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My Journey

"I was cleaning the Des Moines church, looking for a way to feed my four boys. I was vacuuming, and then I stopped to pray. I heard the Holy Spirit speaking to me: 'In order for you to be great in this world, you have to be an entrepreneur, and if you make enough money, you're not only going to support your family—you'll support the entire community.'"

Visit nadadventist.org/ajlilianoketch for more of Oketch's story.

LILIAN OKETCH,
*entrepreneur and business owner,
Des Moines, Iowa*

Lilian Oketch



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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Email: AdventistJourney@nadadventist.org | Web site: nadadventist.org

ADVENTIST JOURNEY

Editor **Kimberly Luste Maran**

Media Producer **Art Brondo**

Art Direction & Design **Ellen Musselman/Types & Symbols**

Consultants **Abraham J. Jules, Paul Llewellyn, Marcellus T. Robinson, Kenneth Denslow, Gary Thurber, John Freedman, Bradford C. Newton, Ron C. Smith, Carlos Craig**



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travels around to local ministers of the Seventh...
 "We hold to that the seven of rest," says that many other that doctrine. driveway on S to church on t as the Sabbath it is one of o Bradford adds Second Comin that, on that d every single b who conducted teachings of th
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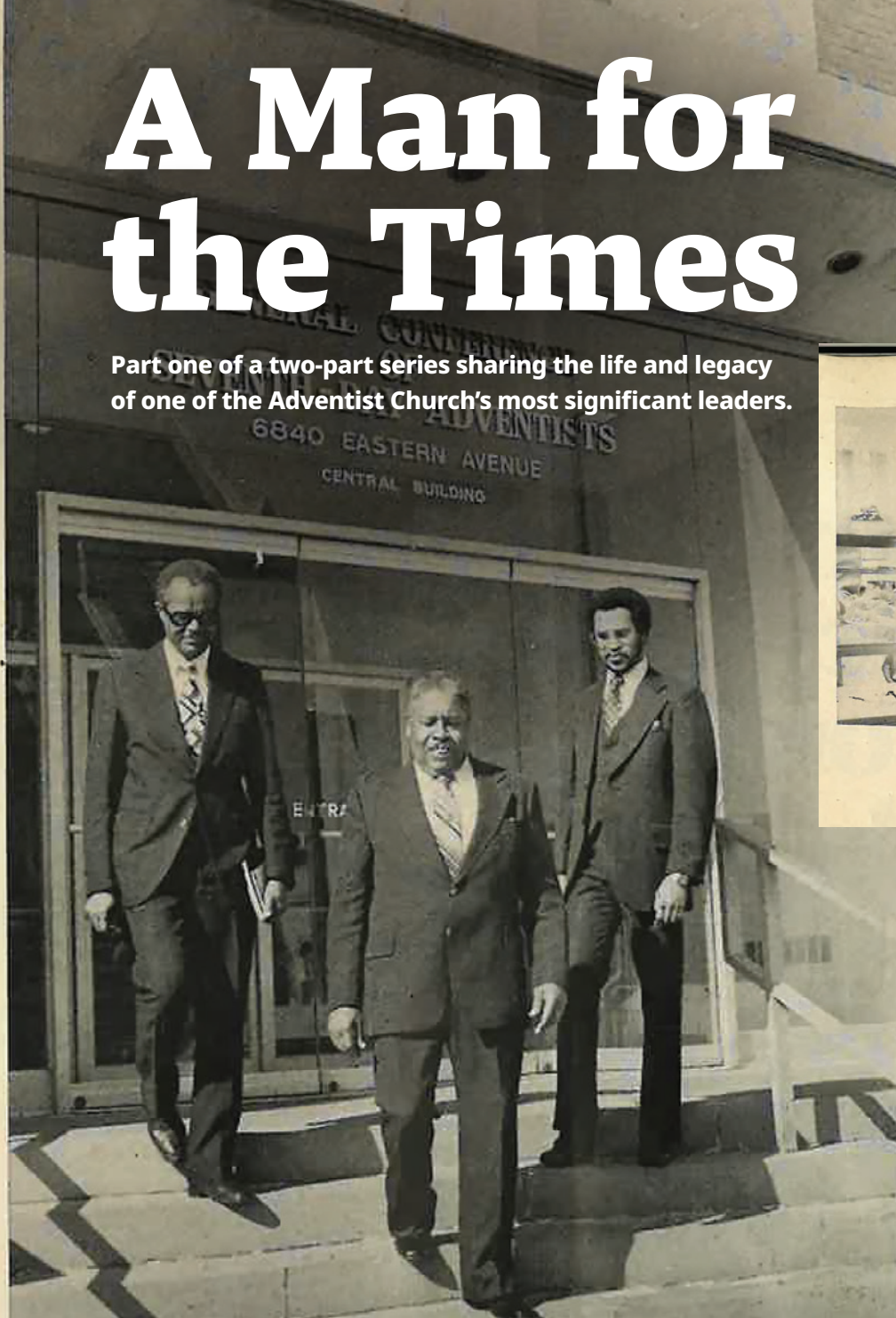
Bradford, a chunky man of 54 years who often walks several miles in the morning for exercise. "We realized that changes had to be made and that we must reflect to the world a community which resembles the community of God." Elder Bradford says that Blacks today are slowly but inexorably moving into positions of major responsibility in the church as administrators, organizers and treasurers.

