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# Adventist Journey

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## My Journey

What God has done for us as a couple and as a family—it’s phenomenal that He’s given us the opportunity to touch as many lives as we have. Caphelle: The task of shaping young minds, developing that love for Christ, and letting them know that God died just for them and that He’s coming back for them is huge. Kevin: I’m excited to see where God’s going to lead. . . . I want to see us use our buildings more actively in ministry. Visit [vimeo.com/nadadventist/ajcaphelleandkevinbenta](https://vimeo.com/nadadventist/ajcaphelleandkevinbenta) for more of the Bentas’ story.

### CAPHELLE AND KEVIN BENTA,

local church children’s ministries volunteer, elementary school teacher; director of property and risk management, Ontario Conference



Cover Photo by Dan Weber, inside photo provided by the Bentas

**Dear Reader:** The publication in your hands represents the collaborative efforts of the North American Division and *Adventist World* magazine, which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

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# Making Friends, **SHARING GOD** ON THE “RES”

Adventist outsiders become community members on a Montana Indian reservation.

BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN



Donald “Cody” Eagleman (center) performs a Native American Indian grass dance during a cultural presentation at the elementary school in Poplar. Cody is a Christian, and friends with Kris Simons and the Marshes. *Mylon Medley*

**T**he tiny city of Poplar is located in the prairie lands of Montana, on the Fort Peck American Indian Reservation. The reservation is home to the Sioux and Assiniboine tribes, and a few nonnatives, which include Gary and Marla Marsh, and their friend, Kris Simons. While Simons, the widow of a Sioux, has lived on “the res” for nearly 30 years, the Marshes have made Poplar their home for the past six years.

They are no strangers to mission work. One year after they got married, and while Marla was expecting their first child, they moved to Africa. The Marshes served in several countries for almost eight years before returning to Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

“Our son and his wife were here,” explained Gary. “We had spent 35 years at Andrews and were coming up for retirement, so we thought we’d come here and help him start a church or keep the church going.” Their daughter-in-law is a nurse who had been assigned work in the area.

The Marshes wondered about their future on the reservation. What would happen if they came here and their kids moved away?

Three months after they settled in, that’s exactly what happened. Gary said, “We made a decision that we would stay and see what we can do to help with our native friends who are here on the res. They’re God’s kids too.”

Gary, an airplane pilot who operated Andrews University’s flight program, taught school in

Tanzania. Marla, who worked in what is now the College of Visual Arts and Design at Andrews, taught school in Nairobi. But in Poplar they have been the students.

**Taking Classes**

Walking toward one of the local shops on the main thoroughfare of the tiny town, the Marshes wave to the shopkeeper cleaning outside. Her family owns the store that sells a variety of native items, including small collectables, beads, leather, ribbon, hats, and dresses. Gary deftly shakes her one hand and removes the broom and bin from her other hand to sweep up broken beer bottle shards from the parking spaces next to the store. The woman smiles her thanks and explains that beer and liquor bottles often litter the downtown streets and sidewalks.

Task done, the Marshes proceed to the shop for a brief visit. They share that they regularly “go around” to all the places in town. “We support the local vendors and we get to know people by being out and about,” said Marla.

Another way the Marshes have made friends is by taking classes at the community college. “I started taking the Dakota choir class, learning how to sing in Dakota,” said Gary. “I don’t know what the words all say, but I can read them in the hymnal and they’re all Chris-

tian hymns. ‘Amazing Grace’ and all those songs are Christian words, but they are basically in the Dakota language. Then Marla started taking a [beading] class over there, too.”

“I made a pair of moccasins. I went to class every day, every week. When I got done the next year, I came back, and I finished both moccasins,” said Marla. When the teacher was leaving, she asked Marla to bring the moccasins to show the new instructor. She did. One of the students was impressed with the intricate work done on them. She told Marla they would be very expensive if sold in a store. “The new teacher taught me how to do medallions—like a necklace, but you can sew them into items. I learned how to make a coin purse,” Marla added.

