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My Journey

I was born into the Seventh-day Adventist Church and grew up involved in church ministries. I married a pastor; we had three daughters—God has placed on my heart a passion and love for children. I homeschooled our children, and have served Him through many children’s ministry opportunities in the local church, teaching in a classroom, and, most recently, serving God as a teaching principal.

Visit nadadventist.org/ajjessicamoon for more of Moon’s story.

JESSICA MOON,
*wife, mom, and Adventist school
principal in Dover, Delaware.*

Jessica Moon



Cover photo by Art Brondo

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

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ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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NAD Year-end Meeting Vespers: An Upper Room Experience

On the eve of the first day of the year-end meeting, attendees and special guests enjoy dedicated prayertime, ordinance of humility, and Communion as part of a special program.

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

This year's Friday evening vespers program during the North American Division Year-end Meeting delivered a unique and spirit-filled experience. It began with an agape feast of biblical proportions: fruits, nuts, breads, dips, cheeses, and crackers, all served on wooden dishes. Attendees filled their plates, moved to their tables, and feasted in the company of others, fellowshiping and rejuvenating.

Bringing the group back together, Anika Anderson, assistant director of NAD Events Management, and Desiree Bryant, a Ministerial Association associate director, led everyone in singing a hymn and then the year's theme song, "Come, Holy Spirit."

Then a special performance began.

Two figures, dressed in biblical-style attire, began walking between the tables from the back of the room, chatting about a meeting they were headed to. As they talked, another voice joined, as a third costumed figure ran from the back of the room to meet them.

"What are you doing?" the first figure asked the third. "He said to travel in pairs! You can't come with us!"

As they progressed to the front of the room, more figures filed onto the stage, some of them discussing how late certain people were to the meeting.



When the three original figures made it to the stage, they were warmly and teasingly greeted by the rest of the group, and they all stood around talking in the upper room, waiting.

This original dramatization of the events in Acts 2, now known as Pentecost, portrayed the faith-filled impatience of Christ's followers as they met as instructed to wait for their Lord. There was laughing and arguing, prayer and quoting of Scripture. And as the energy built in the upper room, the disciples prayed aloud together, suddenly speaking in myriad languages.

At the end of the skit, attendees were invited to participate in a time of focused prayer, meeting in groups within their unions. Their prayer was to be separated into seven sections:

- Silent, individual prayer, asking God to prepare their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit.
- Group "popcorn" prayer, asking for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and that Christ would add His intercession.
- Prayer led by union presidents or a designee asking



The three NAD officers, Kyoshin Ahn, G. Alexander Bryant, and Judy Glass, present the November 2, 2024, Communion service near the end of the division's year-end meeting vespers program.



NAD executive committee members and special guests at the 2024 North American Division Year-end Meeting gather for a special vespers, including prayer, ordinance of humility (left), and Communion—with emphasis on Pentecost.

Photography by Pieter Damsteegt

“There’s something contagious about God’s love. It starts in our hearts and spreads to all.”

God to rid them of differences and to unite them in Christian fellowship.

- Prayer in pairs, sharing requests and praying for each other.
- Praying scripture in pairs, asking the Lord to fit them for soul-saving, focused on John 21:17.
- Prayer in groups of four, asking God to help them meet people in their daily walk and speak words that will lead others to Christ.
- Silent, individual prayer of repentance and confession.

After nearly an hour group facilitators closed with prayer, and attendees filtered to two separate locations for the foot washing.

“We want to consecrate ourselves, as Christ called us to do in that upper room,” explained Rick Remmers, assistant to the president. “We pray that God’s will be done, and that we will be willing to receive His blessing.”

Following the foot washing, special music was provided at the piano with songs “Holy Ground” and “Let Us Break Bread Together.” Some attendees raised their hands and sang along in worship.

“As I look around this room, I see God’s leaders,” said G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president. “But first, I just see God’s people. God doesn’t look at us as leaders; he looks at us as sons and daughters. Regardless of our titles or positions, or what we do or don’t do, He loves us with

an everlasting love, and this service is a reminder of that.”