Because he was elected in January to fill an unexpected vacancy, Elder Bradford will be up for election again next year; but he has "no reason to doubt" he will be elected then

come Bradford, around business operations explain ment chief together The Church ventis

A Man for the Times

Part one of a two-part series sharing the life and legacy of one of the Adventist Church's most significant leaders.



Going through cafeteria line with his wife, Ethel, Elder Bradford selects only vegetables although Seventh-day Adventists are not required to abstain from meats or fish. Mrs. Bradford is a secretary in the church.



the strict laws of the Adventist religion, for one thing, the church does not allow dancing, a form of activity that has become part of Black sub-cultures throughout the world. Explains Bradford: "We don't want our children to become too interested in individuals of the other sex before they marry... It is sometimes difficult for them, I imagine, but I think it has worked pretty well."
 Though he admits his religion is restrictive in many ways, Elder Bradford thinks it is unfair to think of Adventism in only negative terms. Sometimes people even confuse us with cults like Jim Jones'. But we are not a weirdo sect or cult. We've gathered insights on the scriptures and recast them into a latter-day setting that prepares people for the return of Jesus Christ. That is the greatest event that people can imagine."



All images provided through the
Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists

Did you know that the North American Division was founded in 1913? For most of the twentieth century the work in North America was led by one of the vice presidents of the General Conference. Then in 1985, with growing missional needs, the North American Division was reformulated once again as one of the 13 divisions of the world church. Charles Edward Bradford (1925-2021) would serve as the first president of this newly reformulated North American Division, beginning in 1985. This is our story in a biography gleaned and condensed from an biographical article written by Douglas Morgan in the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists about Bradford's life and contributions.—Editors.

Charles Edward Bradford was born in Washington, D.C., on July 12, 1925, to Etta and Robert Bradford. Charles's parents were stalwarts from the founding generation of Black Adventism in America; his mother was converted after attending Bible studies on the mission boat *Morning Star*. His parents met at Oakwood and spent their lives as a ministry couple serving a wide variety of churches until his father's poor health forced him to retire early. During Charles's teenage years his gifts for ministry became evident as he assisted with tent meetings. The influence of his mother added to his resolve to go into ministry.

After completing his studies at Oakwood College (now Oakwood University), Bradford began pastoring in 1946 in the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference. A few months later, in December 1946, he became president of the Southwest Region Mission (then Conference, 1950). For Bradford it was the beginning of 24 years of ministry in the Black (regional) conferences, organized after General Conference approval in 1944. Bradford's Louisiana district included Baton Rouge, Hammond, and Covington. Bradford conducted an evangelistic effort that led to the planting of an additional church in Monroe; then in 1947, in Baton Rouge, he brought close to 100 new members into the church.