“I also took a class in the hand drum,” said Gary. “I’ve also made a leather Bible cover. When we’re taking these classes, we’re meeting other people in the community.”

It’s that willingness to immerse themselves in the community so fully, along with being honest about who they are and what they stand for, that has helped Gary and Marla cultivate meaningful relationships with people they are now able to call friends.

The couple has come to realize that, in some ways, the work is more challenging on the res than overseas.

**Earning Trust**

After watching a cultural awareness event at the local middle school gymnasium, where young and old perform the songs and dances of their heritage, Gary explained why it can be difficult to join a closed community that is suspicious of outsiders. “One of the big things here is lack of trust. People come and do things, but they leave. They go home and they’re real proud that they did something, but it’s temporary,” he said. “The people here, I know one of



Gary and Marla Marsh visit the Poplar, Montana, Adventist church site, which is less than a mile from their home. *Pieter Damsteegt*

Gary and Marla have dedicated themselves to being part of tiny Poplar, Montana, working in the community. It is a mission work. It’s a work of love.

the questions they asked when we made our first trip out here as a mission group: ‘Are you coming back?’ And when we actually moved here, Marla, what was their response?”

“They said, ‘Why did you move here? What brought you here? There’s nothing out here.’”

“I responded, ‘Maybe it’s you. We want to be here.’”

Marla continued, “You just have to be genuine in what you believe, and be the same every day. You don’t change. You have to be helpful. You’re always kind, smiling. You aren’t downing them. You aren’t criticizing them. You’re just trying to build them up, and you always are doing that. Pretty soon they say, ‘That’s different,’ . . . and they learn to trust you.”

**Creating Community Through Church**

The Marshes have been blessed by all the support they’ve received from



Marla Marsh displays moccasins she learned to craft during community college classes. *Mylon Medley*

Adventists of all ages. School groups come in the summer and assist with Vacation Bible School. Church members help run the every-other-year camp meeting held at the community college, which is a story in itself.

Medical professionals travel to Poplar and help with clinics and teaching lifestyle principles—especially smoking cessation and diabetes counseling.

Through the efforts of the Marshes and many volunteers, the basement of the church has been constructed. The site, which was previously a large home and a local hospital, is shaping up.

Construction workers and business owners donate time, equipment, and money into the property transforming it, bit by bit, into a church building and community center. Churches, conferences, and union conferences have pitched in with funding.

There is a desperate need for a church in the downtown area, within walking distance for residents.

"I go to the prison many Sabbath afternoons and evenings for Bible study, and meet with several inmate groups. We have church service in our home on Sabbath morning," said Gary. "But the entire town is watching our church property over there. We've been blessed. We got three city lots for \$6,000. It took about a year and a half to get a clear title to the property. We did the excavation in 2017; we had a dedication in April 2018 on the property. Then the group from Michigan came out—and a person from Indiana. In September 2018 we had a father and son from Oregon help put the footings in. The team from Michigan did the walls and slab. A plumber came from Washington and helped do the plumbing. Meanwhile everyone is watching and asking questions."

Gary and Marla, walking around the neat white walls comprising the



Gary Marsh shows the work done to the church basement in September 2018. *Pieter Damsteegt*

basement, explained how a group will frame the basement walls, put in the main floor, and close it up. "We have to keep it dry for the winter. Then next summer groups are coming out again," said Gary.

After lots of volunteer work and financial donations the realization of the dream is close. "What we've been praying for, working toward . . . it's going to be a lighthouse that will share God's love. That's what we want it to be," Gary said.

### Showing a Better Way

After six years on the reservation in Poplar, Gary and Marla Marsh feel at home in a place that is a mix of modernity and ancient tradition and culture. As they drive people to doctor's appointments, hold health seminars, take college courses, organize Vacation Bible Schools and Adventist camp meetings—and as they hold Sabbath worship services in their home and coordinate the building of the church during the week—they feel blessed by the many answers to prayer.

With fetal alcohol syndrome near epidemic numbers and rampant use of drugs and alcohol mixed with poverty and a sense of hopelessness, the Marshes are striving to be God's light, showing the Sioux and Assiniboine population that there is a better way.

