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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

We're all in this together. We're not alone on the journey. It's much bigger than any of us. Along the way we have to be willing to let people into our lives, not only for them to impact us, but so that we can impact them. If we're living in a bubble, the journey isn't much of a journey. We're not making the connections that the journey is really about. **Visit vimeo.com/nadadventist/richardparke for more of Parke's story.**

RICHARD PARKE,
*director of media, Pioneer Memorial church,
Berrien Springs, Michigan*



Cover Photo by Christina Rogers

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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ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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AN INTERRUPTED GAMBLER: From Poker Player to Pastor

Joel "Joey" Barajas pursued ministry after an affirming, unexpected conversation.

Every Monday during his senior year at Walla Walla University in College Place, Washington, Joel "Joey" Barajas helped kick off the school week by leading Hispanic Ministries Night on campus. The services are in English, and hymns are sung in Spanish.

Despite the name, students of various races and ethnicities attend the program.

"It puts in perspective what heaven is going to look like," said Barajas, who finished his studies at Walla Walla as a theology major, which was not his intent when he transferred to the university.

"I came to Walla Walla as a business major, wanting to start my own business and all that stuff. But God had other plans," said Barajas.

Prior to his enrollment at Walla Walla, Barajas attended a community college in Seattle to be near his older brother, who was studying at the University of Washington. Barajas and his family are from Mattawa, a town in the center of Washington with a population of approximately 4,600 people. When his brother went off to school, he invited Joey to visit.

"I loved the city, I loved the city life. Coming from a small town, it was different," said Barajas.

Once there, instead of picking up books for studies, he picked up an addictive hobby.

"I got into that lifestyle of partying and all that. Gambling was a big part of my life as well. I would pass three casinos on my way to school

on the bus," said Barajas. "So it was easy for me to ditch school and go to the casinos and gamble all night and day."

"I eventually flunked out of my first quarter while in Seattle. My parents didn't find out until I shared my testimony three years after the fact. They kept asking when I was going to graduate," said Barajas. "I kept saying, 'One more year. I need to take a few more classes.'"

"They believed me. But it took a while for me to return to school."

A Redirect

Barajas completed an associate degree in business when he was 21. Around that same time he decided to be more intentional about his relationship with God.

"My roommates had parties every other weekend. It was difficult to really have that connection with Christ when there was loud music and people everywhere," said Barajas. "So I prayed, 'God, I believe You don't want me to be here anymore.'"

God's response was sudden and direct.

"Out of nowhere Walla Walla University sent me an invitation to visit the school. I'd never even visited its website. I had attended camp meeting on its campus once or twice, but I'd never visited the school," said Barajas.

Barajas visited Walla Walla University during a University Day, which is designed for prospective

EDITED BY MYLON MEDLEY AND KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN FROM AN INTERVIEW

students to tour the school, attend classes, and meet other students.

"I fell in love with the campus. I didn't grow up going to Adventist schools. I went to public school. Finding a community full of believers like me who were striving to have a relationship with God really impacted me, and showed me what I was missing my whole life."

University Day also gave Barajas the opportunity to encounter the university's spiritual life.

"I fell in love with the vespers service. I cried," said Barajas. "I felt God telling me, 'This is where I want you to be.' As soon as I got back to Seattle, I filled out an application, and the rest is history."

Once he officially transferred, he not only had to get oriented to the school, but also found himself needing an orientation to the Adventist culture.

"Coming to this school was an entirely different world for me, because everyone here is pretty much Adventist. They all had their lingo of haystacks. I didn't call them haystacks, I called them nachos."

Transformation Through Connection

Barajas did not have many friends at first. One person befriended him from their time working out and playing sports together. One day as he was running late for vespers,





COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

he saw this friend standing outside the facility where the program was held.

“His body language said a lot. Since I played poker, I knew how to read people’s body language and facial expressions. I knew something was up,” said Barajas. “I asked why he wasn’t going into vespers. He plainly said, ‘I’m having trouble believing in God right now.’ I had taken no theology classes, but for the next three hours we talked about his view of God.”