On May 23, 1948, Charles married Ethel Lee McKenzie; the couple had met at Oakwood after they were assigned seats at the same cafeteria table. Charles and Ethel had three children: Sharon (Lewis), Charles, Jr., and Dwight. From the outset of their 73-year marriage, music was one of the most visible of the many ways Ethel collaborated with her husband in ministry.

A Natural Leader

In 1952 Bradford, at age 27, entered a new phase of ministry as conference evangelist and director of the Home Missionary Department for the Central States Conference. It was the beginning of a pattern that recurred over the ensuing decade in which Bradford was given relatively high levels of responsibility for his age while shuttling between conference positions and local pastorates. When his assignments as conference evangelist took him to St. Louis, Missouri, in the summer of 1953, the experience was so rewarding that, at his request, he remained there. Some of his colleagues in departmental work in the Central Union (a predecessor to Mid-America) wondered why he would want to return to a local church after attaining a position in "the office." However, in Bradford's estimation, despite his later election to the highest levels of

denominational administration, the real center of vitality would always be the local congregation.

In 1957 Harold D. Singleton, another of Bradford's primary mentors, called him to the Northeastern Conference to head the Home Missionary and Sabbath School departments, and to conduct public evangelism. Bradford did not recall doing anything particularly innovative in his conference departmental work. Yet he did try to begin a shift in the departmental director's role from "supervisor" to "resource person." When conference departmental leaders visited local churches in that era, it was typically to check to see if goals for various programs were being met and make the necessary exhortations if not. Bradford instead prioritized listening to the pastors and members of the churches he visited to ascertain how the conference could help their ministries thrive. As in Central States, Bradford left the Northeastern Conference office in the fall of 1959 to return to pastoral ministry, this time at City Tabernacle in Harlem, New York. "Some people would say that was a demotion, but it was one of the greatest things that happened to us," Ethel later observed.

↓ Charles E. Bradford marries Ethel Lee McKenzie on May 23, 1948.





Charles E. Bradford in the early years (left to right): circa 1945, 2000, 1960



At 36 Elder Bradford was elected the fourth president of the Lake Region Conference (a position he would serve for nine years). Lake Region was the first regional conference to be organized (September 1, 1944), bringing together Black congregations from the Lake Union Conference states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, with office headquarters established in Chicago. By 1961 the number of congregations had more than doubled from 21 to 43, as had the membership from 2,300 to 5,187. As president, Bradford, who possessed what his daughter, Sharon, called a “forward-thinking mindset,” introduced changes, such as installing younger ministers from outside Lake Region in the pulpits of some of the conference’s largest churches. Though it was impossible to completely overcome the natural defensiveness of more experienced workers, Bradford sought to move with discretion, and in accordance with one of his main goals: a more participatory form of decision-making and collegial style of interaction between conference leaders and workers. By 1970 the Lake Region Conference membership had reached 8,800, a net increase of 70 percent since the beginning of Bradford’s administration in 1961.

Passion, Dedication, and Diplomacy

As conference president Bradford had greater opportunity for gaining a hearing among denominational leaders with regard to racial disparities. This opportunity also placed on him the delicate challenge of using his voice wisely as well as courageously in the enflamed atmosphere of the civil rights revolution and urban upheaval during the 1960s. Bradford also issued a forthright rebuke to the General Conference president, Reuben R. Figuhr, in response to Figuhr’s open letter to “Fellow Believers,” published in the *Review and Herald* of January 2, 1964. The General Conference president had seemed to ascribe equal validity to the positions of those who said that the race question is a “moral” issue and those who said it was not, but was instead a political controversy of the sort that Christ instructed His followers to avoid.

In a letter of January 9, Bradford warned Elder Figuhr in no uncertain terms that he was “definitely out of harmony with the times in which we live, as well as the timeless counsels of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy.” Citing passages from these “timeless counsels,” Bradford insisted that the “issue IS moral,” and asked, “How can we be silent on the matter and present it as an ‘option’ or nonessential when great segments of our church membership do not understand that the frown of God is upon all who do not recognize and appreciate the dignity and intrinsic worth of every man?” Despite Figuhr’s reluctance, the General Conference, in April 1965, did issue a strongly worded call for a complete end to racial bias and segregation in all Seventh-day Adventist churches and institutions.