"Our main thrust when we left Berrien Springs was to make friends," said Marla. "I told them, 'We're not preachers and you know that.' They all nodded their heads. We said, 'We're just going to be

friends—and they said, 'Amen. That's what you ought to be doing. It's supporting us.'

"Then when, for example, you see a group of 12 men give up their salary or wages for building and whatever industry they work with to come and spend a week here to support the same dream we have, it's pretty humbling."

Marla and Gary, who have had some personal setbacks recently, are still praying for God to continue helping them as they show their new friends a better way to live—and as they help others really get to know the Great Spirit.

"I don't think I've ever been lonely here, ever. You'd think with only three members I might really be lonely. But you make new friends and there's something going on all the time," Marla said.

The Marshes would love to see an Adventist school for the kids of the reservation. "That may be an answer down the road for changing people's lives," said Gary.

They've dedicated themselves to being part of this community, working in the community. It is a mission work. And it's a work of love.

"We are committed to staying here until the Lord comes," Gary said.

"Or until we can't work anymore, we'll be here," added Marla.

"We're here."

*Kimberly Luste Maran is editor of Adventist Journey.*

>> Visit <https://vimeo.com/298192665> to watch the Marsh story.

# Stronger Than Prejudice

Adventist nurse makes mission her life on the reservation.

BY MYLON MEDLEY

**N**early 30 years ago Kristina “Kris” Simons arrived in Poplar, Montana, as an altruistic travel nurse looking to address the alarming health needs of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

“I had just left Alaska . . . and I wanted to go somewhere with [warm winters], like Hawaii, somewhere nice,” said Simons.

“Oh, here’s one in Poplar, Montana,” said a representative of her agency.

“I didn’t know anything about Montana except where it was,” recalled Simons.

The rep said, “Yeah. Let me see: 60 [degrees Fahrenheit] below [zero] . . . lots of fetal alcohol syndrome problems, alcoholism, drug addiction.”

“She’s rattling off all of these negatives about it. And the more she talked, the more I wanted to go there. I thought, *I could make a difference there*,” said Simons.

Poplar, with a population of fewer than 900 people, is located on the reservation. Fort Peck is among the largest reservations in the United States, with more than 2 million acres of land and a population of approximately 10,000 people. It is home to the Assiniboine and Sioux, who occupied the land long before there was a “Montana” or a “United States of America.”

After living on the reservation, or “res,” for three months, Simons met her now late

husband Edward. They married two months to the day after their introduction.

“It’s not the easiest place in the world to live, for sure, but it can be one of the most satisfying and gratifying places,” she said.

## Life on the “Res”

The climate, in every sense of the word, is difficult on the res. The winter weather is extreme. The location is remote and barren. The issues related to health and upward socioeconomic mobility are discouraging. The attitudes toward those who are not native are described to be as cold as the weather itself, understandably so.

“Have you watched the movie *The Dakota 38?*” asked Simons.

The documentary film follows a group of people honoring the 38 Sioux leaders who were hanged on December 26, 1862, in Mankato, Minnesota. The leaders fought against broken treaty promises by settlers who were encroaching on their land, leaving thousands of natives with little food. It was the largest one-day mass execution in the history of the U.S., and it was endorsed by the nation’s president, Abraham Lincoln.\*

“When I went to college here, they showed that [documentary] at every single class,” said Simons.

“There’s a lot of prejudice around. You just show them something stronger and better than prejudice,” said Simons.

During home church service, a neighbor child who lives in Poplar, reads a hymn with Kris Simons. Mylon Medley





Gary Marsh (center) tells a Bible story as Kris Simons (left), an Adventist nurse, sits with one of three reservation children who attend church service in the Marsh living room. *Pieter Damsteegt*

In addition, many can share memories of relatives who were forced to go to “Indian School,” where natives were forced to become Christians and adopt the colonized lifestyle.

“The history for them is so recent. The horrors of the past and everything that happened to them is like it just happened. The fact that they’re still very guarded and untrusting of most White people when you first come around is not a big surprise,” said Simons, who is Caucasian.

