

CONNECTION

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NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE

SUNDAY
ADVENT CHURCH

EXTRAORDINARY TIMES

Message From The President

By Ted Huskins



EXTRAORDINARY TIMES AND EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES

We live in extraordinary times. More than that, we live in prophetic times. The prosperous, liberal, open society that much of the world has aspired to over the last two hundred years is shrinking before our eyes. In its place is emerging a world ever more defined by selfishness, conflict, hunger, and disease. Soon we will be shaking our heads and saying “what we could have achieved in a time of ease we must now accomplish in the face of great difficulties.”

On the other hand, we live a moment of history when the people of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine are experiencing some measure of spiritual awakening. The message with which we have been entrusted is finding a few receptive hearts and minds. The troubles that the world is experiencing and the small outpouring of the Holy Spirit seem to be going hand in hand, and we know

from prophecy that we will very soon receive much more of both. With both extraordinary difficulties and extraordinary opportunities at hand, then, one of the key questions for leaders of the sisterhood of churches in Northern New England is how do we maintain the functionality of the organization? How do we strike – and continue to strike – while the iron is hot?

It is in the context of extraordinary difficulties and extraordinary opportunities that your conference leaders, our Executive Committee, recently voted to take an action that was, well, extraordinary. The Committee voted to apply for the Payroll Protection Program (PPP), a forgivable loan from the small business administration. The loan is part of the CARES act, voted by congress in response to the economic challenges presented by the Corona Pandemic. Our rationale was fairly straightforward – we knew that many church members, like Americans in general, could potentially be impacted with job loss and/or income reductions, and we knew that had the potential to negatively affect tithe, which meant we’d be faced with some very difficult decisions related to budgets and staffing. In this context, participating in a government program designed to keep people from being laid off was attractive because it would help the conference maintain our current staff for a little more than two months, and the hope was that tithe would begin to rebound after the PPP monies had been spent.

But, there was a question – a critical question: Should we participate in a government program that involved payments to the church? Even if that program was designed to keep workers from being laid off? For the answer to that question, the Committee went to the Spirit of Prophecy, and on the facing

page you can read the passage from testimonies that swayed the committee and decided their vote, mine included. You should also know that the attorneys from the General Conference have stated that there are no strings attached to this money and it has no bearing on religious liberty issues or issues related to the free exercise of religion.

As of this writing, it appears that the tithe decrease in 2020 will likely exhaust the PPP forgivable loan, leaving the conference in a tight situation, but with our staff fully engaged in ministering to our youth, our members, and our community we will continue to proclaim the message God has given us to share. Praise the Lord that we can continue a full-on effort at such a time as this! So, even though we’ve received an influx of cash it is a drop in the bucket compared to the overall conference budget. Please don’t read this and think, I can give my money elsewhere. If that happens your conference and our mission to our home territory will be significantly damaged.

You should also know that most of our independent media ministries have also applied for the PPP and been approved. Now more than ever God is calling US, me and you, to support our local mission and proclaim with power in this Eastern Territory the message of a soon coming Savior.

The conference is being extremely careful with the administration of the PPP money. A separate account has been set up so that proving the money was used for payroll is easy and any auditing is likewise made easy. As far as complying with the terms of the program, the forgivable loan was designed to keep people from being laid off, and the terms revolve around that objective. The sisterhood of churches in Northern New England

does not become beholden to the government by accepting support to keep its employees on payroll – your leadership would never accept such a bargain.

Not everyone will agree with the action taken by the Executive Committee, and to such I would again point to the words of Ellen White on the facing page, adding that after much prayer and searching your executive committee felt convicted that the course we took was the right one.

Brothers and sisters, we live in extraordinary times. We live in prophetic times. Let us seize the moment and proclaim salvation through Christ while the Spirit is being poured out!

E.G. WHITE ON ACCEPTING THINGS OF VALUE FROM GOVERNMENTS

(from the footnotes of Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pages 526-527)



In the latter part of 1893, Elder A. T. Robinson, leading out in the work of the church in South Africa and wishing to secure land for the 526 establishment of a mission among the natives, arranged for an interview with Cecil Rhodes, premier of Cape Colony and head of the British South African Company operating in Mashonaland. Rhodes was especially pleased with the plan outlined for operating a mission among the natives of that country, and handed to Elder Robinson a sealed letter addressed to Dr. Jemison, secretary of the company, to be given to him in Bulawayo. The brethren went to Bulawayo expecting to purchase land, and did not know until Jemison told them that Rhodes had ordered him to give them all the land they wanted. A tract of twelve thousand acres was selected, and this became the site of the Solusi Mission, the first one operated by the denomination among non-Christian peoples. A knowledge of this gift created considerable concern among certain leading brethren at Battle Creek, who feared that to accept it would be a violation of the principles of the separation of church and state. As the matter was discussed at the General Conference session of 1895, action was taken:

“That we ought not as a denomination either to seek or to accept from any civil government, chief, ruler, or royal chartered company, supreme, local, or otherwise, any gift, or donation, concession, grant, either of land, money, credit, special privilege, or other thing of value, to which we are not in common with all others justly entitled as men without any reference to our religious profession or religious work.”