His bold insistence on sweeping action to advance racial justice in the denomination sheds light on Bradford’s self-description, often repeated during his later years, that he was a “company man.” Though some at General Conference headquarters might have been tempted to think otherwise, he was not a rebel. Yet his loyalty was not a craven subservience for the sake of higher position. Rather, it was a loyalty born of genuine love for the church—“a lifelong romance with the Seventh-day Adventist movement,” as he put it. That same loving loyalty compelled him to do all he could to hold the church accountable to its ideals regarding the equal dignity of all its members. His passion for rectifying the injustices that hampered the work among African Americans was part of a broader vision for the whole church that made him a “company man.”

Bradford’s election as an associate secretary of the General Conference in 1970 suggests that the predominantly White denominational leadership sensed the genuineness of his loyalty, and, more important, something of the value of his gifts for leadership. His winsome interpersonal manner helped gain their confidence. He was a skillful diplomat, combining affability with shrewdness in navigating the interplay of conflicting perspectives and competing agendas, without surrendering essential principle. That skill was one quality that made evident his potential for effective service to the church at large.

Bradford would eventually serve as the first president of the newly reformulated North American Division, but this was after several years of service at the General Conference. These experiences would help shape him into a man for the times when he came to the North American Division helm in 1985.

You can read more about Adventist history in the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists at encyclopedia.adventist.org.

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The Power of a Simple Tract:

Transforming Lives With Messages of Hope and Wholeness

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

Have you ever hit rock bottom and found hope from an unexpected source? For a 16-year-old girl from California, that hope came in the form of a pocket-sized *Signs of the Times* given to her by a stranger on an Amtrak train.

The teen was heading back to the group home where she lived after running away to a friend's house; there, she had fallen into regularly using drugs, neglecting food and sleep for days. The novelty wore off, and, missing her family, she accepted her friend's help buying a ticket home.

Boarding the train at 5:00 p.m., she found a seat alone, texting her boyfriend constantly to help ease the anxiety brought on by her drug use. A man a few seats away, talking on his phone, kept glancing at her with concern. Overcome with emotion, she began crying. The man then handed her a pocket *Signs* with a cross on the cover, titled "Someone Cares About You."

The compact 3.5- by 5.5-inch tract was jam-packed with such promises as Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" and Psalm 40:1-3, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He ... heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth" (NKJV).*

In a rare handwritten note to *Signs of the Times* she wrote of receiving this surprise gift:

"That's when I cried even more. I told my boyfriend what had happened, and he texted me a prayer to help me feel better. After that, he told

A young participant of the Southern Union Publishing Department's outreach event smiles as she hands out tracts at Atlanta, Georgia's Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Photo provided by Carl McRoy

me it was a sign—a sign that it's time to change. It really meant something, and ever since that day, I haven't touched drugs."

Sharing Hope, One Tract at a Time

There are countless stories of a simple tract and other literature sparking transformation in recipients. Sometimes these people did not receive a tract directly from another person, but rather found it in a bathroom, at a restaurant, on a plane, or on their car windshield.

Carl McRoy, NAD Publishing Ministries director, asserted that distributing tracts "doesn't require any expertise. You just look for opportunities to share." Having a piece of literature allows the average church member, without theological training, to reach those around them.

McRoy noted that tracts and other literature often help plant seeds for people to receive the gospel, stating, "There are a lot of stories of people who have been baptized, and if we talk to them, we see the interaction with literature at some point."

He added that when people like the 16-year-old girl reach out, they seek a human connection to help guide them in their faith journey. The tract is just the starting point. He has found that literature evangelism is most impactful when members distribute spiritual materials in person and consistently return to the same area to follow up with those they have reached.