“There’s a lot of prejudice around. You just show them something stronger and better than prejudice,” said Simons.

### Stronger and Better Than Prejudice

*What’s stronger and better than prejudice?* The spirit of an elderly White congregation of an Adventist church 70 miles away in Glasgow, Montana, embracing Kris’s husband as one of their own. Glasgow held the closest Adventist church to Poplar. There are no Adventist churches on the Fort Peck reservation.

“They were so good to Ed,” said Simons. “There was one family that quit coming immediately because they did not want any part of being in an Adventist church where there was a native.” But that one family did not influence how the remaining members doted on Ed and supported him when he decided to get baptized. Simons says Ed was the first Sioux to get baptized in the area.

“It’s like you go visit your favorite auntie,” Simons recalls Ed telling his friends when asked why he went to a “White church.” “That’s what it feels like when we go over to church.”

*What’s stronger and better than prejudice?* Ed and Kris starting a local ministry when the congregants at the Glasgow church passed away, forcing the church to close. Hosting scores of children of various ages; teaching them about God through nature and inspired messages; launching small camp meetings for the reservation; and giving children a chance to pair their talents with lessons from the Bible.

“The children on the reservation are worth saving. The people on this res are worth saving,” said Simons.

*What’s stronger and better than prejudice?* Simons volunteering to accompany elderly natives during their doctor visits.

“This is my home. These are my people. I love them. I take care of them every way I possibly can. . . . There are always people like older women who need to go to the doctor. They’re scared to talk because they don’t know what the doctor is saying anyway and [they feel walked over]. The doctors don’t tend to be very nice to natives. That’s where I come in. I’m the regulator.”

*What’s stronger than prejudice?* Simons adopting the spirit of widowed Ruth when she told her mother-in-law, Naomi, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16, NIV).

Ed died in 2010 after battling diabetes and a severe heart condition that led him to have eight major heart attacks. “After my husband died, everyone kept wondering why I didn’t go back to Oregon, where my family [lives]. The Lord didn’t ever ask me to. There’s always been more to do here, a lot.”

### “Work in Progress”

Simons cannot speak about the church lifelong missionaries Gary and Marla Marsh are helping to construct on the reservation without crying. Her faith has sustained her while she has longed for an Adventist church community. But she does not believe the years without a church have been in vain. Simons said if she never moved to Poplar she would’ve missed out on a fulfilling life.

“This little place allowed me to be able to be who the Lord wanted me to be; what He had in mind. At least it’s a work in progress.”

*Mylon Medley is an assistant director for the NAD Office of Communication.*

\*Jon Wiener, “Largest Mass Execution in U.S. History: 150 Years Ago Today,” Dec. 26, 2012, [www.thenation.com/article/largest-mass-execution-us-history-150-years-ago-today/](http://www.thenation.com/article/largest-mass-execution-us-history-150-years-ago-today/), accessed on Feb. 11, 2019.



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## MINISTRIES CONVENTION HELPS PREPARE LEADERS AND MEMBERS TO SERVE AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN, WITH MYLON MEDLEY

**M**ore than 600 ministry leaders gathered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, January 13-16 for the 2019 “Stronger United: Many Voices, One Vision” Adventist Ministries Convention (AMC). Conference, union conference, and division ministry partners came together to inspire, educate, and renew church ministry leaders across the North American Division (NAD) through daily devotionals, special music, church resource exhibits, TED (technology, entertainment, design) talk-style presentations, breakout sessions,

and awards given to individuals for ministry achievement.

NAD ministry directors hosted intentionally cooperative breakout sessions planned, according to AMC organizers, to “ensure that the spirit of collaboration is evident in each of the [eight] NAD core values through the breakout sessions.” Regardless of the ministry they represent, attendees were encouraged to join breakout sessions they felt would help discover “best practices relevant for their ministry.”

Just prior to the convention NAD Prayer Ministries held

the two-day “Praying Our Way Through! An Adventist Ministries Pre-Convention Event,” a special prayer services meeting.

