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SHARING HOPE AND WHOLENESS IN CRISIS

BY R. STEVEN NORMAN III

Lighthouse are built to shine during dark storms, and since we are to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), Jesus wants to shine through us during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The early Christians were beacons of light when famine and pestilence killed thousands. According to Eusebius, when pestilence occurred, "Then did the evidences of the universal zeal and piety of the Christians become manifest to all the heathen. For they alone in the midst of such ills showed their sympathy and humanity by their deeds." (*The Church History*. Eusebius)

In this tradition we encourage everyone in the Southern Union to commit to Sharing Hope and Wholeness during this crisis. The world needs it. Fear, greed, want, illness, and death surround us as the confirmed cases of Coronavirus illness and deaths rise daily.

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David Freedman, Southern Union Chief Financial Officer, discussed business continuity guidelines on Monday, March 16, 2020, with the staff and employees. The office is closed until April 22, 2020.

GENERAL CONFERENCE 2020 SESSION ANNOUNCEMENT

The General Conference 2020 Session has been rescheduled to May 20-25, 2021.

PHOTO BY: R. STEVEN NORMAN III

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE AND PRAYER

BY RON C. SMITH, D.MIN., PH.D.

In times of anxiety and fear, many people turn to God and seek divine help. This is true even in people who had no prior interest in anything spiritual or religious. Anxiety and fear also can drive people away from God, at a time when they need Him most. Fraught with worry and distracted by pressures generated by COVID-19, accompanied by corresponding challenges of limited food, illness, waning investments, and isolation; even religious people find there is little time for prayer, decreased desire or ability to concentrate on Bible reading, and bitterness about Heaven's seeming silence in the face of crisis.

Due to the rapidly changing situation with the coronavirus disease pandemic, the administration of the Southern Union Conference has elected to transition its office headquarters in Peachtree Corners, Georgia, to a virtual operation. Starting at the end of business on March 16, 2020, all employees will be

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What are some ways we can Share Hope and Wholeness?

Seek Hope and Guidance in the Word.

In the midst of crisis, Christ Who calmed Galilee's billows, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and saved the lost is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He changes not. (Malachi 3:6)

Meditate and pray over Scriptures such as Psalm 91, 46:1; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 17:14; and Lamentations 3:21-26.

Do not be overwhelmed by anxiety.

Paul says it well, "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. (Philippians 4:6-7 MSG)

Speak Truth.

In the face of the many rumors and conspiracies floating around, speak truth. Before you share a text message that someone sends to you, verify it. In times of crisis, each of us must inspire trust by speaking truth.

Live Love.

Love is doing what is in the best interest of others. This includes making decisions to be healthy and safe for others.

Set Up an Online Prayer Meeting or Bible Study.

Within the last few hours I have received two invitations to attend online prayer meetings — one all the way from Dubai! The Dubai Central Church created an Instagram post to announce the time and date of their Prayer Meeting, with links to join them on YouTube, Facebook, livestream, and their website.

Share Digital Glow Tracts.

William Smith, Southern Union Publishing Director, says, "One of the leaders of the GLOW Tract Organization suggested that each church member can witness by sharing an Online GLOW Tract link. Here's how:

- Go to the link: www.glowonline.org.
- Tap on any GLOW Tract cover, and then tap the link icon.
- After reading a GLOW Tract, share the link for the GLOW tract by email, Facebook, or Twitter.

"The Lord gave the Word; great was the company of those that published it," Psalm 68:11.

Don't Forget the Children and Teens.

Here are two suggestions for children and teens.

- Invite neighbor children to watch an online story program.
- Watch the International Pathfinder Camporee Nightly programs on Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/adventistyouth/>
- Huntsville First Church Children's Ministries Department is live streaming children's programs each Sabbath morning.

Keep Bible Studies Going.

Ralph Ringer, Southern Union director of church growth, evangelism training, and Jewish ministries, shared the following tips:

- Call members/neighbors/family/interests to encourage them, and let them know we care about them and love them.
- Share a Bible promise and/or encouraging text, by phone, text, email, or social media.

- Use Zoom, Skype, or social media to have Bible studies.
- Share websites like: It Is Written, Voice of Prophecy, Faith for Today, Breath of Life, Shalom Adventure, and satellite channels like Hope Channel, 3ABN, and LLBN. 📺

R. STEVEN NORMAN III, *Southern Union Conference communication director and Southern Tidings editor.*

PRAYER ANNOUNCEMENT

BY DAVID LONG

The Southern Union Conference is encouraging all members to collectively pause in prayer every Monday at 6 a.m., 12 p.m., and 6 p.m., for the challenges our world is facing. Also, please check with your Conference's prayer ministries director for information on various prayer calls in your area.