This was followed by another action: “That in harmony with this resolution that the General Conference Association be instructed to pay an



Cecil Rhodes was an avowed imperialist who left a complicated legacy. Part of that legacy was the assistance he gave to the Adventist Church.

appropriate amount for all government land that may be secured in Africa or elsewhere.”—The General Conference Bulletin, February 21, 1895, 283.

The Foreign Mission Board ratified this action by recording that: “The lands secured from the government shall be purchased and not received as a grant.” Before this action could be implemented, however, on January 30, 1895, Ellen G. White wrote a communication from Australia in which she indicated: “With respect to the propriety of receiving gifts from Gentiles or the heathen,” “what they would give, we should be privileged to receive.” The next day she wrote the article (appearing on pages 200-203 of Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers) pointing out that certain “leading men” were “taking extreme positions.” In the light of these two communications from Ellen White, the action of the General Conference session was never implemented.



Lainy Strong, Nicole Rojas and Emily Schlisner clean up around the camp store.

MAKING BITTER INTO SWEET AT CAMP LAWROWELD

By Trevor Schlisner

It is a bitter thing that there will be no campers at Camp Lawroweld this year. But let us not murmur or complain, for just as in Exodus 15:22-26, the Lord has made a way to turn the bitter into sweet.

Consider this and see if you agree with my reasoning: Camp Lawroweld is the gem of the Northern New England Conference. But this gem needs some serious polishing – there is a great deal of deferred maintenance and improvement that just cannot be deferred any more. At the same time this considerable work needs to

be done, the college students who make up camp staff rely heavily on their summer earnings (and critical tuition match!) to get by. Considering all these factors, I presented our Executive Committee with a plan to have almost a full camp staff and set to work on an ambitious schedule of projects for the whole summer, then host a Maranatha team in the fall to take on some large building and maintenance projects. In essence, I'm trying to make lemon-aid out of lemons. Our Executive Committee approved the plan.

My thinking is that, if we can't have campers at Lawroweld, then we should maintain and improve the

camp in every way possible so that we have an excellent facility for our youth next year. This, I think, is as close as we can come to turning the bitter into the sweet.

By having an almost-full staff, we'll be able to come in just under the 50-person meeting limit that will prevail in Maine. Students who come to camp from out-of-state will have to quarantine for 14 days, and that is a bit of a challenge, but we'll manage. One unique opportunity that presents itself is that I'll be able to spend more time than usual with our camp staff, mentoring and disciplining them. Praise God for that opportunity!

Making Bitter Into Sweet

The plan for having camp staff for the summer but not having campers is budget neutral. That is to say, we'll end up using the budget we had set up for camp, and having fewer staff will offset not having income from camper fees. However, the maintenance that needs to be done on the camp will cost more than budgeted, so any assistance that you may feel led to give is very

much appreciated! And, whether you donate to this effort or not, please keep Camp Lawroweld in your prayers, especially that our staff will have a safe summer and be drawn closer to Christ.

Currently my list of maintenance and repair projects that need doing over the summer is 156 items long. Yes, 156. And the things on that

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Marjorie Johnson puts new paint on a deck chair.



Ethan Stauffer and Will Wallace powerwash the stone foundation of the lodge.



Frentzen Pakpahan, one of the new pastors in the conference (and as yet unassigned to a church), paints the porch of a cabin.



mily Rojas, Grant Milano, Olivier Belasingam and Alex Schlisner (in window) get ready for a dump run.



Ben Blanchard and Jasmine Kuntz work on a new patio in front of the lodge.

Elder Ted Huskins Elected President of the Northern New England Conference



Elder Ted Huskins has for the past two months been the Acting President of the Northern New England Conference, and for over six years prior to that was the Executive Secretary of the Conference. In Mid-June, the Conference Executive Committee, a committee made up of representatives from the sister churches of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, elected Elder

Huskins as the President of the Conference.