“At the end of that conversation he said, ‘You need to be a youth pastor.’ I was in a couple Bible classes at the time, and I was considering becoming a pastor. So that really impacted me,” said Barajas.

“I truly believe that God has gifted me in connecting with people and creating a space for them to put their guards down. It’s easy for me to open up to people, and that allows them to then open up,” said Barajas. “Just being able to share a word of happiness or wisdom creates an opportunity for the Word of God to bring transformation into someone’s life.”



Joey Barajas poses with the Pasco Riverview church Pathfinder Club. Provided by Joey Barajas

All In for Christ

Barajas graduated on June 17, 2018, with a bachelor’s degree in theology and a minor in business administration. Upper Columbia Conference extended a pastoral call to him, and he was placed at the Pasco Riverview Seventh-day Adventist Church. “I started in August 2018,” said Barajas. “But before I began pastoring, God opened a door for mission work right after graduation with ADRA Connections to the Amazon in Brazil for two weeks. That had a huge impact on my life.”

Barajas has loved almost every minute of his two-year internship at the Pasco Riverview church as their associate pastor. “Pastoring is emotionally demanding, but seeing lives being transformed for Christ is definitely worth it!” he said.

Barajas has worked primarily with the church’s youth and at Tri-City Adventist School, leading Bible studies, chapels, and a week of worship. On Friday nights Barajas has coordinated a worship and Bible study “hangout.” Barajas also served as a camp pastor at Camp MiVoden.

“This has been a high point during my internship. I grew up going to Camp MiVoden, and to go back as

a camp pastor was amazing! I felt like a camper, but with a beard,” he laughed. “Seeing God at work there is something I will never forget. I love all ‘my kids’ with all my heart, and throughout this internship they have been a reminder of my calling.”

This fall, he plans to attend Andrews University to pursue an MDiv. Barajas admits that his relationship with Christ has been a roller coaster ride. But it’s a ride he never wants to get off.

He recalls his gambling days. “When you’re playing poker, there comes a point where you have to risk it all and go all in. You either win it all or lose it all. It’s a stressful moment because it’s all based on luck.

“I have won big, but I’ve also had devastating losses. Regret seeps in, and all decisions are questioned,” he added. “When I went all in for Christ, there has been no regret, no greater prize.”

Mylon Medley is an assistant director of communication for the North American Division; Kimberly Luste Maran is an associate director of communication and editor of Adventist Journey.



Joey Barajas celebrates graduating from Walla Walla University with his father. Provided by Joey Barajas