Worship through music each day was provided by renown pianist Sam Ocampo and the accomplished duo of soloist Denise Josiah and musician Donnell S. Josiah.

### One Body in Christ

The opening keynote address was delivered by G. Alexander Bryant, executive secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Bryant’s presentation, “A

← Ron and Karen Flowers, retired directors of General Conference Family Ministries, accept a special lifetime achievement award presented by NAD Family Ministries directors Claudio and Pamela Consuegra on January 15, 2019.  
*Dan Weber*

Diverse People Shaped by a Diverse God,” drew from the example of God, who demonstrates the power and strength of unity through presenting Himself as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. “It is God’s design and desire to replicate this strength in diversity through His people and His church,” said Bryant.

Bryant unpacked a passage from 1 Corinthians 12, challenging attendees to recognize that “God has put conservatives in the church. God has put liberals in the church. God has put people in the middle in the church. God has set the members of the body as it has pleased Him. . . . God knows—the body cannot be the body without the distinct and separate functions of the members. That’s what Paul is saying. *What if everything was an eye? What if everything was an ear?* We need the diversity in the church to carry on and fulfill the mission of the church, the will of God. We also need the diversity to reflect who God is. Do you think one group can reflect who God is?”

“We are stronger united,” said Bryant reflecting the theme of the convention. “But more than that, we are not even the body of Christ without our differences and our diversity and uniqueness that God has set in the body.”

### On Exhibit

More than 50 exhibitors were present at AMC, ranging from official ministries and services of the NAD, including Children’s Ministries, Education, and Adventist Retirement, to ministries of the global Seventh-day Adventist denomination, including the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and the Office of Adventist Mission. Exhibits also featured independent ministries seeking to gain exposure and spread awareness of their particular focus.

“This exhibit is one of the best we’ve had in a long time,” said Cornice Williams, volunteer at the Disabilities Ministries booth, which represented an Adventist church in Rochester, New York, with 30 members, all of whom are disabled. “A lot of [visitors] are really, really interested and concerned about the disabled in the church, and that’s stuck with me. It warms my heart to know they’re now ready for this space.”

“We’ve been going around spreading the word getting people to incorporate and embrace disabilities. We have information in French, Spanish, and English, and books on disabilities ministries at AdventSource,” continued

Williams, who later received a lifetime achievement award at the convention for her work in personal ministries within Northeastern Conference—for being instrumental in launching the church in Rochester for people with disabilities. “We’re open to come to your church to do workshops and to help you wherever you’re stuck with disabilities ministries to show you how to move forward.”

Brad Forbes, director of AdventSource, served as coordinator for AMC exhibits. “This is a great opportunity for me to meet people, to ask them what’s working and ask what we can do to assist in promoting these ministry resources,” said Forbes.

“I [also] hope that visitors make connections with whatever people are in their ministry area. That’s the number-one thing,” continued Forbes. “Sometimes at conferences you’re on your own for long periods of time . . . [but here in the exhibit hall] you can connect with people who are dealing with the same ministry challenges that you are.”

### Ministry Recognized

The lifetime achievement awards banquet was held the evening before the final AMC general session. Before the awards portion, social researcher, author, and speaker Shaunti Feldhahn spoke about making the most of married relationships, debunked myths that circulate in churches and among leaders about the rate of divorce in Christian couples, and urged those in leadership roles to provide support for parishioners who need help with family relationships.

The evening closed with the presentation of lifetime achievement awards in 16 ministry categories. The excellence in ministry awards were presented throughout the AMC with recipients acknowledged during a video slide show at the banquet.



↑ Jamie Jean Schneider Domm, digital media strategist for the North American Division, leads a workshop on social media. *Pieter Damsteeg*

“We need the diversity in the church to carry on and fulfill the mission of the church, the will of God. We also need the diversity to reflect who God is.”



↑ G. Alexander Bryant delivers the opening keynote address at the 2019 Adventist Ministries Convention. *Pieter Damsteegt*

**Forward With Community**

Armando Miranda, associate director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, issued a challenge at the AMC’s final general session in his presentation “2gether: Because 2 Are Better Than 1.” He said that God, who models community in the Trinity, instituted community from humanity’s beginning (Gen. 1; 2). “From the start,” Miranda said, “God gave us this—the utmost example of community, of unity, of togetherness, that of the family when they become one flesh.”