Elder Huskins grew up in Asheville, North Carolina in a farming community. He is a second-generation Adventist and graduated from Fletcher Academy, where he was the Student Association President. As a student at Southern Missionary College, Ted was part of the Campus Ministries Leadership Team as the head of Collegiate Adventists For Better Living. Ted graduated from Southern with degrees in Theology, Biblical Languages, and Physical Education. Ted received a Masters Degree in Divinity from Andrews University and served 20 years in pastoral ministry. For five years prior to joining NNEC, Ted served as the President of Coleman Stewardship Services, a supporting organization that helps churches improve their stewardship practices.

Ted married the love of his life, Cindy, who happened to live just five doors away from his childhood home (about half a mile in the country).

Ted has five children (Mindy, Allison, Grace, Jay and Michael) and a grand-daughter (Willoughby). Ted's hobbies include gardening, bird watching, history, archaeology, travel, baseball and college basketball and the care (or pampering) of their pets - Prince William, their dog, and Lady Jane Gray their cat.

As Executive Secretary, Ted was a key part of the team that helped bring a renaissance to the Northern New England Conference in terms of increased evangelism and church planting, increased tithe and offerings, and increased worker morale and member satisfaction. Ted plans on a continuing emphasis on evangelism (including youth evangelism!), church planting, and stewardship. "We live in historic times," he said, "And there isn't that much worldly history in front of us, so let's work together to finish the tasks Christ has set in front of us."

Ted's professional passions include Stewardship, Leadership, Evangelism, Biblical Interpretation and Near Eastern Archaeology.

*Making Bitter Into Sweet at Camp Lawroweld
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list range from little projects such as putting up safety signs, to large projects such as replacing the flooring in some cabins and cleaning all the logs in the lodge.

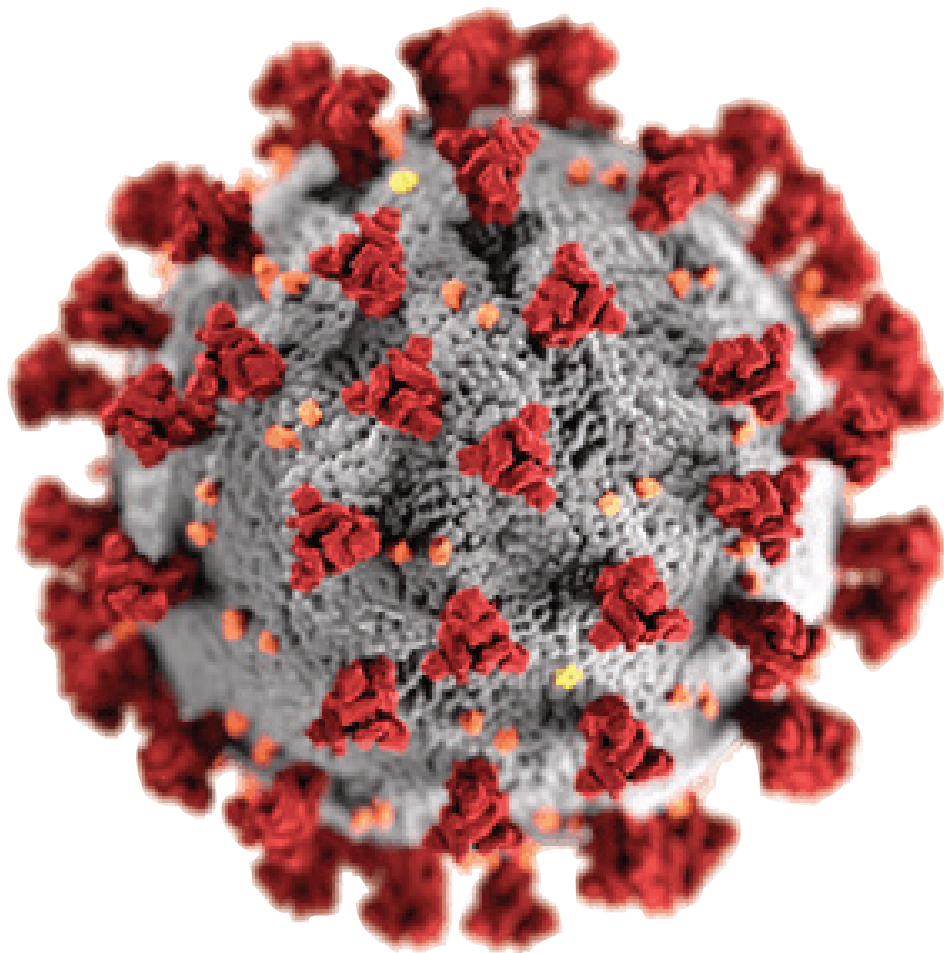
It is going to be a busy summer, especially since youth ministry has not ceased even though the camp will not be open. We'll be having "virtual campfires" as a ministry outreach to our junior, teen, and blind campers. It isn't a sufficient replacement for the real thing, but it is as close as we can get this summer and I am sure it is a tool God will use!