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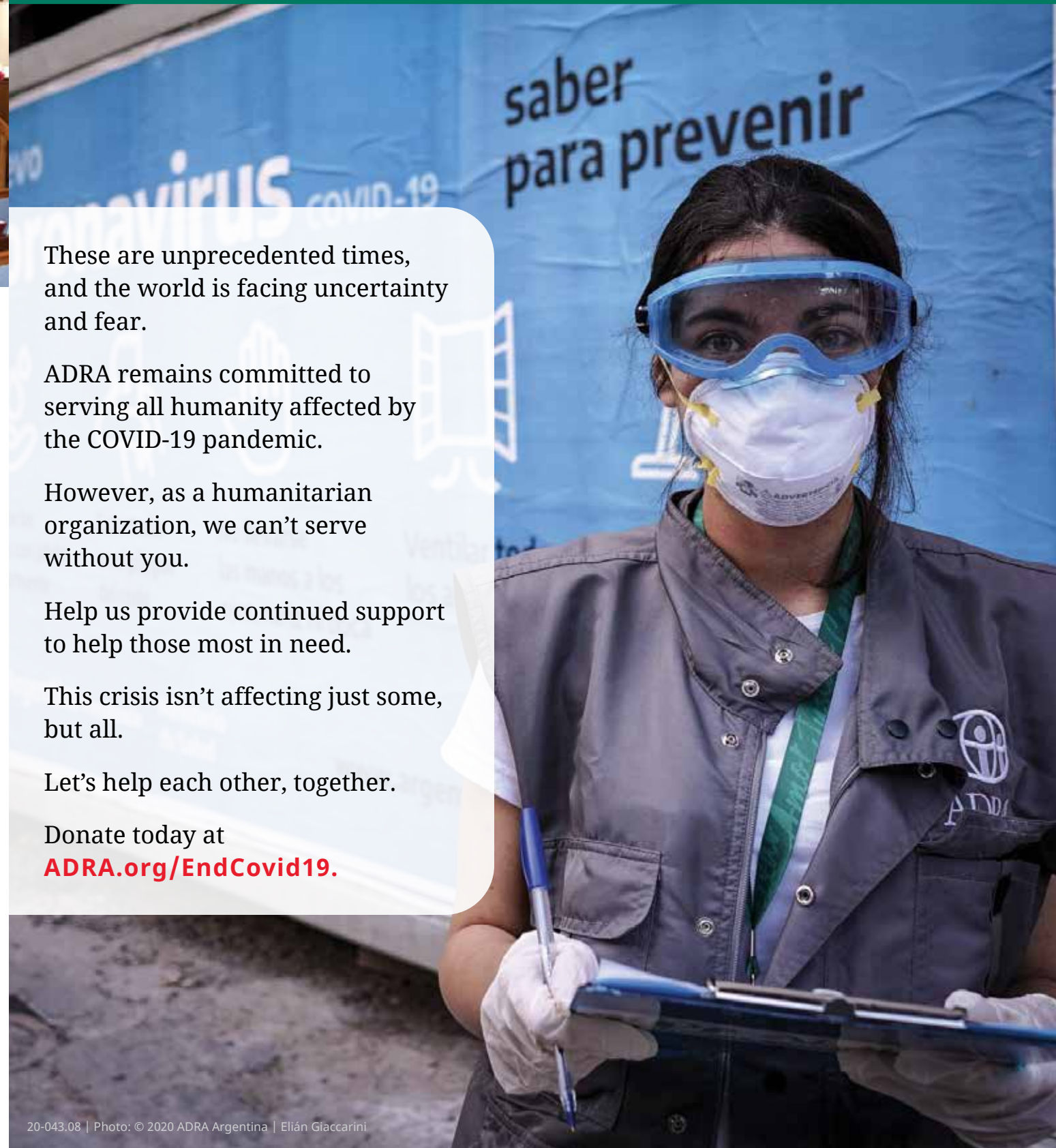
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← Jefferson Rodrigues and Rob Gonyea of Avalon Design Studio worked on creating the Sonscreen Film Festival 2020 virtual experience despite having to social-distance on a friend's porch (with WiFi) after tornadoes caused power outages in their community. *Photo provided by Jefferson Rodrigues*

SONSCREEN FILM FESTIVAL 2020 GOES VIRTUAL

More than 250 participate as the festival moves online during COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2020 Sonscreen Film Festival was on track to be held with new partner CoLab April 2-5, 2020. But those plans changed the second week of March as novel coronavirus disease closures caused the North American Division (NAD) to cancel the festival that was to be hosted at the Loma Linda University church in California. By April 13, after weeks filled with long hours reorganizing, shuffling, and creating, the festival moved online. It became the first NAD event to successfully occupy virtual space over a weeklong period. More than 250 “attended” the film festival—watching film blocks, sending Instagram photos, and engaging in a question-and-answer segment through film comment sections.

Participants were given an access code with password to enter the festival site. That code also allowed them to vote for the Audience Choice Award. At the festival’s conclusion more than 450 film block entries and 2,000 page visits were recorded.

“Our community rallied together to help make the virtual Sonscreen Film Festival a success,” said Julio Muñoz, festival director and an associate director for the NAD Office of Communication. “I’m grateful to our team who worked behind the scenes, the judges, our schools, and filmmakers who supported this effort. I’m amazed that we could do this online and preserve many of the characteristics that make Sonscreen unique.”

Breaking News

“On March 10 our team was about to return from what would turn out to be our last business trip before travel was suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Muñoz. “I got a message from our NAD officers that LLUMC* had voted to suspend travel and suspend the hosting of any conferences on campus. A call to Stew Harty, our host and pastor for media at Loma Linda University church, confirmed that they would likely not be able to host our event as the state of California began to shut down.”

