



Official Newsletter for the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



MICHIGAN MEMO

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BibleStudyOffer.com continues to bear much fruit. We have received more than 5,100 total requests for Bible studies since its inception.

Forging Ahead in GOD'S STRENGTH

By Wes Peppers

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE PERSONAL MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

As 2017 is now history, we have much to celebrate and pray about. The signs of the times are escalating and being fulfilled. Details of prophecies we once preached as future events are now present truth. We have witnessed God use His church and people in miraculous ways to win precious souls through *Grow Michigan*. The following is a brief recap of the year.

Unlock Revelation was once again an incredibly effective outreach initiative. More than 8,000 people attended the meetings at nearly 100 sites. Over 2,500 non-Adventists came, eager to hear Bible messages presented each evening. Of the 2,500 that registered, 61% indicated that

they came to the meetings through some sort of personal invitation.

That's exciting because it means that personal and public evangelism still works when we do them together as many members are inviting their friends or Bible study contacts. More than 450 people have accepted Christ and made decisions for baptism! Several have already been baptized, and many more are preparing. Others are still in the valley of decision so we need to lift them up in prayer, befriend them in our churches, answer their questions, and encourage them to give their hearts to Christ and follow His truth.

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- EDITORIAL -

The Doeg Culture of Slander

By Jay Gallimore

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

“There is a difference between kind thoughtful dialogue and nauseating contention. Could it be that the political culture of our times has infected some in the church?”

Doeg the Edomite would rate as one of the most despicable characters in the Bible. He shows up when King Saul was in a jealous rage over David’s fame. Saul’s own son, Jonathan, tried to reason with him concerning the truth of David’s innocence. But Saul’s paranoia of David was so strong that he threw his spear at Jonathan.

In running for his life, David stopped at Nob, the city of the priests. He asked Ahimelech, the High Priest, for some food. In addition, he asked for a weapon, and was allowed to have the sword of Goliath, which was stored there. When questioned by Ahimelech on why he was alone and in a hurry, David lied, leaving the priest in the dark to the real reason. Nevertheless, he would later take responsibility for inadvertently causing the death of the priests by the hand of Saul.

Watching this exchange between David and Ahimelech was Doeg the Edomite, chief herdsman for King Saul. Later, at Gibeah, surrounded by his attendants, Saul again spewed out his vile accusations against David. Then he accused his servants with conspiracy to help David. At this very tense moment, when Saul needed another Jonathan, Doeg speaks up. He said, “I saw the High Priest inquire of the Lord for David, give him food, and the sword of Goliath.” All of that was true. But it wasn’t the whole truth. Doeg used his half-truth testimony to satisfy Saul’s obsession. His fabrication vilified

the priests as co-conspirators to take the throne.

When Ahimelech, the High Priest, was confronted with these accusations he elegantly pointed out his innocence. But the facts had no impact on Saul’s jealousy. He ordered his soldiers to kill all the priests of the Lord. To their credit they refused. Then Saul ordered Doeg the Edomite to kill the priests. So Doeg killed 85 priests and their wives, children, and nursing babies. Such were the results of “truth” cooked into gossip for personal gain and fed to an appetite that craved it. No doubt Doeg, in a responsible position, claimed to be a believer in Israel’s God. Yet he dared to pervert the truth about the innocent priests of God.

Since the 2015 General Conference (GC) session, the leadership of the GC has been mercilessly slandered by some online websites and internet magazines, including their gossip blogs. Cooking up a character assassination and serving it as an attractive article seems to be a specialty dish that’s in demand these days. Especially if it is about a church leader that isn’t in their “camp”.

And it is not just this decision of the GC that arouses such passion. Some of these same online magazines and/or their blogs have supported, for example, the teaching of evolution in our schools and gay marriage. In addition, just about any teaching in the church manual on Christian

lifestyle is sneeringly pictured as legalism. And the world church is scorned as being inferior to western culture.

During the recent live-streamed Year-End Meetings of the North American Division (NAD), which is part of the GC structure, there was a discussion on the unity of the church over non-compliant unions. One young man stood up and begged the delegates to use their influence to stop the vilification of church leadership. What a great appeal! Character assassinations, whether in the church, school, websites, online magazines, or blogs create a satanic toxic muck that is poisonous to church life.