Jordan Milano rolls a new coat of paint onto the porch of a cabin.

Witnessing In The End Times: What We've Learned From COVID-19

By Scott Christiansen



When a disrupting catastrophe comes along, like the global COVID-19 pestilence that we are now experiencing, it acts like a clarifying lens – something like putting on the perfect pair of glasses and suddenly seeing things in sharp relief. With this new clarity, many are finding that they view the world differently, or at least with much more clarity. For many in the Adventist community, this means that our priorities are suddenly easier to sort out, which in turn means a general move toward greater support for, or direct engagement in, evangelism.

Interestingly, while the above process was happening to Adventists across the conference,

something like it was also happening to many post-Christians and secularists in each of our three states. Perspectives changed. Priorities and beliefs were questioned and reordered. Minds opened, at least a little.

The net result of the changes in the Adventist mindset and in the general population at large yielded a rare, almost bewildering confluence of interest: Part of the world, however briefly, suddenly wanted to hear the message that Adventists have been trying to proclaim. It is an over-used phrase, but the world experienced a brief paradigm shift, at least in regard to proclaiming the Adventist message.

And of course, the shift came at the worst possible moment: Our churches, the center of our witnessing, were closing and our members were sheltering in place. We found ourselves grappling with a whole new set of questions: How do we communicate our message to people under the prevailing COVID-19 restrictions? How do we handle the response? How do we try and be as local as possible in all that we do, so that local people (church members, pastors) are proclaiming the message to their community and fielding the responses?

With COVID-19 what we saw, in a nutshell, was a preview of what it is like to witness in the end-times: rapid changes with threats and hazards that are difficult and trying, and, at the same time, an opportunity to innovate and reach more interested people, more effectively, than ever before.

Since we know we're living in the end-times, let's review the lessons learned during COVID-19 (or, perhaps, during the first wave of COVID-19) because it would be wise to reflect on the learning opportunities that God has provided us, and be better prepared for end-time ministry opportunities before the next disruptive catastrophe besets human society.

SEEDS SPROUTED

One of the things that happened early in the COVID-19 event was that some pastors reported getting calls and emails from former members and former Bible study students in the community, as well as community members who'd had contact with church members over the years. Essentially, some of the seeds planted through the decades sprouted. The words and deeds

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of years gone by came to people's minds and they reached out to an Adventist contact. The effect was not huge – pastor's phones were not ringing off the hook – but as people in the community grappled with disease and death and economic disruption, some of them sought answers from sources that they had come to trust.

What our pastors experienced is an excellent lesson for us in these last days: Don't stop planting. Until probation closes, some of the seeds may sprout and be nurtured with the latter rain. Even though sowing without much reaping is tiresome and draining, we should keep on being faithful witnesses, seeking the Lord's will and doing his bidding, until time runs out.

NECESSITY SPURS INVENTION

When COVID-19 impacted our global society, outreach activities were pretty ingrained in Adventist culture. We distributed tracts door-to-door. We ran foodbanks and soup kitchens. We gave small-group or individual Bible studies. And of course, we invited people to our churches; in almost every outreach activity, we invited people into some form of personal fellowship with us. COVID-19 took a wrecking ball to these in-person-focused outreach activities and as a result, no longer could we use an in-person relationship with people to help them form a personal relationship with Christ.

It was a strange thing for Adventists – long accustomed to having our proclamation of the gospel ignored by most of the world – to find that some people were suddenly

interested in our message at the same time we found we could not use any of our usual methods to reach them. In this situation, Adventists in general and Northern New England Conference in particular turned to a readily available mass media for both reaching in and reaching out – internet platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, etc. Adventists were not alone in turning to internet platforms – everyone from random teens to late-night hosts were filming with their phones at home and posting videos – but for Adventists in Northern New England, the move probably presented a larger and more rapid shift in methods than almost any other group. We shouldn't be proud about this – it is now obvious that we were well behind the curve in digital outreach. The good news is that we did quite a bit of catching up very quickly. The sisterhood of churches in Northern New England rapidly moved to help make digital fellowship available to all congregations – whether it was through free conference calling or platforms such as Zoom. Leadership also held weekly Sabbath Schools and church sermons in the event there was a lapse at the local church level. A special morning kids program – the T&T Show (hosted by Trevor Schlisner and Ted Huskins) was produced and ran for a month, delighting hundreds of kids while bringing them valuable Bible-based lessons. Schools adopted digital education delivery to house-bound kids.