Within hours, as the communication team was preparing to board flights, more reports came in from colleges and universities across the division about potential inability to travel.

“After more consultation with our Sonscreen team and stakeholders, NAD administrators decided that in order to protect the health and safety of all participants, it would be best to cancel Sonscreen 2020,” Muñoz said.

The rest of that week was focused on canceling caterers, removing hotel blocks, communicating with judges and speakers, and discussing the possibility of online hosting and virtual watch parties.

A Change in Plans

Immediately after the decision to cancel Sonscreen 2020, Muñoz began calling university and academy film professors to inform them of the cancellation. He told them that the team would work on creating some sort of “virtual” film festival.

The Sonscreen team initially imagined they would host the festival from the NAD headquarters, while student filmmakers joined watch parties at their respective schools. The team talked about who would emcee, how film question-and-answer sessions would function, and who would host them, and how they’d re-create the feeling of watching together in a screening room.

It seemed possible to have the interaction between filmmaker and audience, albeit via video.

Plans started to come together. Within a couple days, however, several of the participating schools closed because of the pandemic, and students dispersed to their homes. Then, on March 18, the NAD headquarters building closed, and employees started telecommuting.

“As we found out more about the spread of COVID-19, we realized that gathering in any sort of group would not be possible. We decided that streaming the films was our only chance to salvage the festival,” Muñoz said.

Two major concerns emerged: could the team create a secure digital environment so that films would be seen only by participants; and could they create an interactive environment, particularly so viewers could vote for the Audience Choice Award?

Behind the Scenes

Georgia Damsteegt, Sonscreen Film Festival operations manager and NAD communication senior editorial assistant, developed a prototype for embedding the films and for viewer voting through the festival’s website. She also updated the jury voting method. “This new process, created out of necessity, will be something we will use in the future,” said Muñoz. “For years we hoped to fully digitize the jury process, so I’m delighted this has been accomplished.”

Meanwhile, Mylon Medley, festival programmer and NAD communication assistant director, coordinated the final official selections film list and began work on organizing film blocks.

The Sonscreen team still needed to figure out how to create a secure environment. They reached out to Sonscreen student alumnus filmmaker Jefferson Rodrigues, creative

media director for Avalon Design Studio. Rodrigues and Rob Gonyea, vice president of media art at Avalon, were already working to re-design and reconfigure Sonscreen’s website to create a streaming platform for Sonscreen Films. Explained Muñoz, “They worked with Georgia’s prototype, and thanks to the work they had already started—and after many conversations on Slack,—in a couple weeks Avalon created the site for Sonscreen 2020 Online.”

Features of the online platform included passcode-protected viewing, time-released film blocks, daily video message from director Muñoz, Instagram feed with festival hashtag (#Sonscreen2020), meet the filmmakers short video greetings with each official selection, and enabled comments section for questions and answers with the filmmakers. And, yes, the design of the site “should feel more like a darkened screening room to watch the films in,” said Rodrigues.

Online and Onward

The 46 official selection films were divided into five films blocks, which were released at 12:00 noon and 6:00 p.m. (Eastern), each day of the festival. Once released, the blocks would stay online and open for the duration of the festival, initially scheduled for five days but extended three more days after Tennessee was hit by massive tornadoes on April 13, the start of festival week. Not only were student filmmakers and professors impacted by the tornadoes, but Avalon Design lost power for several days, forcing them to take their laptops and find WiFi elsewhere until power was restored.

➔ High school film teacher Robert Martinez watches a Sonscreen film block with his students from Spencerville Adventist Academy in Maryland. *Photo provided by Robert Martinez*

“One of the best parts of a film festival is getting to hear from the filmmakers,” said Robert Martinez, film, choir, and orchestra teacher at Spencerville Adventist Academy. After a film screen, filmmakers could also participate in a brief question-and-answer session, where they were asked about the creation of their films. “Some of the filmmakers were so creative in their brief video introductions that it really enhanced the online festival experience.”

“Our entire team learned so much through the process of making Sonscreen an online festival,” Muñoz said. “We hope to see everyone in person in 2021, but it’s good to know that we can come together and celebrate young Christian filmmakers in this virtual space as well. I look forward to continuing to nurture our film community online and in person.”