To be clear, discussing differences of opinion with a Christ-like attitude and civil courtesy is part of church life and should be! But there is a difference between kind thoughtful dialogue and nauseating contention. Could it be that the political culture of our times has infected some in the church? A culture of politicians and news media using uncivilized sneering, scorn and twisted slander on each other? A culture—like the Roman amphitheater with its ravenous appetite for blood—our culture has an insatiable appetite for character assassination. The secular news and blogs are filled with the gore.

When the GC session is represented as a political convention instead of the holy convocation, bathed in prayer, that it is. When its ministerial leaders are vilified and compared to Nazis and medieval popes. When the tactics of cooked up “truth” are used to intentionally malign and tarnish those who disagree. When emotional stories are woven to defeat the truth, then the Lord Himself is going to have a controversy with such people.

There is a reason why those who refuse to love the truth, are “sent” a strong delusion so that they believe a lie. Some years ago, in one of our churches there was a tragic moral failure. The pastor, who was

working for this person’s redemption, was approached by a “reporter” from one of these websites. He told the pastor how he thought the minister had been pressured by the conference to do such and such. When the pastor told him that was not the case at all, he responded by saying, he “didn’t want to believe that.”

While transparency is an important leadership principle, not everything should be open for the world to see. For instance, a few years ago, I was approached by someone who wanted my help to confront a person who they believed had wronged them. However, the person who felt wronged committed those present to secrecy about their identity and the incident because they did not want to become a victim of the gossip blogs. This is not an isolated request for those of us in the ministry. There are some things, from an ethical standpoint, where silence is golden even if the silence is used against us.

Also at times leaders need some space with other leaders to work through sensitive challenges without feeding the online gossip appetites. At a recent live-streamed GC Annual Council, someone shared leaked sensitive information, without context, concerning the process that brought a particular motion to the floor. The implication was that the process had been manipulated by the president. It was patiently explained how the committee responsible for the motion, including everyone on both sides of the question, had agreed to the process. Do you think those who “spilled the beans” apologized for trying to embarrass the leadership without going to them privately and getting the rest of the story first?

Proverbs says there are seven abominable things the Lord hates. Among them are, “A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”

There is a reason that Doegs are in demand.

Tragically, there is a Saul in all of our carnal hearts. Our selfishness does not want to believe the truth, but like Saul, wants to believe our obsessions. It is sinful insecurities that tempt us to tell or create negative stuff about each other. Even if it is the truth, why tell it unless it is germane to one’s duty? Why expose or delight in the failure of our brothers and sisters in Christ? Or even worse, vilify them with false information and half-truths? Even the Apostles made mistakes in leadership. But you don’t hear them sneering about each other in the New Testament. Yes, they sometimes openly shared their differences and concerns. But they used Christian principles, not the methods of Roman culture to solve them. Gossip, ridicule and slander, no matter where it takes place should be resisted and reprovved. Peter teaches us that “above all” we should practice “fervent love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Jesus was the constant victim of evil surmising and gossip by politically motivated scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. His words were “cooked up.” His miracles misrepresented. His motives slandered. The Doegs of His day finally managed to accomplish the crime of the ages—the crucifixion of the Son of God. This should sober all of us.

Many years ago in a church board meeting I had an elder be verbally antagonistic to another elder. After I pushed the “pause button,” I asked him if the other elder “knew that he loved him?” He hung his head and said, “pastor you know my background.” I said, “I know. And it’s ok to share your differences, just so the other elder knows you love him.”

I praise God for the heavenly sweetness found in our churches and schools. But we must be on guard against the sick slanderous culture of our times. May God grant us the vigor of primitive godliness and the strength of apostolic love.



▲ Alaina with husband Rodrigo Correa

God's Reflection in Marriage

By Alaina Elder-Correa
NILES WESTSIDE CHURCH MEMBER

PRAYER FOCUS

Every Monday morning, the Michigan Conference staff meets for worship and prayer. Here is the list for January. Please join with us as we pray for these churches and ministries.