For the Communion service, small wafers of bread were passed around the tables in wooden bowls, while Kyoshin Ahn, secretary for the NAD, read the segment of Scripture in which Jesus invites His disciples to partake of the emblem of His body. Then he prayed.

“Lord, we give thanks that in Your great love You sent Your Son to be our Savior,” Ahn prayed. “We were dead in our transgressions, and Your Son gave His life for many. Hallelujah, what a Savior! May our hearts be filled with infinite thanksgiving for Your grace and mercy. Amen.”

As grape juice was poured into tiny wooden cups at each table setting, Bryant shared additional thoughts.

“There is something overwhelming about God’s love,” he said. “When the Spirit of God takes control of our hearts and lives, we can say to our betrayers, ‘I desire to eat this last meal with you.’ There’s something contagious about God’s love. It starts in our hearts and spreads to all.”

Judy Glass, treasurer for the NAD, read the scripture in which Jesus invites His disciples to partake of the emblem of His blood. Then she prayed.

“We thank you for Your love and care, and for Your willingness to send Your Son to earth so we can

be with You forever,” she prayed. “That hope keeps us going. Please bless us, Lord, and guide us, and bring us closer to You. Thank You for the most amazing gift. Amen.”

When the Communion service was concluded, Bryant reminded the group that Jesus said He would not partake of the bread or wine again until doing it with us in heaven.

“He believed in us,” stated Bryant. “He believed we’d get the task done, and He’s saying it again tonight: ‘North American leaders, I believe in you!’ Even in my stumblings and weaknesses and messing up, Jesus believes in me, and He’s waiting for me.”

Bryant encouraged, “If you want to say to Jesus, ‘Keep the cup in Your hand; I’m coming,’ stand with me!”

As chairs scooted back from tables and everyone in the room stood to their feet, Bryant closed the evening with prayer.

“Father, thank You for the hope we have in Jesus, despite ourselves,” he prayed. “Thank you for Your great love for us, and Your great sacrifice. Give us every day a fresh glimpse of You that will help us, motivate us, encourage us, and strengthen us for the journey.”

He finished, “And all the people said . . .” And the entire room resounded with “AMEN!”

Becky St. Clair is a freelance writer.



Faith, Determination, and Divine Power

In his 2024 North American Division Year-end Meeting sermon, president G. Alexander Bryant called church leaders to seek a “double portion” of the Holy Spirit.

BY JULIO C. MUÑOZ

On November 2, 2024, in a powerful sermon in which attendees actively participated with voiced responses and hearty amens, G. Alexander Bryant, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD), delivered a message of hope, resilience, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. Through personal testimony and biblical insights, he encouraged church leaders to embrace the spiritual power available to them, urging them to ask, seek, and knock (see Matt. 7:7) persistently until they experience a profound, divine empowerment in their lives and for their communities.

“We have a vast challenge, a vast assignment before us, to reach North America with the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. But the good news is God has already supplied everything,” Bryant said.

Bryant, preaching a sermon entitled “Double Portion,” emphasized to the delegates, official invitees, and spouses attending the 2024 NAD Year-End Meeting (YEM), the need to move beyond external structures or forms, challenging the congregation to prioritize the Holy Spirit as their source of strength and guidance. He reminded them that spiritual progress cannot be achieved without persistent, heartfelt connection with God’s Spirit.

To illustrate the importance of faith and determination, Bryant shared a story from his college years when, just two months before graduation, he faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. Told he lacked credits required for his business administration degree, he undertook an arduous journey to complete a critical economics course at a university located 12 hours away. Without sufficient funds and against all odds, he drove across states, faced challenges such as a near arrest because of speeding, and finally completed 36 lessons in a single week. His perseverance paid off after a miraculous grading oversight

← On November 2, 2024, in the year-end meeting sermon, speaking on the topic of receiving a “double portion” of the Holy Spirit, NAD president G. Alexander Bryant addresses the importance of prayer in people’s lives. All Photography by Pieter Damsteegt

was corrected, allowing him to pass the course and graduate. He wondered aloud, “What if I hadn’t prayed, and what if I hadn’t listened to that small voice telling me to check with the professor and test proctor one more time?”