Visit sonscreen.com/film-festival/ for a list of the 2020 Sonny Award winners and more information about Sonscreen.

* Loma Linda University Medical Center

Kimberly Luste Maran is editor of Adventist Journey.



NAD NEWS BRIEFS



← Pathfinders sing the Pathfinder song during the virtual PBE program on April 18, 2020. Screenshot from April 18 PBE virtual program

NAD YOUTH MINISTRIES PROGRAM CELEBRATES THE IMPACT OF THE PATHFINDER BIBLE EXPERIENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted plans for the 2020 Pathfinder Bible Experience (PBE), which was set to take place April 17-18, 2020, in Salem, Oregon. Leaders were anticipating thousands to participate and observe the annual Bible knowledge testing for Pathfinders from across the North American Division (NAD) and beyond, especially after the stunning turnout at the 2019 testing. Instead, a much smaller group joined a virtual event on April 18.

The event in Salem would have represented the division level of the PBE four-step testing process, which begins at local churches, then advances to conference-wide testing. That same process is then repeated within a union conference's territory. This year's division-level testing was canceled by the NAD Youth Department on March 5 after consultation with the division's officers, the youth directors of the nine union conferences in the NAD, additional consultation

from Oregon health officials, and a discussion and vote from the NAD executive committee.

"As the pandemic further developed it was clear no face-to-face testing would be possible. Many unions did not have the capability of online testing; therefore many canceled altogether. We could not have an official NAD division testing if we could not get representation from the unions," said Gene Clapp, coordinator of the Pathfinder Bible Experience.

In response, leaders of North American Division youth and young adult ministries created an online program that was livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube on April 18 to showcase PBE. Approximately 180 people watched the live program. As of June 4, the video has received nearly 4,000 views on Facebook.

"The intent of the program was to celebrate God's goodness through the PBE program. A team from the Dallas-Fort Worth area—DFW Filipino Tamaraw Pathfinder

Club—was able to join and participate in the program," said Armando Miranda, associate director of NAD youth ministries. "The special program did not include a division-level testing, but it did include three questions that would have been asked at the official testing."

Miranda; Tracy Wood, director of NAD youth and young adult ministries; and Vandeon Griffin, associate director, led different sections of the hourlong program. Daniel R. Jackson, recently-retired president of the North American Division, shared a message that encouraged the Pathfinders and viewers to remember the special role they play in God's plan. The online program also featured music and testimonies from Pathfinders of the participating clubs.

This year Pathfinders were given the biblical books of Hosea, Micah, Amos, Jonah, and parts of Ezra and Nehemiah to study.

"It's a blessing to see the faith of the Pathfinders, and the leaders who guide them, strengthened by memorizing and studying passages of the Bible," Miranda said.

The assigned books for next year's PBE testing are Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter. According to Miranda, a number of Pathfinder clubs have already started their preparation.

"We pray that this program continues to strengthen the faith and the journey of these Pathfinders and families," said Miranda.

—Mylon Medley, NAD Communication

Retired Breath of Life Speaker Walter L. Pearson Jr., 74, Passes to His Rest

Seventh-day Adventist pastor and evangelist Walter L. Pearson, Jr., former speaker/director of Breath of Life, passed to his rest on June 7, 2020. He was 74.

Storytelling "was his gift, that was his niche," said Carlton P. Byrd, current speaker/director for Breath of Live TV ministries. Pearson was "one of our greatest communicators, particularly in his narrative preaching and ability to tell a story."

"His ministry was intergenerational," Byrd added. "He could reach people of all different age groups. Some pastors are great in evangelism, some in doctrinal preaching, [but] Elder Pearson had that gift to reach everybody in multiple settings."

NAD vice president Alvin M. Kibble said, "Pearson was the quintessential pastor/preacher. He preached with the fervor of the old-time evangelists and the eloquence of a master wordsmith. His timing, his style, and humor were artfully and effectively crafted to deliver the message God had ordained. A careful student of the Word and of human nature, he preached sermons that were biblically sound and socially relevant."