There was also an outward-facing focus: the entire evangelism effort across the conference pivoted to online delivery, which was no small task. There was a steep learning curve but by the grace

of God leaders were able to climb it. For example, the evangelism department helped pastors, Bible workers, and digital evangelists make brief video ads where they simply offered to pray with, or pray for and/or study the Bible with people who were interested. Some of the ads generated a very significant response (including generous helpings of abuse – this is, after all, the internet, where people show their true nature). Some generated very little or no response. The differences in the ads themselves and in the response to each was studied, and the approach to making ads was refined. In all of this, one lesson stood out: it was possible for a reasonably approachable pastor or Bible worker to make a short ad and gain Bible studies at a very low cost. In fact, some of our workers were overwhelmed by the interest the sum of their efforts generated (see the article about Peter Flores on page 10). Other pastors continued to preach to their congregations via Facebook or YouTube livestream, and were amazed at how many people (from around the world!) tuned in to their sermons. In a very real way it whet their appetites for more digital evangelism, especially when aimed at local audiences who could not only tune in but also come into actual fellowship with the congregation.

One such example of this is Leon Twitchell, who pastored the Oxford Church in Maine when COVID-19 hit. Leon, who will be the first to admit he is not a technology pioneer, threw himself on the mercy of his teenage daughter and this tech-savvy young woman helped Leon produce a series of sermons that he posted for his congregation on YouTube. To his surprise, Leon

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found that while church members were viewing the sermons, he was getting even more views from the community. This experience started Leon on a path that recently culminated in his agreeing to attempt to plant churches in nearby communities by using YouTube as his initial contact platform. He'll use the name Backwoods Pastor for his YouTube channel and will make a series of short, folksy, very engaging sermons aimed at working families in Western Maine, then will promote those sermons through paid ads and build relationships with those who respond.

Here is one primary lesson for witnessing in the end-times that many in the conference have learned from all this: Use the platforms that God provides to vigorously proclaim our message, even if those platforms are new and unfamiliar, going boldly into new areas that might work to expand Christ's kingdom.

EMBRACING RISK

Christians are generally a cautious, deliberative bunch, and it seems that we Adventists among them are even more so, as reflected in our committee structure at every level, through which every endeavor must pass. But this approach, which has served us well, is not suited to rapidly responding to massive societal upheavals and the problems and opportunities that stem from them. Sometimes, in the Lord's work, it is just necessary to move rapidly and boldly – while also moving in faith and prayer – and strike while the iron is hot. Sometimes, it is necessary to embrace risk.

Early in the COVID-19 pestilence, the It Is Written ministry embraced risk and moved boldly to create a national online evangelism series called Hope Awakens. Thinking very creatively, they tried to replicate all the steps needed to simulate a real evangelism series: advertising and creating interest – including zip-code specific online advertising clustered around participating churches, registration of participants, including email, telephone number and zip code, the establishment of local teams that would serve as coaches and provide a transition of relationships to local pastors, etc., etc. It was,

frankly, a brilliant effort that was mounted rapidly and under great pressure. It Is Written knew that minds and hearts were uniquely open, that people were for once focused on bigger questions instead of trite entertainments and It Is Written wanted to strike while the iron was hot.

Your sisterhood of churches also embraced risk and twenty churches invested and joined the hundreds of churches across the US that participated in Hope Awakens. It didn't work. Or at

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NNEC'S DIGITAL EVANGELIST, ALREADY BUSY, GETS BUSIER

By Scott Christiansen

Peter Flores had a vision: use social media to connect and communicate with non-Christians, leading them to Christ and forming an online church to meet their spiritual needs. In 2019, he found like-minded leaders in the Northern New England Conference and he joined the conference as their first digital evangelist. Peter set about making short videos that he hoped would appeal to the majority post-Christian population in Northern New England. But he went about making those videos in a unique way: he recruited members of the community to help him – people who had no interest in the spiritual content but wanted experience making videos. Peter gained only a modest online following but he ended up having long, very fulfilling conversations with his volunteers. Those conversations turned into wide-ranging Bible studies that both Peter and his volunteers were fascinated by.

The volunteers started telling their friends, and the Bible studies and face-to-face meet-ups grew. Then came COVID-19 and Peter was

initially stymied; how was he going to continue his Bible studies when he couldn't interact face-to-face? But like a true entrepreneur Peter pivoted and used the situation to his advantage. He made a quick video offering to pray for or with and study the Bible with anyone who wanted. He posted that ad on YouTube and Instagram in his home area of greater Portland, Maine.