Through this story Bryant conveyed the crucial message: with faith and unyielding persistence, seemingly insurmountable obstacles can be overcome. He encouraged the church leaders to apply this same perseverance to their spiritual lives. “We have to pray for the Holy Spirit every day,” he said. “We have to be determined.”

“Prayer is not to help us help God understand our situation; it’s to prepare us to receive His solution,” Bryant said.

Bryant then turned to the powerful example of the disciples in the book of Acts, who, through prayer and unity in the upper room, received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Comparing this to the prophet Elisha, who sought a “double portion” of the power God had given to Elijah, he affirmed that God still

offers a double portion of spiritual power to those who truly seek it.

Drawing upon the story of Christ’s resurrection and ascension, Bryant reminded the congregation of Jesus’ victory over death and His command to spread the gospel, empowering believers with the Holy Spirit to complete this mission. He noted that when the Holy Spirit filled the disciples at Pentecost, it included men and women alike who, together, “turned the world upside down” with their testimony.

“God has promised a double portion to us today,” Bryant said, calling on all present to ask God persistently for the Holy Spirit to empower them for their unique calling. He encouraged the congregation to keep asking, seeking, and knocking, ensuring them that God will answer those who persevere.

Again referencing Matthew 7:7-12 as he did earlier in the sermon, Bryant asked, “Do you want a double portion of God’s Spirit? Are you willing to ask and keep on asking? Are you willing

God still offers a double portion of spiritual power to those who truly seek it.

to seek and keep on seeking? Are you willing to knock? To keep on knocking and say to Lord, ‘Give us what we so desperately need?’”

As he concluded his sermon, Bryant posed a final question: “What’s holding you back?” With a heartfelt appeal he invited everyone to rise above their limitations, receive a double portion of the Holy Spirit, and fulfill their purpose with courage and faith.

Julio C. Muñoz is associate director of Communication for the North American Division.



The Shenandoan Select Choir from Shenandoah Valley Academy perform for the afternoon “President’s Concert” to close out the Sabbath on November 2, 2024.



A cappella group Devoted Vocals light up the morning program on Sabbath, November 2, 2024, at the North American Division Year-end Meeting.

MOVING TOGETHER IN MISSION, POWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Officers share their annual reports at the 2024 North American Division Year-end Meeting.

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA AND BECKY ST. CLAIR



G. Alexander Bryant, gives his president's report on November 1, 2024, at the North American Division Year-end Meeting. *Pieter Damsteeg*

The 2024 North American Division (NAD) Year-end Meeting began at 9:00 a.m. on November 1 at the NAD headquarters in Columbia, Maryland, following a two-day administrators' conference—the first in 10 years—at the same location. Close to 200 executive committee members (of 302) gathered for day one of business meetings where, until Monday, November 4, they received reports, voted on business items, strategized, worshipped, and fellowshiped with fellow Adventist Church leaders and friends. The year-end meeting was also livestreamed on the NAD website, Facebook, and YouTube platforms.

A Call to Higher Service With Holy Spirit Power

"It's always a pleasure to share with you what's happening across the division," said G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, in his November 1 report. He divided the quinquennial theme "Together in Mission: I Will Go" into the NAD's areas of strategic focus, "the three M's"—mentorship, media, and multiply. He noted that in a vast, diverse, and rapidly changing context such as North America, these intersecting points help us advance God's mission more effectively.

Bryant reported that 169 executive committee members, or 56 percent, are new since January 2021. At the NAD headquarters one of the three executive officers, four of six vice presidents, and 13 departmental directors are new. At the union level during the same time period, new leaders include seven presidents, seven executive secretaries, one treasurer, and five education

directors. Among the 59 conferences, 48 presidents, 45 executive secretaries, 18 treasurers, and 35 education directors are new.

"There's never been this amount of change this quickly in the North American Division," said Bryant. He emphasized the need for mentorship—identifying, coaching, and equipping new leaders—to navigate this wave of change. He challenged leaders to consider how they are mentoring the next generation.