JANUARY 8-12

Clio, First Flint
Pastor Jonathan Chitwood
First Flint SDA Elementary
First Flint ACS Center

JANUARY 15-19

Michiana Filipino-Amerian,
St. Joseph
Pastor Roy Castelbuono

JANUARY 22-26

Escanaba, Munising, Riverside
Pastor Daniel Rodriguez
Escanaba SDA Elementary
Escanaba ACS Center

JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY 2

Cadillac, Manton, Mesick
Pastor Bob Benson
Cadillac ACS Center
Bible Worker Rebekah Johnson

Marriage is about giving honor and glory to God. When did you and your spouse last stop to consider your relationship in that way? We don't often think of our marriages as a witnessing opportunity, but the truth is that a family orchestrated by Christ is one of the most powerful witnesses there is. In her book, *The Adventist Home*, Ellen White writes, "One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached." Sometimes we feel compelled to join all kinds of ministries to spread the message of Christ; however, when we spend our first energies on cultivating a healthy family relationship, we exercise our most powerful witness. I believe that witness begins with marriage. For husbands and wives, setting an example of a healthy and thriving marriage relationship is not only a witness to our children but to others.

Several weeks ago, my husband Rodrigo and I had the privilege of attending the Crystal Mountain Marriage Retreat at Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville, Michigan. Joining us at the retreat were over 70 other couples focused on drawing closer to one another and to Christ. The retreat, which is sponsored by the Michigan Conference Family Ministries Department, was entitled "Journey Toward Intimacy." Leading out were Elder Willie and Elaine Oliver,

directors of the Department of Family Ministries for the General Conference. From the start, the retreat was an absolute success. Every detail of the weekend was carefully planned and executed by the Michigan Conference Family Ministries Director, Gail Micheff, and her team. What stood out to me in particular was the way couples were incorporated into every aspect of the weekend. For example, Kris and Kalicia Clements led worship in music before each session, and Greg and Cheri Copin took beautiful keepsake photographs for each of the couples. Attending were those who had been married anywhere from four months to 46 years.

One of the points the Olivers emphasized repeatedly was that marriage is not about us. Marriage is about God. Marriage was created by God to reflect who God is. When we grow closer to Christ as individuals, we should see that closeness reflected in our relationships. The Olivers put it this way: "There's no way to say we are growing in our relationship with God but that we don't love each other." However, despite our best intentions, we don't always extend the love and grace of Christ to our spouses. Throughout the retreat, the Olivers took us through exercises and practical tips for bettering our marriages. Included were sessions on solving our solvable problems, becoming intimate allies, and forgiving each other when trust has been

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Teens Preach *Unlock Revelation*

By Andy Im

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION DIRECTOR



▲ Sergio Gil

The church needs more men and women like Sergio—committed individuals that are willing to invest in, and sacrifice for our young. This is a vital imperative for the future success of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Sergio took 12 Teens in Leadership Training (TLTs) and had them prepare, study, and preach the *Unlock Revelation* series. They each took turns sharing one or two messages as a joint endeavor of the Holland and Grand Rapids Northwest Spanish churches.

In the beginning, the teens weren't all that "into it." "No one was really excited," says Sergio. Truth be told, they were simply nervous and anxious as one might imagine. A phrase Sergio heard loud and often was, "I don't know how to talk in front of people!"

But, when you step out in faith and chal-

lenge our young, God is going to deliver. He really is. And so will our teens.

Once they opened their mouths and started preaching, the adults were flabbergasted. "They couldn't believe (the teens) were preaching the messages better than the adults!" recounts Sergio.

Through it all, eight individuals made decisions to be baptized! Bear in mind, it was the TLTs that preached the messages and offered the appeals in Spanish, the second language for most, if not all the TLTs.

Also, the teens often had to preach during the school week when they had homework and exams to study for.

One of the students, Chris, ended up preaching on the eve of a huge exam. Much of his time was spent preparing for the message instead of studying for the test. His dad counseled him to put

God first, and to leave the results with God. Chris did just that—while studying as much as he could—and ended up receiving an "A" on the exam!

Perhaps the next time your church holds an *Unlock Revelation* series, you might consider getting the youth more involved. They don't necessarily have to preach the series. But, let's not underestimate the power of youth ministry, I'm talking about the kind where the youth are the ones actively ministering to people, and not necessarily being ministered unto. In the end, both objectives are accomplished.