Peter got a fair number of responses, including abusive responses (hey, it's the internet, where anonymity puts true character on display). But some responses were sincere and open to learning what the Bible says. Peter disregarded the abuse and focused on the sincere responses, communicating with them and maturing those conversations into Bible studies. Now Peter gives more than 20 individual virtual Bible studies each week, with many lasting for over an hour. "These people have a hunger for spiritual learning and they have a lot of questions. Sometimes the studies don't stop until I am forced to leave for my next video appointment. I'm spending so much time in front of the screen that I've had to get some blue-light-blocking sunglasses to reduce the wear on my eyes. On the other hand, this is the most spiritually-fulfilling thing I have ever done."

While Peter's Bible studies were exploding, God opened the door to another opportunity. He met a group of recent immigrants from Africa, all of whom had some sort of Adventist connection but none of whom were keeping the Sabbath or practicing an intentional Christian lifestyle. As Peter got to know them better, they asked him if he would be their Pastor and lead Sabbath worship for them and their families. This effectively

filled Peter's Sabbath with more screen time but also with much more joy. "I've never done anything more fulfilling than leading people into a relationship with Christ. It doesn't get better than this."

Taken altogether Peter has been overwhelmed by the response post-Christians are having to his offer to study the Bible and pray together. But even being flat-out with his work has not stopped him from forming plans to advance his video ministry. "Over the summer I and my crew are going to make a feature-length video titled "Three Questions For God". It will be really unique in that I narrate the conflict between Christ and Satan in story form, but also layer that story with several other stories. It's hard to describe, but I hope it will be compelling and that we'll be able to promote it on YouTube across the conference. The idea is to gain a large number of contacts, and try to move those contacts to Bible studies facilitated by our church planting teams around the conference. We're doing this on a shoestring budget, so maybe it will work, maybe it won't, but by the grace of God I'll keep trying things out until we figure this out and lead as many people as possible to Christ."

Adventist Review TV (ARtv), the premier Adventist developer of online spiritual content aimed primarily at the digital generations, has agreed to co-fund the feature-length video in return for rights to use it globally. The feature will likely be filmed during August and several NNEC properties will be used as settings. When completed, a link to the video will be provided on the conference website and Facebook page.



DIXFIELD SOUP KITCHEN CONTINUES TO SERVE

By Greg Dennison

For some ten years now kind-hearted volunteers at the Dixfield church in Dixfield, Maine have been preparing monthly meals for the vulnerable in their community. Using a multipurpose facility that the church purchased some years ago for eventual use as a church, school and community service center, the volunteers have been able to serve a regular sit-down meal to townspeople, getting to know them in the process. Church members have regularly joined in the meal, creating bonds and a sense of fellowship with the townspeople. The monthly meal was ideally suited to witnessing – until COVID-19 came along and forced dramatic changes.

During March and April, the meal was prepared to go and delivered at the curbside. The packaging

and delivery required extra steps but a larger crew was not possible, so during those months nine personal protection-equipped volunteers – gatherings of over ten are prohibited by the state – worked to procure, prepare and distribute the food. The to-go meal is paired with grocery items in a food box, with pick-up available from 3:30 to 5:30 pm.

Starting from scratch, the team developed an effective way to deliver their services. They set up a street-side canopy with signs telling people to stay in their car and call a phone number for service. One of the



Soup Kitchen meals are always freshly prepared by the dedicated volunteers



Cindy Schlager begins to set up the kitchen for a very busy day

volunteers fielded those calls and assigned them an order number, noting any special instructions for those fulfilling the order. Then other team members assembled the order and put it on a curb-side table with the order number clearly displayed. The system worked well, even with the significant 25% increase in demand from March to April. It is hoped the system and volunteers can keep up with the expected future increase in demand.

The goal of the Dixfield church is to follow Christ's method alone in serving community members and sharing with them the saving love of Jesus.



THE FAMILY OF GOD

By Pastor Steve Dayen

At the very end of the book of Malachi, in the last two verses of the Old Testament, the Lord gave us a powerful promise relating to the end times. “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6, NKJV). The

Lord plans to do a mighty work of healing and strengthening family relationships before He returns, and I believe that His second coming is “near, even at the doors” (Matthew 24:33).

Last year my wife Linda and I were invited by our Conference leaders to accept an additional role as Family Ministries Directors for our conference. We were both humbled and delighted to taken on this new responsibility, as we also continue to pastor the Woodstock and

Berlin churches in Maine and New Hampshire.