Pearson was born in 1945 in Mobile, Alabama. He was a graduate of Pine Forge Academy in Pennsylvania and then earned a degree in religion and theology from Oakwood College (now Oakwood University) in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1967. Shortly after graduation he married Sandra Holland.

In 1969 Pearson joined the Adventist ministry as associate pastor of the Glenville Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cleveland, Ohio. After years as a pastor and regional conference ministry director, Pearson was called to the General Conference in 1993. Following a

"Pearson was the quintessential pastor/preacher. He preached with the fervor of the old-time evangelists and the eloquence of a master wordsmith."



↑ Walter L. Pearson, Jr., retired speaker/director of the Breath of Life, joins the media ministry's fortieth anniversary celebration in 2014 at Oakwood University church. Breath of Life TV

brief stint at the Ellen G. White Estate, Pearson moved to the world church's Ministerial Association, where he was part of a team that trained Adventist pastors and those of other denominations.

Pearson became speaker/director of Breath of Life in 1998, a position he held for 12 years until his retirement. In all, Pearson preached in 67 different countries around the world.

Pearson suffered a stroke in 2006; and Sandra Pearson passed to her rest in 2009. Two years later Pearson married educator Patricia Patterson, who had also lost a spouse.

Along with Patricia, Pearson is survived by three adult children and four grandsons.

—Mark A. Kellner, with reporting from NAD Communication



← In April, Robert Costa, speaker/director for the It Is Written Spanish ministry Escrito Está, while under quarantine orders, conducts an online evangelistic series reaching at least four church divisions. *It Is Written*

Escrito Está Holds Virtual Meetings

throughout North America, Central America, South America, and Western Europe, joined the event. Attendance peaked with 247,000 views the opening weekend and remained strong with 170,000 consistent views night after night.

“I am so excited to see people making decisions for Jesus Christ,” said Costa, “We are living in unprecedented times, and it’s an honor and a privilege to share hope with people who are looking for answers.”

The event was preceded by social media invitations and special training sessions for church members to invite their friends and relatives to join the online meetings. On the closing Sabbath, 204 baptisms

were held in the North Mexican Union. More than 1,200 baptisms have been requested once restrictions are lifted, and Bible studies continue for many more.

Costa, who is also an associate ministerial secretary and evangelist for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, conducted other online series for Honduras, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua in May. Also in May, Costa conducted a series for North America entitled *Esperanza en Jesus* (Hope in Jesus) as a part of the *It Is Written Hope Awakens* series that began April 17. Visit hopeawakens.org for more information.

— Ellen Hostetler, *It Is Written*

Between April 18 and 25, 2020, Robert Costa, speaker/director for the *It Is Written* Spanish language ministry *Escrito Está*, shared hope with people in Mexico. Under quarantine orders himself, Costa conducted an online evangelistic series for the North Mexican Union Conference entitled *El poder de la Esperanza* (The Power of Hope) from his home.

The event was live-streamed through Facebook and YouTube. Because of the online platform, other conferences and churches

BY BONITA JOYNER SHIELDS

Prophecy Has a Face

We Adventists are a prophetic people. From the time we were children, we learned about prophecies in the story of Daniel and his three friends. We learned about how God’s kingdom would ultimately conquer the world’s kingdoms. We learned about the 2,300 days and the significance of 1844. Prophecy is in our DNA.

Yet in spite of all our learning and talking about prophecy, it seems so impersonal. It’s a concept we’ve had difficulty transferring from future happenings to our daily lives—until now. Prophecy has a face. Actually, prophecy has many faces.

For me, March 2020 began just like any other month. I traveled to Canada for a meeting, then traveled back to Baltimore on March 10. I was upgraded to first class—the first time I had ever experienced that perk! I knew there had to be a reason for my good fortune. As I looked around the plane, I noticed that very few people were on the flight. That was my first inkling of what would soon take place.

While attending a bridal shower on March 15, I received word that I had been exposed to someone with the novel coronavirus. I immediately left the celebration and went home to isolate. I never went back to the office, because two days later our office went virtual. Life as we knew it is gone; many believe never to return.