"Whatever setting you find yourself in your daily life (e.g., grocery store, doctor's office, gas station, restaurant), that's where you can share literature," said McRoy. He emphasized that by being intentional and consistent, "you increase the odds of the Word becoming flesh" (see John 1:1, 14).

Testimonies on Tract

Testimonies of how easy and fun it can be to distribute tracts abound. Here are a few from an outreach event sponsored by the Southern Union Publishing Department, directed by William Smith.

"We just finished distributing at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta: Georgia versus Notre Dame. What a great group! A good number of youth. So happy to see their involvement! Praise God!" shared Willie Mae.

"We had a blast giving people silent preachers," said another participant on October 19, 2024.

Finally, McRoy shared that between *Signs*, *Vibrant Life*, and *El Centinela*, 2.6 million tracts were sold last year. While that is a decent number, he said, "We should be able to challenge ourselves to do more in a division with more than 375 million people to reach."

* Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the North American Division.



→ Tracts like this one, received by a downtrodden 16-year-old girl, are a powerful entry point to reaching people with the gospel. *Pacific Press Publishing Association*

Something to Consider

Consider harnessing the power of a tract to spread the love of Jesus. As Ellen G. White, a cofounder of the Adventist Church, emphasized in *Colporteur Ministry*: "Some would receive more benefit from papers and tracts than from books. Papers, tracts, and pamphlets that dwell on Bible lessons all need attention in the canvassing work, for they are as little wedges that open the way for larger works" (p. 140).



Kent Sharpe, project director of the North American Division Antioch Initiative, shares information about Pentecost 2025 at the 2024 ASI convention this past August.
Rick Remmers

“More Than an Event,” Pentecost 2025 Is About Transformation, Says North American Division President

BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN

We’re asking for God’s Spirit to do something above and beyond what we can do,” said G. Alexander Bryant, North American Division president, in May 2024 as plans to share Pentecost 2025 with the NAD executive committee took shape. “We call it Pentecost 2025 because we don’t really want it to be about just numbers. We want it to be about the outpouring of God’s Spirit today. The church [in Acts] was after God’s

Spirit; . . . that’s really where the focus should be.”

Much has happened since then. Pentecost 2025 launched on July 1, 2024. And while that’s still the focus as evidenced by the release of prayer focus and video training webinars, the North American Division is enthused that, as of early December 2024, more than 4,200 churches and schools have applied.

“We are so excited by the interest in our members to host proclamation initiatives in their locales,”

said Rick Remmers, NAD assistant to the president. “The Holy Spirit is moving! And with God leading, we will share the gospel with so many of our brothers and sisters.”

The NAD has prayerfully and carefully coordinated each part of the process. From the online application to the welcome kit packed with materials, from the website with free resources to the offer of financial assistance from the NAD, and from the synchronized, division-wide prayer plan to the aggregation of supplemental resources from NAD ministries and services, meticulous attention has been given to help ensure that Pentecost 2025 can be a success.

“We will do our best, and God will do the rest,” paraphrased Calvin Watkins, NAD vice president who oversees evangelism as well as serving as regional liaison. He added, “This is a Holy Spirit-powered initiative for every member—every pastor, teacher, young adult, student, and child—to participate in.”

“I don’t want people thinking that we’re just gearing up for an event. What we’re doing is gearing up for a transformation, and Pentecost is the pinnacle in the transformation,” Bryant said. “We’re hoping that the best evidence of Pentecost 2025 is what we see in 2026 and 2027 and beyond—with a transformation of our churches and our mindsets in terms of what God has called us to do in the mission of the church. Pentecost is not just an event—it is our asking, pleading, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a greater measure, the latter rain upon God’s people here in North America.”

Below are summaries of recent developments as the NAD continues to pray and equip its members to receive God’s Spirit and help transform the lives of those around them.

Prayer Focus

With partners across the division, the NAD has developed a monthly prayer focus starting in 2024 and continuing through 2025. Prayer is called for each Wednesday and Sabbath throughout the month, with unions assigned certain months to emphasize specific prayer requests.