Paulo Macena, NAD leadership director, shared research on the impact of mentoring for leaders and referenced his book, *The Mentorship Guide*, which covers biblical mentorship and program planning. He introduced a mentorship certification program for church leaders that reached roughly 10,000 participants on Zoom and YouTube and is now available through the Adventist Learning Community. Macena also highlighted an NAD program in which 35 conference presidents formed groups of four to seven, each led by a mentor.

Bryant continued with the media strategic focus, noting that Adventist pioneers were trailblazers in using technology, such as the printing press, to spread the gospel. He suggested that, just like the pioneers, who were in their 20s, youth and young adults have an opportunity to be leaders in media ministry.

Adam Fenner, vice president of digital media and director of Adventist Learning Community (ALC), shared the NAD's rebranding and retooling plans for NADadventist.org, social media, and other NAD-affiliated sites; he also highlighted the NAD's MOU with

the world church to collaborate on updates to adventist.org. The division aims for NADadventist.org to become a “one-stop shop” for resources.

He promoted Adventist Connect, a rebuild of Adventist Church Connect (ACC) and Adventist School Connect (ASC) website platform. A video report announced that migration to the more user-friendly WordPress platform will begin in spring 2025; that basic sites will still automatically pull eAdventist data, providing even the smallest churches an online presence; and that advanced sites will offer greater customization—all at no additional cost.

As he presented the final M, multiply, Bryant revealed that as of the second quarter of 2024, NAD membership was 1,268,572. However, with 390 million people in the division’s territory, much work still needs to be done. He referenced Pentecost (Acts 2) as a moment that elevated the disciples’ ministry. The Holy Spirit had already been working through them, but on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 were converted as they received additional power for God’s work.

Bryant shared the NAD’s Pentecost 2025 initiative, inviting members and leaders to hold at least 3,000 proclamation initiatives. “So far, 3,600 churches have signed up to be part of Pentecost,”* he said to applause, adding that registration is open until December 31, 2024.

“Pentecost is more than just an event. It’s a clarion call to God’s people that we want to take it to the next level, and it’s an admission that we can’t do it in our own strength,” Bryant stated. He also acknowledged that “we don’t know where all the money is going to come from, but Pentecost is stepping out in faith and trusting in something we can’t see.”

Bryant underscored that Pentecost 2025 recognizes that “the world is in a different place than [it’s been] before, and we need extra strength, courage, power, and transformation.”

Bryant shared other initiatives, including church planting and public evangelism. He covered the Antioch initiative, which aims to impact metropolitan centers by focusing collective resources on those areas. Currently Antioch pilot projects are under way in Dallas, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri; and New York, New York.

He then reminded attendees of the division’s assets, spanning seven media ministries, a call center (Adventist Information Ministry), elementary and high schools, 13 universities and colleges, about 6,670 congregations (churches and companies), more than 65 camps, several health-care systems, and much more. Bryant also noted that the media ministries were helping prepare churches for Pentecost 2025.

Then, as typical in his reports, Bryant cast a vision by asking “what if” questions that addressed collaboration; intentional, systematic mentorship; media ministries; and strategically combining resources and establishing centers of influence for health, food distribution, training, transitional housing, and counseling.

“We can do this by the power of God’s Spirit, by the transforming of God’s Spirit on our hearts; and we can do it together in mission. Let’s go and do it!” Bryant concluded.

SEEING THE MISSION FIELD AS IT ACTUALLY IS

Kyooshin Ahn, executive secretary for the North American Division, presented his report to kick off the third day of the division’s 2024 year-end meeting. To begin, he thanked the secretariat team for their service and their contributions to the report.

(For the purposes of Ahn’s report of the state of the church in the NAD, all data represents numbers at the close of the second quarter of 2024, unless otherwise specified.)

Current membership—as of the close of the second quarter of 2024—of the church was 1,268,572, a net gain of more than 10,000 members from 2023. Ahn projected that there would be closer to a 20,000 net gain in membership by the end of 2024. In 2023 the church baptized 30,000 people, and thus far in 2024 it has seen 14,000 baptisms, with a projection of at least 30,000 total by the end of the year.

“It is my sincere prayer that we will see more than 40,000 baptisms in 2025,” Ahn stated, then amended, “Am I aiming too low? Yes! I pray for 50,000 baptisms in 2025!”