Miranda quoted Ellen White: “The holy pair were not only children under the fatherly care of God but students receiving instruction from the all-wise Creator. They were visited by angels, and were granted communion with their Maker, with no obscuring veil between.”\* Adam and Eve, said Miranda, “were together with God too. The plan of God, in a perfect world, has been to be in community—together.”

“God is with us; He gives us the power to defeat the enemy,” Miranda concluded. “Jesus came into this world; He walked with us, with every-

one—if He did so, why shouldn’t we? He preached through example; we should do the same.”

As attendees prepared to leave the meeting hall, the convention closed with a group of NAD leaders and church members with a rich diversity of age, race, gender, and profession reading aloud the passage from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 on unity and diversity in the church.

\*Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), p. 50.

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BY JOSE CORTES, JR.

# Conspiracy in North America

**W**hat if our Adventist churches across North America began a conspiracy? What if we decided in harmony with all the other churches across Bermuda, Canada, the United States, and the islands of Guam and Micronesia that we are going to love our cities as Jesus did?

What would happen if we ventured outside the walls of our churches, asked people about their needs, and did something transformational for individuals and communities?

What if our *local churches conspired together* to respond to disasters in the community (fires, earthquakes, storms, tornadoes); to feed those who are hungry; to clothe those who are underclothed; to mentor children after school; to minister to prisoners and their families; and to visit and pray regularly for those in the community who are sick?

What if we helped others within our walls too? Local churches could offer free marital counseling for married couples and free premarital counseling for engaged couples; free parenting classes; donate space, free of charge, for community events and celebrations that are consistent with Adventist faith and practice; provide manicures and pedicures for battered women; celebrate Communion with those who are homeless and bring them in when it is cold; lead toy drives during the holidays.

Churches could stand against modern slavery and the abuse of women, children, and seniors (not a silent church); teach free financial management classes; hold free fitness classes; promote and facilitate the adoption of children; and find practical ways to minister to often-neglected immigrant families, including the refugee community.

What if the local church connected with governmental leaders and worked with them to support good causes regardless of their party affiliation; hold a reception for community business owners and pray for their success; cosponsor and organize concerts with popular musicians in some of our beautiful historic buildings rather than having these buildings closed to the public most of the time? We could organize and sponsor celebrations during special days and recognized holidays such as New Year's Eve/Day, the Super Bowl, Valentine's Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and others; or partner with city and other organizations to serve as volunteers in such events as marathons, fairs, and festivals.

Some of our churches are doing some of these things, but more is needed.

What would happen if our churches opened their doors more often? Other denominations who don't have our beautiful and powerful message keep their doors open all the time.

What if we distributed flyers in our communities, not just those with beasts on the cover, but also those offering the few services mentioned above and others? What if we did this, not just for a day, or for a season right before the evangelistic meetings, but on a regular basis as a lifestyle?

What do you think would happen? Consider these three points.

**A relevant church is never empty.** Jesus was surrounded by people constantly. He did not preach to empty pews. There's a reason He was always surrounded by a crowd.

**A relevant church reaches and reclaims its community.** Jesus did that on a regular basis. He went to the synagogue, sat and read, then went out to reach and reclaim His community.

**A relevant church retains its members.**

When people are active and happy doing something good, something they enjoy, they don't leave. The total opposite happens: more people come—youth, young adults, adults, and children—It can be viral. Jesus went viral. That's why our church is here today—because of what He did.

It's time for a conspiracy of compassion and hope in our Adventist churches in North America!

What would happen if we ventured outside the walls of our churches?

*Jose Cortes, Jr., is an associate director of the Ministerial Association and leads in the areas of evangelism, church planting, and Adventist/global mission for the North American Division. Visit [compassionmovement.org](http://compassionmovement.org) to learn more about the NAD's Day of Hope and Compassion.*

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