"We're all able to share the word of God, and nothing should stop us from doing it," says an enlightened Noemi.

Wouldn't you agree?



GOD'S STRENGTH, *cont'd*

One testimony is from Autumn, a young adult in Saginaw. Jordan, her friend from the Clio Church (also a young adult), invited her to the series. After the first meeting, she was hooked and didn't miss a night. She loved the Christ-centered, Bible based messages, and they transformed her life. She made her decision to give her life to Christ. She will be baptized this month. Jesus has changed her life in so many ways, and He has become everything to her. Addictions have been broken; sins have been forgiven, and new life has been given. She is now walking in the fullness of God's light and truth for the last days.

Praise God for *Unlock Revelation* that still reaches even young adults when we follow Christ's method for soul winning! Our next conference-wide series will be in 2019, beginning March 25. Details will be coming in the next few months regarding how we can begin preparing.

BibleStudyOffer.com (BSO) continues to bear much fruit. We have received more than 5,100 total requests for Bible studies since its inception. Requests come in every day from multiple avenues. More than 4,400 have been visited so far, and more than 2,700 people are actively studying the Bible weekly. Thus far, 48 people have been baptized from BSO. Many more will continue to take their stand for Jesus as they complete the studies.

Jeremiah from Pullman received a BSO card in the mail and threw it away! He thought it was a scam, even though he had recently become interested in studying the Bible. Having been a Muslim for

13 years, the religion did not seem to answer the questions he had or satisfy the longing of his heart. He continued thinking about the card and couldn't get it out of his mind. He later pulled it out of the trash, logged online, and made a request for studies. A few days later, a family showed up at his door to deliver the lessons. They studied weekly, and after several months he discovered the truth he had always been looking for. Rejecting Islam, he found life in Christ, truth in His word, and peace in His salvation. He was baptized on November 4, and he is already active in sharing his faith with others.

These are just a few of the hundreds of stories across Michigan. Ellen White saw people in vision running from house to house in the last days sharing literature and Bible studies. She may have seen any one of your faces through these efforts! We are fulfilling prophecy as a people, but we still have much to pray about. There are still millions more who need to hear the Three Angels' Messages. We are not finished, and God's mercy affords us another opportunity to press forward in 2018 to fulfill our calling as His disciples.

The 2018 Master Plan of Evangelism for the Michigan Conference has been shared with the pastors and personal ministries directors. Its purpose is to assist the churches in evaluating, planning, and executing discipleship and evangelism at each layer of the leadership for the local church. The plan provides guidance to churches that are looking for assistance in planning and gives additional focus to those that already have plans.

It is encouraged that the conference plan be considered when making the plans for your local church this new year. The personal ministries team or leader should work with the pastor and ministry leaders to create the master plan, which should then be discussed, adjusted (if needed), and voted by the elders and church board.

The planning should ideally begin for the following year in August or before. This provides a plan that the personal ministries team is able to carry out. The church board should utilize the plan each month to evaluate where they've been, where they are, where they are going, and the steps needed to get there. This will help to motivate the church and members towards total member involvement because it provides a clear vision for where the church is headed.

Though we are still encouraging harvesting through evangelistic meetings, we will have a strong focus on the evangelistic phases of preparing, planting, and cultivating in 2018 through related initiatives. If you would like to view the conference plan, simply visit www.misda.org and click on "Member Services" and go to the "Evangelism and Personal Ministries" link. You'll find it there.

Thank you for all you do to continue building God's Kingdom. Our reward will be the many faces in heaven that we prayed and strived for. Let's move forward together in the grace and strength of Christ to use all our energy and talents for His glory, and allow Him to use us to labor in His vineyard, bringing the precious fruit of lost souls to the Master.

District 12 Grow Michigan Training

When: February 2-10

Where: Detroit Metro Church

What: Personal Ministries/Emmanuel Institute Training

- Transform evangelistic culture in your local church
- Utilize evangelism cycle to maximize soul-winning
- Hands-on training for BibleStudyOffer.com & more
- Q & A time with experienced soul-winners & evangelists
- Flexible weeknight & weekend schedule

Who: All area churches & members are welcome!