Looking at the demographics of the church, Ahn reported that 53 percent are female, 41 percent are male, and 6 percent did not indicate gender in their responses. These numbers have not changed compared to previous years.

Almost half of the church’s baptized members are between 30 and 59 years

On November 3, 2024, Kyoshin Ahn, NAD executive secretary, delivers his report to the executive committee gathered for year-end meeting at the division headquarters in Columbia, Maryland. *Pieter Damsteegt*



of age; nearly a third are over 60. Interestingly, the median and mean age of current NAD church members is the same, at 49.

According to a 2024 survey the NAD's membership is 33 percent White, 30 percent Black, 23 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Asian, 2 percent Pacific Islander, and 2 percent multiracial. The full 2024 diversity survey report is available at eadventistnews.com/2024/11/03/nad-diversity/.

"We have a very diverse division, and no one ethnicity is dominant," Ahn commented.

The NAD's membership represents 5.4 percent of the 23 million members of the worldwide church. Though this number was previously 6 percent, Ahn pointed out that this does not mean the NAD church is shrinking; it simply reveals the incredible recent growth rate of the church in other parts of the world.

"We have a steady increase in congregations within our division," Ahn commented, stating a current total of 5,775 churches and 894 companies. During the past decade the NAD has added a total of 400 congregations to its number, for a total of nearly 6,700. Also steadily increasing is accession, or additions to church membership by baptism and profession of faith per 100 members. In 2023 that number was 3.1, a number that has been climbing annually since 2020.

A look at the net growth rate of the church in the NAD shows a significant dip in membership in 2022; Ahn explained that this was because of membership audits across the division, with more accurate numbers being reported to update records. "There was a resurgence in 2023," Ahn pointed out. "The current trajectory of our growth rate looks like we're returning to pre-2016 numbers."

As part of his report, in celebration of 150 years of Adventist mission, Ahn showed a video report about mission ministry within the NAD. Another video report followed, presented by Brian Ford, director of eAdventist Membership Services, which focused on ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity in the NAD church. Michael W. Campbell, director of Archives, Statistics, and Research, reported via video on the NAD's need to focus on Native American and Indigenous populations across the NAD. He also shared that the fourth-largest religion in the U.S. right now is Buddhism.

Questions and comments included a request for the issue of diversity and inclusion in the church to be addressed in a focused discussion, particularly in how it impacts the ability of local churches to minister to their communities.

Ahn, in closing the secretary's report, he said the church must acknowledge North America as the largest unchurched English-speaking mission field in the world.

"Do we have coordinated approaches to effectively address these challenges?" Ahn asked the room. "If yes, praise the Lord! If not, how can we develop an effective mission strategy to work in these changing landscapes? Are we prepared to interact with people meaningfully when they show up and show interest?"

Ahn admitted he was asking hard questions without having definitive answers, but asserts they were all valuable questions.

"We must consider our strategy together, and we must do it seriously," Ahn stated. "We are still called to continue the mission as we were 150 years ago. Jesus says to us, in John 4:35, that the fields are ready for harvest—just look outside your door! Look at the NAD field! We need to see the mission field as it actually is."

"ONE PLUS ONE TO THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT = AMAZING THINGS"

As she took the stage on Monday, November 4, NAD treasurer and chief financial officer Judy R. Glass continued the focus on God as our source of strength and provider. "It's amazing to see what the Holy Spirit is already doing in this room," she stated.

Glass began by sharing upcoming and ongoing initiatives, highlighting Pentecost 2025. She noted that churches registered for Pentecost 2025 by November 30, 2024, will receive half of NAD funding through their unions by December or January. The remaining funds will come after completing their event and submitting a report.

Glass concluded her opening remarks by introducing a "new math" she had learned from General Conference treasurer Paul Douglas at the recent GC Annual Council. "One plus one is two, which we know, but one plus one to the power of the Holy Spirit equals amazing things."