Ellen White has counseled that “the final movements will be rapid ones.”* While this coronavirus has been around since the end of 2019, the events that changed the world as we know it happened within a few weeks’ time.

My brothers and sisters, we *are* living in the last days. Are we preparing daily for Jesus’ return—not just when a crisis occurs? We must have the oil of the Holy Spirit with us *now*, before world events again change rapidly, and when we go looking for it only to discover that it’s too late (see Matt. 25). Think about it: Who ever thought that hand sanitizer and toilet paper would be almost impossible to get? Things we never thought we would be without were gone.

Jesus tells us that in the last days, lawlessness will abound and the love of many will wax cold (see Matt. 24:12). What could wax

colder than a police officer ignoring the pleas of a man begging for the pain to stop, only to ultimately die from the cold, callous actions of a man who had sworn to uphold justice? The murder of George Floyd is tragic and deserves justice and accountability—as do the victims of those who chose to react to this injustice by ravaging the livelihoods and life dreams of those people who had their businesses destroyed, and the lives of those who were protecting them.

We Adventists believe that central to the great controversy is the character of God. While His character is abundant and multifaceted, aspects of His character are pivotal for us, especially during this prophetic time. “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne” (Ps. 89:14). Righteousness and justice are not options for Christians. We cannot claim to be righteous without doing justly, and we cannot claim to do justly without being righteous (see Micah 6:8).

Yes, prophecy has a face. That face is COVID-19. That face is George Floyd. That face is injustice. That face is of those whose livelihoods have been destroyed through violence and destruction. The ultimate face of prophecy is Jesus and His character. Will we be that face to the world?

We cannot claim to be righteous without doing justly.

* Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 11.

Bonita Joyner Shields is vice president for Ministries for the North American Division.

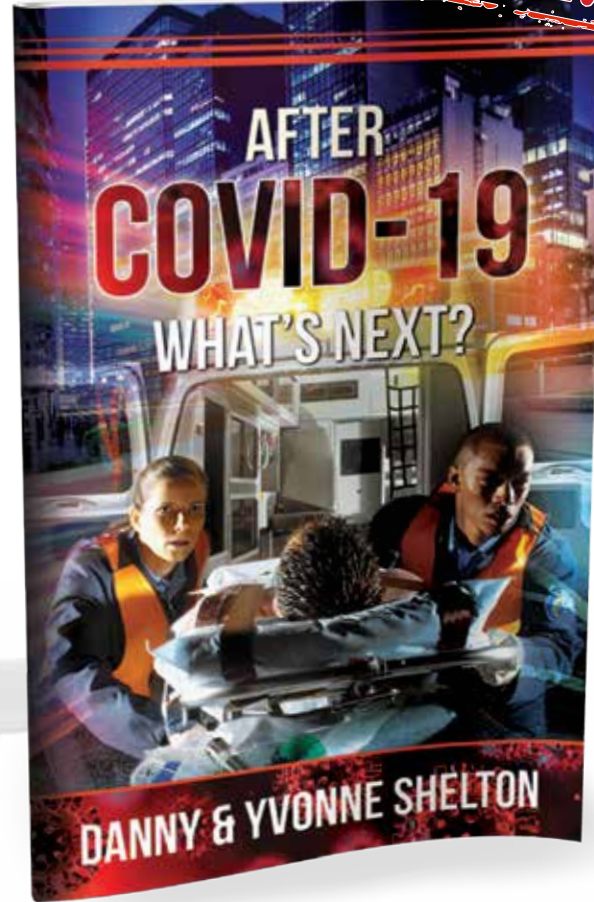
DOOR-TO-DOOR EVANGELISM

POSSIBLE!