Cost: \$25 per person for materials

Call/email Nancy Larsen for info/registration
(nlarsen@misda.org or 517-316-1587)

Women's Ministries Retreat 2018
Branded in Christ

Speaker: Dee Ann Bragaw
April 6-8, 13-15, 20-22
Camp Au Sable MI

Registration begins Monday, January 29 at 9:00 AM
www.misda.org, click Member Services,
 then Women's Ministry

Camp Meeting
 June 18-21

Women's Ministries
Leadership
Certification
 Levels 1 & 2
 w/Carolyn Sutton

Grow Michigan Personal Ministries Training Weekend

When: March 2-4
Where: Camp Au Sable
What:

- Learn principles for soil preparation & seed planting
- Step by step instruction on effective community based outreach
- Learn to make transitions from compassion ministry to spiritual fruit
- Learn methods to transform friendly chats into Bible Studies
- And more!

Who: Pastors, Elders, Personal Ministries Leadership, & Church Members
Cost: \$25-\$75 depending on lodging
 Call/email Nancy Larsen for info/registration (nlarsen@misda.org or 517-316-1587)

GOD'S REFLECTION, cont'd

broken. The point of emphasis in each session was Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

And because we can do all things through Christ's strength, even those on the brink of leaving their marriages can have hope. "Every relationship," said Elaine, "has the opportunity to get back to a place of dedication." As people of faith, we have the power of Jesus Christ,

and He can work His power in our marriages. When God repairs and restores relationships, that is a witness no one can argue against.

Ellen White writes in *Happiness Home-made* that couples should: "Determine to be all that is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. . . Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance. Then marriage,

instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love."

When we are connecting with Christ on a daily basis, that connection will overflow into our family life. When we as spouses, as children, and as parents can show Christ in our interactions with each other, when we show patience despite frustration, forgiveness in the midst of betrayal, and kindness in all things, we become the witnesses God has called

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MONTHLY CALENDAR

JANUARY

- 1-2 New Year's Holiday -
Office Closed
- 12-14 Teen Snow Outing -
Camp Au Sable
- 15 Martin Luther King Day -
Office Closed
- 16 Camp Meeting Directors
- 22-25 Ministerial Retreat -
Camp Au Sable
- 26-28 Pathfinder Area Coordinator
Retreat - Camp Au Sable
- 30 MI Executive Committee

FEBRUARY

- 2-4 CAMPUS Winter Retreat -
Camp Au Sable
- 3 Pathfinder Bible Experience -
Area Level
- 19 President's Day - Office Closed
- 22 MI K-12 Board Of Education
- 22-25 Teen Bible Camp -
Camp Au Sable
- 27 MI Executive Committee
- 28 Camp Meeting Directors

UNLOCK REVELATION

By Tom Hubbard
WILSON CHURCH PASTOR

Coming off the recent loss of our church to a fire, and knowing we have a lot of work to do in rebuilding, the question was asked, "Would participating in Unlock Revelation be something that we could or should do at this time in Wilson?"

Thankfully the answer was a resounding yes! The exposure we had received from the church fire was something we wanted to capitalize on and use for God in the most effective way possible. We set our sights on, and looked forward to September 25, along with the many other churches across Michigan.

Our average attendance throughout the meeting hovered right around 70 people. It was a thrill to see the church rally around this effort as members and interests came to hear the truth. It is exciting to see so many interested in knowing more about God's Word.

One gentleman who was raised Catholic, came to almost every meeting. He said, "I really enjoy coming and learning, I have appreciated each presentation!" We praise the Lord for the positive decisions he is making as he has accepted the

Sabbath truth, and continues to attend the phase 2 meetings.

Another young lady who lives in the area also responded positively. She came each evening with a smile on her face and would sit right near the front. She loves learning from God's Word and is currently studying to be baptized.

There are 14 others who have made decisions for Christ and are currently studying to be baptized. We praise the Lord for *Unlock*

Revelation, but also understand that it is the personal work of each member that makes for a successful harvest.

We praise the Lord for the way He uses the church and its various forms of outreach, such as: Biblestudyoffer.com, Wilson Junior Academy, Pathfinders, and Sabbath School to bring in souls.

We are so thankful for what He is doing in Wilson. We may have temporarily lost our church, but by God's grace the mission of the church remains strong. Please pray for us as we labor for souls.

The harvest truly is plentiful!