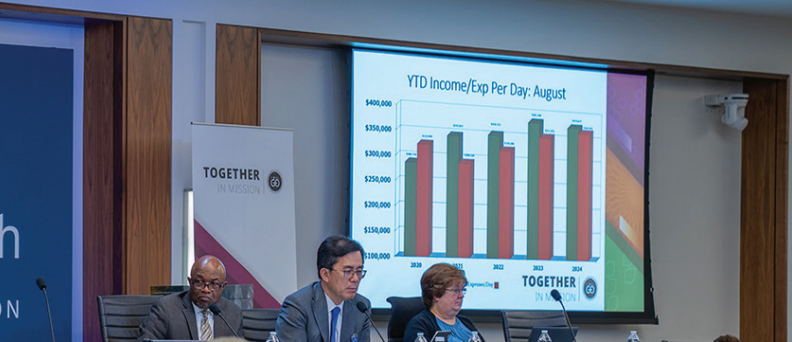
Glass then presented the NAD's 2023 audited financial statement, highlighting an increase in operating and plant assets, which include cash, the NAD building, and other fixed assets.

She then addressed working capital, or assets available for day-to-day operations. With a working capital of 9.68 months at the end of 2023, the NAD exceeded the six months recommended by the working policy. "We're doing well in hitting this threshold, [which provides] funds for major initiatives and financial support for our unions and conferences," Glass noted.

Glass and others subsequently presented several reports, including reports from the NAD audit review committee; Adventist Re-



Judy Glass, NAD treasurer, presents her report on November 4, 2024, at the NAD Year-end Meeting. *Art Brondo*



In Depth on Year-end Meeting

To read these reports in full, and access links to other news reports and videos of each YEM session, visit nadadventist.org/news/2024-nad-year-end-meeting-video-and-news-coverage.

tirement; and the General Conference Auditing Service. The NAD YEM executive committee voted to approve each report.

Transitioning to the year-to-date (YTD) unaudited financial statements, Glass painted a different picture than in 2023, when tithes increased across all nine unions. “At the end of August [2024], we were showing a 1.08 percent loss in tithe,” she said. Four of the nine unions exhibited gains, and the Atlantic Union led with a 1.12 percent increase.

“We’ve been running behind on our tithe all year, but remember that we’ve had multiple years of amazing tithe growth,” she said.

Glass shared that net tithe income surpassed the budget by \$353,783, carefully distinguishing between budgeted and actual tithe.

Glass reported that the division has 198 days of cash available, which they calculate more conservatively than the General Conference Auditing Service (GCAS) auditors by excluding current liabilities and restricted net assets. This figure surpasses the target of 185 days, equal to half the 2023 expenses. Additionally, working capital stands at a healthy 8.64 months.

From the August year-to-date expense summary, Glass highlighted that \$12.1 million was allocated to church ministries, better than the budgeted \$13.2 million, with total expenses \$1.9 million under budget.

Among other financial indicators, the NAD has \$72 million in cash, down from \$81 million in 2023, but above the \$65 million threshold. Also, daily income outpaces daily expenses by \$10,000. “We’re in good shape here as well, and you’ll see [that] during the past four years, our income has been running ahead of our expenses,” Glass said.

As part of the treasurer’s report Chad Grundy, NAD undertreasurer, presented the 2025 budget assumptions, noting it is a balanced budget based on 96 percent of the 2023 gross tithe. Unlike previous years, the 2025 budget does not assume a 1 percent tithe increase. It includes a 3 percent cost of living increase, to be implemented on July 1, 2025, and travel allowance budgeted at 106 percent of 2024 figures.

Grundy also shared the following breakdown for the budgeted \$1.27 billion gross tithe: the NAD will keep 13.9 percent, most of which provides appropriations and services for the field, and the conferences will retain the remaining 86.1 percent.

At the heart of Glass’s remarks was a promise on a slide titled “Blessings from God.” “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34, NIV).

“Let us remember that as we go forward. Sometimes we try [to] take the whole world, all the problems, on at one time, but we know God is walking with us each day, each step of the way”

In closing, after a long morning of reports and voting on financial policy, Glass stated, “One final thing I want to remind us about is the Holy Spirit math: one plus one to the power of the Holy Spirit equals amazing things.”