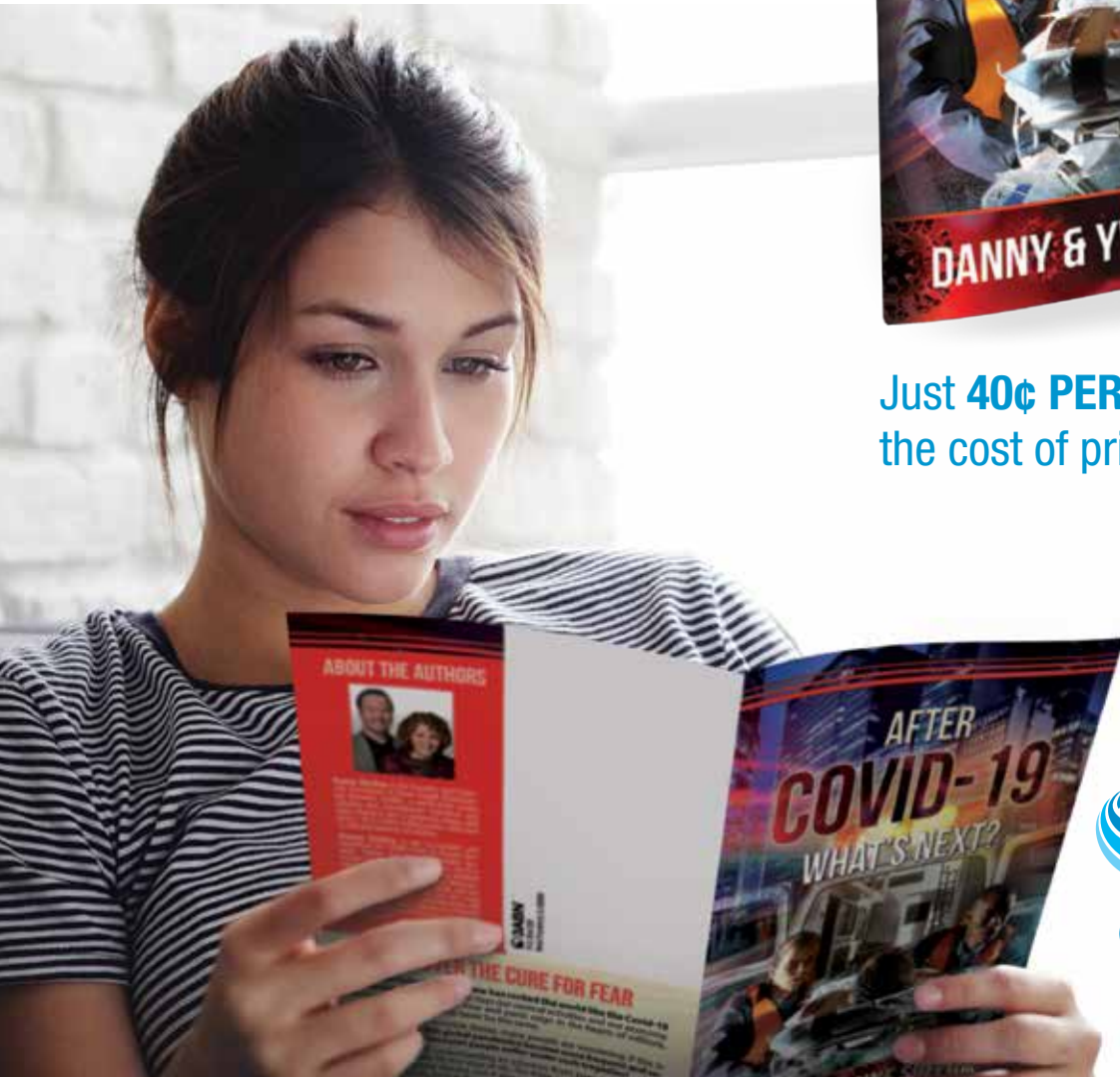
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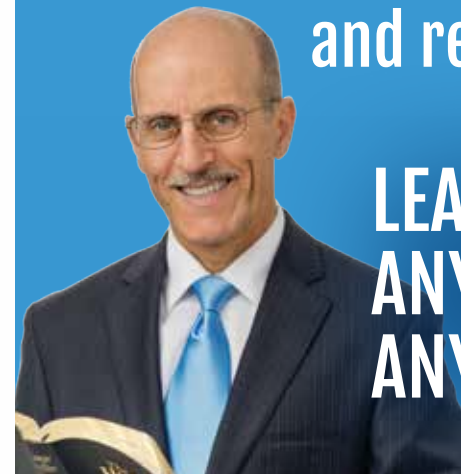


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