"To the consecrated worker there is wonderful consolation in the knowledge that even Christ during His life on Earth sought His Father daily for fresh supplies of needed grace; and from this communion with God He went forth to strengthen and bless others. Behold the Son of God bowed in prayer to His Father! Though He is the Son of God, He strengthens His faith by prayer, and by communion with Heaven gathers to Himself power to resist evil and to minister to the needs of men," *Acts of the Apostles*, 56:1. 📖

DAVID LONG is the Southern Union Conference prayer ministries director.

required to work from home and all efforts have been made to ensure that day-to-day operations will continue without interruption. The Southern Union administration will evaluate the current situation on April 22, 2020, to decide if virtual operations need to be extended.

In our quest to be a part of the solution and not the problem, I encourage you to follow the guidance of the CDC and other federal agencies, as well as your state and local governments. This includes reducing travel, washing your hands frequently and thoroughly, and limiting social gatherings as far as possible. Additionally, take time to know and love your family like never before. Pray to God and trust in His divine power.

Love has been called the greatest therapeutic force of all time, but nowhere is this truer than in the reduction of fear and anxiety. The Bible states, “Perfect love expels all fear.”

I invite you to pray with me now. Our Heavenly Father, we come to You in full acknowledgment of Your omnipotence and the awesomeness of Your sovereignty. Lord, we find ourselves in the middle of a crisis in our nation, in our Church, in our families, and in our personal lives.

We’ve been impacted by a battery of issues surrounding the Coronavirus. Financial investments have waned and are dwindling, food items are limited, and there’s a whole lot of fear and anxiety in the hearts of people. I pray O God, that we will use this opportunity to draw close to You.

And even as we continue to work remotely as members of Your Church, give us the power as well as Heaven’s resourcefulness to continue to serve in a very safe way that will facilitate the healing of our country, of our jurisdictional surroundings, our Church, and even within our homes. We give You our lives afresh now, and we are totally dependent upon what You will do for us. We ask it in the name of Jesus, with full confidence that You will see us through. Amen. —RCS 🙏

RON C. SMITH, D.MIN., PH.D.

President of the Southern Union Conference.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

BY ANN FREEDMAN

He is always there for us. While we are staying home to prevent spreading or catching the COVID-19, we are still able to be a witness for Him.

Isolation is difficult, not only for our elderly population but also widows/widowers, single parents, etc. Here are some ideas to reach out and minister to our friends in these groups, while visiting is discouraged or prohibited.

- Call, text, or email on a regular basis — try to talk about things other than the current pandemic. Share Scriptures and encouraging words.
- Encourage them to be prayer partners with you — you can text throughout the day with encouraging verses. I am always encouraged to know someone is thinking of me and praying for me.
- Mail notes of encouragement, pictures your children have



PHOTO BY: R. STEVEN NORMAN III

The staff bowed in prayer to ask God’s protection for everyone in our Union and world. Everyone is asked to pause for prayer at 6 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m.

- drawn, or pictures of your family.
- Remember members with special needs in our congregations. Make sure to check in on them.

These are precarious and anxious times for children. They hear the news, adults talking, schools and parks are

closing, and disrupting their daily lives. Be mindful of the conversations you have near the children. They can hear you even if they are engaged in play or other activities, and are looking to see if you are anxious.

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PHOTO BY: R. STEVEN NORMAN III

Alicia Wilson, Southern Union Department of Education administrative assistant, packs boxes of materials she will need while each Union employee is serving the conferences and members from home.

- Remember family worship, emphasizing trust in God.
 - Assure our children that we are taking care of them and keeping them safe. Talking with them on a regular basis will help ease their anxieties. Validate their feelings, then give them answers.
 - Use age-appropriate language. Talk about germs, why we wash our hands, cover our sneezes/coughs, and don't put our hands in our mouth or touch our nose.
 - You can make a game of hand washing — how many times did you wash your hands? Keep a log outside the bathroom where they can put tally marks or stickers each time they wash their hands.
 - Children need routines, especially now that they are out of school. Set up a schedule for chores, crafts, board games, reading, writing in a journal, or notes to family far away.
 - There are many websites that have activities for children. One that I really like is TeachersPayTeachers.com — they have many free activities, and you can select grade and subject matter. Many schools have reading/math websites already in place that students can use.
- I hope these suggestions will help you navigate these challenging times. Remember to stay calm and put our trust in Jesus. God is our “present help in times of trouble,” Psalm 46:1. He will guide us through these times by His strength and power. He has blessed and protected us in the past, and we need to continue to trust in His leading going forward. Please stay safe and healthy. Minimize your exposure and follow the Center for Disease and Control’s guidelines as expressed on their website.
- God bless! 🙏

ANN FREEDMAN, *Southern Union family/disabilities ministries associate director.*