For example, the Mid-America Union Conference (MAUC) kicked things off in July 2024 with the prayer emphasis “The Holy Spirit Will Create Unity Within the Body of Christ.” In the prayer cycle, MAUC will again have the focus in April 2025, under the theme “The Power of the Holy Spirit.” The entire prayer focus list is available at www.pentecost2025.com.

And just last month the NAD held a livestream prayer event to kick off the General Conference’s special annual initiative 10 Days of Prayer. “We followed the prayer materials from 2020 of the 10 Days of Prayer, which centers on the Holy Spirit,” explained Remmers. “We really appreciate the GC initiative, and this material from just a few years ago fits very well with our division-wide effort to ask for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to transform us and power us for God’s work.”

Webinar and In-Person Training

The NAD conducted a live Zoom webinar at 8:00 p.m. ET on July 1. Pastors, church and school leaders, and lay leaders across the division watched the webinar that fully explained the initiative and provided a tutorial on registration—and a segment for questions and answers.

On July 1, the first day the application process opened up for Adventist churches, schools, and church members, 586 applications were submitted.

In one week, 967 signed up.

In order to continue to prepare those who are doing proclamation events in their church or school and



↑ Left to right: NAD leaders Rick Remmers, Kimberly Luste Maran, Jose Cortes, Jr., G. Alexander Bryant, Gladys Guerrero, and Calvin Watkins, Sr., pose for a quick photo before the filming of the first Pentecost 2025 webinar, which was streamed on October 18, 2024. Photo provided by Kimberly Luste Maran

need a hand, the first video training webinars of 14 were released starting on October 18, with streaming events twice monthly. Hosts Calvin Watkins, Jose Cortes, Jr., associate director for the NAD Ministerial Association, and Gladys Guerrero, tutoring and mentorship coordinator for the NAD Office of Volunteer Ministries, conversed with leaders who have had success in the discussion topic for that particular webinar. Prayer is a particular focus in several of the webinars.

The NAD has also either hosted or partnered with another entity to conduct in-person training for church leaders and lay leaders. Unions and conferences, schools, and media ministries across the division have been involved in the training.

But it’s important to note that not all training opportunities involved the NAD.

“We know that some of our seasoned pastors and evangelists won’t need this training,” said Cortes. “We also know that conferences and unions, as well as some of our Adventist media ministries, may have already planned their own training. This is great—we encourage their efforts! In the places we are collaborating on training, we look forward to the Holy Spirit leading us. We are all in this together!”

E-Newsletter

Each month those who registered through the NAD Pentecost 2025 website are sent a newsletter to their email. These newsletters

include practical advice, inspirational tips, training schedules, webinar information, and more.

“We stay in touch through a variety of ways, and our newsletter is one way we can connect,” said Kent Sharpe. “Each proclamation initiative is a local event; however, there is a synergy that happens when we all work together. We want to support that effort in any way we can.”

Additional Ways to Be Involved

As 2025 starts, “prayer is the most important way anyone can help,” said Bryant. “There will be success only where the Holy Spirit is present and working in our lives, and we need to pray for the outpouring of that Spirit on us.”