Through family ministries, we envision tremendous possibilities for impacting our churches and communities for Christ and the gospel. Our enemy in this great controversy takes special pleasure in trying to destroy marriages and families. As Christians, we need to do everything we can, by His grace and through God’s power, to strengthen and encourage families.

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Our vision for family ministries here in Northern New England is to use sermons, classes, seminars and other special events to accomplish two goals: 1) Help lead our families within our own churches to be stronger and healthier in the Lord and 2) Incorporate family ministries in very intentional ways in community outreach and evangelism. Many people in our communities will not initially respond to a direct spiritual approach, yet are yearning to have better relationships in their marriages and with their children.

This ministry is much bigger than the two of us can do by ourselves. We certainly need God's wisdom and strength... and we also need you! If you have any interest or expertise in family ministries, we are seeking to build a strong NNEC Family Ministries team. If you have an interest in helping with marriage enrichment events, parenting classes, divorce recovery seminars... the possibilities are almost endless...please contact us. My email address is pastordayen@yahoo.com and Linda's is lindadayen@gmail.com. We'd would love to hear from you.

least, it didn't work as well as It Is Written had hoped. Their attempt to deploy new technologies and new platforms and form links between the person viewers saw – John Bradshaw – and the local-church representatives who were actually following up was glitch-filled – as any such first attempt can be expected to be. Also, the response in Northern New England was much weaker (as measured by the number of people who said they wanted to be baptized then followed that desire up) than elsewhere in the nation. This, too, was not a complete surprise: we are, after all, the most post-Christian region in all of the North American Division, which is to say we are the most difficult domestic mission field to work in.

But here is the thing: We engaged – hundreds of people across the conference were working on the project or supporting it in prayer. We made hundreds of new contacts, even if most are currently luke-warm. We learned a great deal very quickly and mastered a model that will likely work in our region if we shorten the chain of relationship hand-offs (transitioning a viewer from John Bradshaw to a local Bible worker volunteer, to an unfamiliar pastor and congregation was probably the weakest link in the design). In sum, we learned that if we embrace risk and faithfully, prayerfully, proclaim the Lord and present truth, then doing so will wake us up and give us knowledge, momentum and focus as we press forward.

A LITTLE FIRE, A LITTLE REFINING

We live in the end times – in an era where we can expect it to get steadily more difficult to witness but where we can expect a steadily greater outpouring of the latter rain. And with that in mind, what we've learned from our COVID-19 witnessing experience is that as the world is disrupted, we engage more vigorously in our mission while at the same time people become more receptive to our message. We also learned that we shouldn't stop planting – that even as we harvest we can still plant, for some seeds may sprout and grow and bloom in but a day. We learned to boldly proclaim our message on the platforms the Lord provides to us, even though they may be new and outside our comfort zone, and we learned to prayerfully and faithfully embrace risk and the learning, progress, and awakening that comes with it.

Where we as a sisterhood of churches stand in the summer of 2020 is that many of our Bible workers and pastors are engaged in Bible studies with a host of new interests, our digital evangelism has been dramatically strengthened and is engaged in innovation, and our church-planting efforts have been refined and strengthened. If this is what a few drops of the latter rain accomplishes, are you ready for a downpour? Get ready: these are the end-times, and that downpour is coming.

The Penultimate Page

The penultimate page is the one right before the last one. But here it means something extra, as we live in the penultimate age – the one right before the end. This page will feature articles talking about our time.



ARE THESE THE END TIMES?

By Scott Christiansen

No one in their right mind wants to live through the end times. The Bible makes clear that the wars, pestilence, famine and upheaval in the natural world are without precedence during those days. And yet here we are, living in a time when prophecies regarding the last days are increasingly fulfilled.

“In my writings over the last 20 or so years, I have tried to point to the accelerating decline in the natural world, and show how that decline is a) part of the logical consequence of Satan’s rebellion, which man has joined in, and, b) a significant part of what drives the fulfillment of prophecy in the last

days. I’ve done this by outlining through scripture a progression of events that looks like this:

