number on the map.

**1** Wildfires near Pacific Union College in **Angwin, California**, forced evacuations at the college on August 20, along with other nearby Adventist entities including St. Helena Hospital, and “Elmshaven,” the last home of Ellen White. The fire, known as the LNU Lightning Complex fire, is part of the second largest in the State’s history, burning more than 350,000 acres (nearly 142,000 hectares).

**2** Montemorelos University in **Nuevo Leon, Mexico**, began the school year on August 11 with a record high enrollment of more than 2,400 students. The university, which is directly overseen by the Inter-American Division, will be running fully online distance learning throughout the first semester, in accordance with recommendations and guidelines set by the government of Mexico because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

**3** Radio Nuevo Tiempo in **Peru** continues reaching people for Christ. Efrain Leyva, a 21-year-old man who could not return home for five months due to the pandemic, downloaded the Radio Nuevo Tiempo app. He listened to a sermon by Pastor Alejandro Bullón and requested Bible studies. Efrain invited his cousin, who invited others, ending up with a group of 10 studying together. Efrain was recently baptized. “I’m thankful that God allowed the pandemic so that I could find a different course in my life!” he said.

**4** In response to increased enrollment in their online Bible Correspondence School, the Adventist Discovery Centre at the British Union Conference in **Stanborough Park, Watford, England**, has launched three new courses and has added an additional portal, <https://bibleschools.com/>, available by direct access

or via the main ADC website. The three new courses include one aimed at teens and young adults; another for children; and a series of six booklets covering some of the life challenges children experience.

**5** Following the August 4 explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, students, faculty, and staff at Middle East University (MEU) and from the Middle East-North Africa Union (MENA) have been helping to clean up damage in the surrounding area as well as on the Adventist campus, where windows were blown out from homes, dorms, and classrooms, and ceilings had fallen. Similar damage was reported in the MENA Media Center. Two Adventist secondary schools in Beirut and the ADRA office were also damaged. Two Adventist churches located on the school campuses in Boucherieh and Mouseitbeh were also affected. The Adventist Learning Center for refugees was heavily

damaged, affecting one of the ways the Adventist Church assists refugees in Lebanon. ADRA has been very active in its relief operations, providing emergency food, water, and essential supplies to victims and first responders, and has launched water, sanitations, and hygiene initiatives in the city.

**6** More than 20 years ago, Maranatha Volunteers International (MVI) accepted a request from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in **India** to provide churches for congregations in need of worship space. Western Jharkhand, located in the eastern part of the country, was one of the places Maranatha worked to build 46 churches. Today, not only are these churches thriving, but they have planted 103 daughter congregations, with a total of more than 9,500 Adventists in the Western Jharkhand Section, the first self-supporting mission field in the Northern India Union.