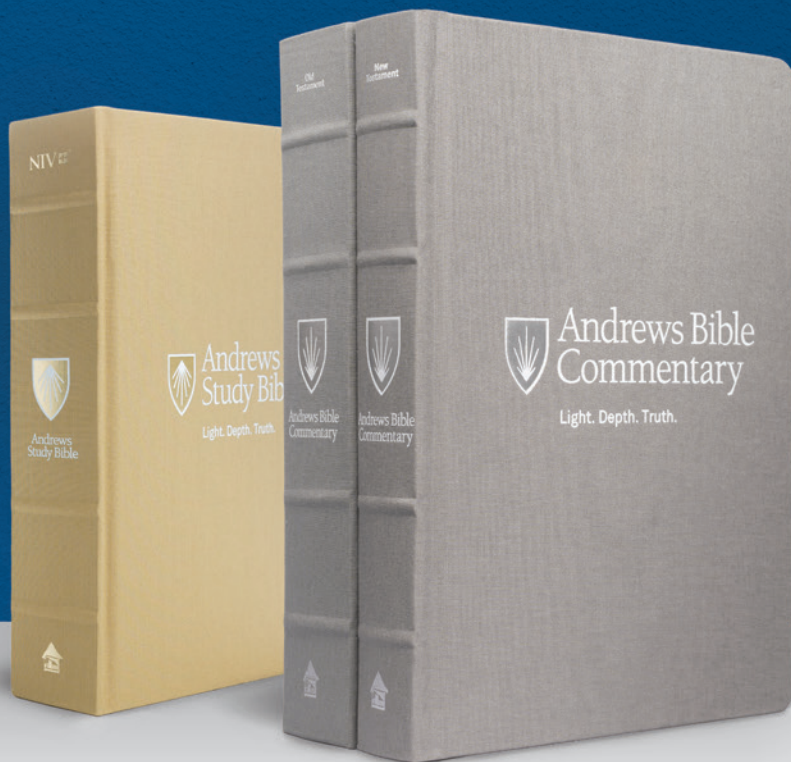
Those who choose to contribute beyond prayer are encouraged to ask their local church leaders how they can help. Many members can assist in, for example, greeting visitors to meetings. Helping in community outreach and community service, such as in their local Adventist Community Services is another way.

For those who want to give a special offering donation, the option to give to Pentecost 2025 is available through AdventistGiving. Simply go to the website www.adventistgiving.org and log in. Make sure your local NAD church is selected, then go to “World Offerings.” Select the “Pentecost 2025” tab and enter the amount you are giving, and follow all prompts to confirm donation. —Kimberly Luste Maran, director, NAD Office of Communication



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BY WASHINGTON JOHNSON II

Unity of Purpose

More than ever our world is increasingly divided by ideologies, cultures, and perspectives that are prevalent across—and even within—denominations. And in a world that is increasingly interconnected, unity is needed to address the globally shared challenges that sometimes seem insurmountable.

This demise of unity was never God's plan. Jesus' last recorded prayer in John 17:22, 23 describes an ideal picture of unity: "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (NKJV).

The setting was the Garden of Gethsemane prior to Jesus' betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. The prayer is to the Father with whom Jesus had perfect unity. During His earthly ministry He spoke of the unity between He and His Father (see John 10:30). This perfect unity existed before the creation of earth as expressed in John 17:5: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (KJV).

The second focus of Jesus' prayer was unity among His disciples: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21, KJV).¹ The disciples did not fully grasp everything about Jesus' mission. It was not until Pentecost that they realized the importance of unity in spreading the gospel.

The final focus of Jesus' prayer was unity among believers. His plea in John 17:22 was for you and me. Unity among believers is the greatest witness to unbelievers. The world will not be won (WON) until Christians become one (ONE).

Jesus is the great unifier, making the basis of our unity our common faith in Him. Jesus not only has demonstrated perfect unity but has prayed for us; and it is a prayer that will be honored by the Father. Through God's power we can strive toward creating a profound culture of unity within our individual spheres that transcends division.

Unity and love are very important components of any enduring and lasting relationship. When we commit ourselves to love and

not hate, we follow the command of Jesus to His disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34, 35).

Martin Luther King, Jr., reiterated this principle in this famous quote: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

In *Selected Messages* Ellen White writes, "Christ is the uniting link in the golden chain which binds believers together in God. There must be no separating in this great testing time. . . . The children of God constitute one united whole in Christ. . . . All who believe are one in Him."²

Revelation 22:2 depicts enduring unity for the redeemed who will eat from the tree of life in the new earth: "The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (NKJV). The reference to "the healing of the nations" means God will ultimately remove all ethnic barriers and restore all people, tribes, and nations into one harmonious family that will live in perfect unity forever.

Unity among believers is essential within the realm of Christianity and is amplified accordingly throughout the Bible. Now is the time to respond to the clarion call to authentically embrace and model unity and reconciliation through the common faith we have been afforded in Jesus Christ.

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² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 3, p. 21.

Washington Johnson II is the director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries for the North American Division.

Unity among believers is essential within the realm of Christianity.



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