1. Satan makes dramatic charges against God’s character, claiming He is selfish and manipulative. Satan mounts a campaign for God’s place and proposes a “better” way of running the universe. One-third of the angels are convinced and join his side.
2. Satan and his angels lose the battle, are cast to earth and are banned from heaven.
3. Satan recruits man by making the same charges that he made to the angels. Man accepts Satan’s charges against God and joins Satan’s rebellion. Satan takes man’s dominion of the earth as spoils of war.
4. Satan continues his rebellion the only way he can – by implementing the “better” system that he promoted in his campaign in heaven. Satan, possessing dominion, twisted the lifeforms on earth so that many conformed to his operating principle of selfishness – a system of taking.
5. God’s elegant, robust original creation, which was based on love and a system of giving – was perverted. The new system flourished at first as it cannibalized God’s creation, but soon the system began to stall, then slowly collapse in on itself as key parts of earth’s living systems died out or failed to perform their original functions.
6. Man and earth now have selfishness as their organizing principle. But selfishness collapses in on itself and we are in the end stages of this terrible and failing system. From my perspective, this generation is the one who gets to see it completely and rapidly collapse.
7. God allows the collapse of Satan’s design for the world because letting Satan’s system play out and be proven folly (and thus his charges against God be proven folly) is the only way that God can redeem His character without the use of force, thus retaining the trust-based relationship He has with all created beings who will accept Him.
8. After earth has collapsed and Satan’s lies have been conclusively revealed, Satan and all who joined his rebellion – whose lives are in harmony with selfishness – will be destroyed and earth will be created anew, without any trace of Satan’s selfishness-based system.

Now, that is a really, *really* short summary that leaves out a great deal. For a more in-depth treatment, you can watch the video series “Prequel of the Bible” by It Is Written for an in-depth Bible-based approach. I co-wrote that series with John Bradshaw. Search the IIW web site for “prequel” and the series will come up.

But back to the subject at hand: The end of the earth. The Bible provides us with a number of things to watch for so that we

know when the end is coming and when the last days have arrived. Evangelicals, for instance, closely watch the middle east as they strongly connect end-times with attacks on Israel. But most Bible prophecy in regard to the last days is more general, pointing more at trends and overall conditions than at a specific event in a specific place. This is because, by and large, the last days are all about the failed and collapsing natural world and human society, both of which point to the failure of Satan's twisted design. Take, for instance, the picture that is painted in Matthew 24:6-8: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows."

So, what we're supposed to be watching for is nations in conflict (check) as well as an abundance of potential and feared conflict (check) as well as famines, pestilences (check!) and many earthquakes. Of that list, we lack only famines and earthquakes. Based on where we are in prophetic history, I do expect earthquakes to significantly increase. That leaves famines, and here is the thing: conflict, economic upset and disruptions in our environment (drought, floods, etc.) all work together to produce famines, so unfortunately we can expect to see famines emerge in the relatively near future.

Now, some may argue that we cannot possibly be in the last days because all of these things have always existed in the world to one degree or another and we simply

can't be in the last days until all these indicators are flashing an off-the-the-charts red signal. My response is that this world will ease into the last days, and has in fact been easing into them. The beginning of the end won't be like the slamming of a door. How could it be, when we are told Christ will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2)?

For the sake of doing a diligent study, let's compare the generalized description of the world in Matthew 24:4-8 with the generalized description of the state of man in 2 Timothy 3:1-5: "But understand this: In the last days terrible times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, without love of good, traitorous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. Turn away from such as these!"

The world today reveres men (and women) such as are described above, and around the world are increasingly choosing them as leaders. And let's be clear: what is happening is that the two systems at play here – Satan's system and God's system – are separating from each other ever more distinctly. Those who admire and adhere to a system of selfishness, who *like* to be competing ruthlessly and taking from the weaker, have embraced Satan's system and their character is described above. Those who, on the other hand, have embraced Christ's kingdom of love increasingly have characters that are described in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12).

So, when we look at the trends in the natural and man-made world, then look at the increasingly polarized character of man, then compare those things to scripture, we can conclude that, yes, we are in the end times and there is a fairly short (given the span of history) and very bumpy ride ahead of us, during which those who are faithful to God will increasingly take on His character as a witness to the world.

Is COVID-19 a sign of the end-times? Yes. It fits with everything else. But don't overstate its importance, because if we do that, then we will sink back into slumber when it passes. Better to take in the whole picture and become increasingly alert and an increasingly active, increasingly passionate member of God's army.

Soon we will see Christ coming in clouds of glory, and I can hardly wait.

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ALUMNI WEEKEND 2020

Friday, October 2:

9:00 a.m. Golf Tournament
5:30 p.m. Speaker: David Branum
5:45 p.m. Bean Suppah, Hotdog Roast & Bonfire

Sabbath, October 3:

10:30 a.m. Worship and Lunch (PTA Gymnasium)
Speaker: Pastor LeClare Litchfield

Saturday Evening:

5:30 p.m. Alumni Band Concert
6:30 p.m. Alumni Basketball Tournament

Honor Years: '75, '80, '85, '90, '95, '00, '05, '10, '15