** As of November 18, 2024, that number had reached 3,805.*

Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the North American Division; Becky St. Clair is a freelance writer.



At the conclusion of worship service on November 4, 2024, and right before the North American Division treasurer’s report, Abraham Jules, Atlantic Union Conference president, and G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, pray together while year-end meeting attendees gather during an altar call. *Art Brondo*



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BY ANGELINE D. BRAUER

More Than One

A few months ago our church hosted a community health fair. One of the attendees stayed to help us pack up after the event. She was back the following Sabbath and joined the choir. She then attended the evangelistic program at the church and has been attending church regularly. When asked what brought her to the health fair, she said that she was just lonely.

Adam knew the feeling deeply, and so God declared, “It is not good (sufficient, satisfactory) that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18, AMPC).¹

Then God made the internet.

That’s not how the story goes, but truth is that the internet—social media, specifically—has largely become the place to go to connect with others. As of October 2024, almost 68 percent of the world’s population use the digital space, and 5.2 billion people use various social media platforms an average of 2.5 hours each day.

Many people turn to social media to cope with feelings of loneliness, but there is ongoing debate on the health impacts. Some find that the digital space helps to connect with family and friends, while others experience greater feelings of loneliness the more time they spend in the digital world. How can both be true?

A recently published research study may help us understand. The researchers found that the motive for social media use had a significant impact on levels of loneliness. Individuals who relied on social media for “relationship maintenance” experienced more feelings of loneliness. They suggest this may be because the digital tool does not allow for the same level of connection as do face-to-face interactions.²

On the other hand, an offline social environment that is fulfilling and rewarding appears to regulate negative effects of social media use. In other words, if you primarily go to social media to seek connection, it may not truly fulfill your desires. This could mean that we need to clarify the purpose of the digital space.

Loneliness is more nuanced than previously thought. In general, loneliness it can be defined as an emotional state of distress because of not having adequate connection with others. It is dependent on our personal desires for companionship and so may vary from person to person.

Different types of loneliness have also been identified: (1) emotional—absence of close personal relationships; (2) social—absence of a sense of belonging to a social network; and (3) existential—having a lack of meaning or purpose in life. Loneliness

can also be voluntary (such as when an introvert retreats to regain energy) or involuntary (such as the result of the loss of a spouse).

Considering this, I can’t help thinking about the role of the church in addressing loneliness. We ought to be a place where emotional, social, and existential needs are met. In fact, if we look at common activities of a church, we find that these needs are addressed:

Fellowship: Regular potlucks, small group Bible studies, or community service projects.

Sabbath: Sabbath rest is an opportunity to disconnect from devices and connect with God and others.

Outreach: Local mission projects or health fairs that foster relationships while serving others.

Nature: Activities such as hikes or picnics or “outdoor church” services.

Gatherings: Social and educational activities, regular family worship times, or storytelling evenings.

We cannot escape living in an increasingly “wired” world. Digital spaces, including online church services, can be an important part of connecting, but they have limitations, and we cannot depend on them solely.

Loneliness continues to be a problem for humanity. As a church body, we need to exert energy into what God provided us with to combat loneliness—being with each other. In all that we do, let’s not neglect safe and healthy community building.

We need to exert energy into what God provided us with to combat loneliness.

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²*Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine* 11, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0721642850.2022.2158089>.

Angeline D. Brauer, Dr.P.H., M.H.S., R.D.N., is Health Ministries director for the North American Division.

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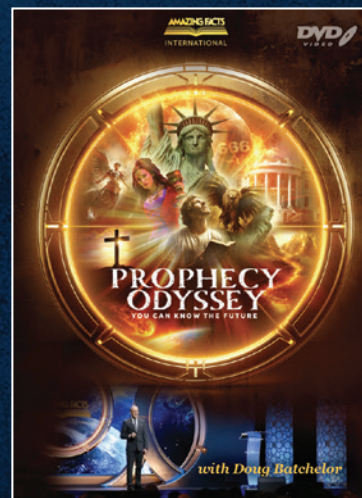
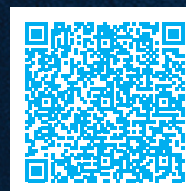
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