

CONNECTION

A man in a light-colored short-sleeved shirt with a tie and a young woman in a grey and yellow shirt are looking at each other. The man is on the right, looking down at the woman on the left. The woman is looking up at the man. They are both smiling. The background is blurred, showing other people in similar shirts.

FALL 2019 • VOLUME 37 • ISSUE 3

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE

GOING TO
OSHKOSH!

Message From The President

By Bob Cundiff



PROOF POSITIVE: OUR PATHFINDER MINISTRY STILL WORKS

I recently had the most wonderful experience. I had the privilege to serve as the Director of the Baptismal Department for the Oshkosh International Pathfinder Camporee. In truth, I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I consented to serve in this capacity, but because of a soft spot in my heart for kids, I readily agreed.

The Camporee brought together 55,000 people from 105 countries across the globe. You will be proud to know that the Atlantic Union was the most well-represented Union with over 5,600 pathfinders and staff in attendance; fifty-two of those precious young people were baptized.

At the 2014 International Camporee, we baptized 600 kids. This year, however, we reached for a faith goal of 1,000 baptisms. Planning for 1,000 baptisms in North America

is an unusual task. We hear stories about baptisms hitting the 1,000 mark in Africa, South America or the Philippines, but we don't hear such accounts from North America.

We issued a challenge to each club to bring at least one baptismal candidate to the camporee. Many clubs did and some brought multiple candidates. But in spite of our best efforts, we still only had 600 kids registered to be baptized on the opening night of camporee. Frankly, I was a little nervous about how the final numbers would tally.

Planning for 1,000 baptisms means putting in place significant logistics and staff. There were four pools, two platforms, registration stations, online registration management, check-in stations, changing tents, baptismal certificate stations and more. I assembled a staff of 75 people including 35 conference presidents who agreed to serve as line managers, announcers and pool managers.

While trying to put all the logistics in place to support 1,000 baptisms, I wondered if we would actually reach that goal. Were there another 400 kids at the camporee who had been studied with and properly prepared for baptism but who had not yet registered? I must admit that my faith was too small. But, I was in for a wild ride as God unfolded His plan for the week!

Our last baptism was scheduled for early Sabbath morning. As the last kids were getting out of the water, I started hearing reports that we'd run out of Pathfinder gift Bibles, gift bags, baptismal pins and certificates. Since I'd ordered 1,000 of each of these items, I began to suspect we'd reached our goal. With the baptisms concluded, we shut down the department, secured the tents and computed our final tally. We had baptized 1,036 kids! Praise God, He

had exceeded our expectations!

I was elated, tired and still processing some disbelief when another president texted me, "Are you aware that the morning speaker just gave another call for baptism and 60 more kids have come forward?!" I was both shocked and delighted, and began scrambling to assemble the staff for an encore operation of the baptism ministry.

I put the word out that we'd have one more baptism at 5:30 on Sabbath evening. I arrived at 5:00 PM to find a crowd of 500 pathfinders, parents, club directors, counselors and bystanders all excited about the 'extra' baptism. I began the evening by sheepishly calling the group together and breaking the news that we'd run out of gift Bibles, baptismal certificates and other gift bag items. The crowd responded with a wild applause of praise to God that we'd baptized more people than we'd planned for! People kept shouting, "Praise the Lord!"

Frankly, friends, my heart was not ready for what would happen in those next few hours. We'd had an incredible week of seeing God do wonderful things in the lives of so many Pathfinders, but that final baptism experience was unprecedented. There was so much joy in that assembly as person after person stepped into the watery grave of baptism. So, we baptized... and we baptized...and we baptized. I began wondering where all the people were coming from. How many more are there? From my limited vantage point on the platform I could not see the end of the line and it was beginning to feel like the line had no end.

Two hours later, my hoarse voice announced the last candidate to have their sins washed away in what was now a very used pool of water.

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Message from the Executive Secretary

By Ted Huskins



I am a firm believer in setting aggressive goals and pursuing those goals with creative and bold initiatives. While this method is more or less fit for the pursuit of business, it is ideal when engaged in the work of expanding God's kingdom and readying the earth for His coming. After all, what goal could be bigger than that? And since we are told to be confident and faith-filled, how could we not set aggressive goals and conceive of bold initiatives? Taking risks is, in fact, one of our core values in the conference.

But in the Lord's work, not every initiative is a success. Sometimes

THE OLIVE BRANCH CAFÉ – A BOLD INITIATIVE

through our initiatives, we are led through a learning experience on our way to building a greater ministry. Sometimes bold efforts that seem ordained of the Lord end up benefitting a small constituency for a shorter time than expected and we end up wondering if the thing was of the Lord in the first place. And sometimes parts of a comprehensive initiative will work while other parts do not, necessitating an evaluation and realignment of the ministry.

Only in the fullness of time will we know if The Olive Branch Café fits into any of these categories, or all of these categories. Until this October, the Olive Branch Café was a part of The Ark – our urban center of influence in Lewiston, Maine. In its original design, The Olive Branch Café was meant to be staffed by volunteers and was to be a gathering place for the community that served healthy, attractive, amazingly-flavorful food. It was a brilliant, low-cost model that was meant to fit into the other Ark activities (health education, community outreach, Bible and prophecy studies and a church plant) like a hand in a

glove. However, after a period of operation, it was discovered that the department of labor would not allow a volunteer staff for the restaurant, and the enterprise was saddled with much higher operating costs and began running serious deficits.

Meanwhile, the balance of the activities at The Ark were a stunning success. The volunteers at The Ark planted a church that by late last year had from 50 to 70 attendees every Sabbath. Their approach to the African refugees in Lewiston had been astonishingly fruitful. The health education and cooking classes were well patronized, and they began to see numerous other areas of potential, such as fielding a mobile health-screening van, or increasing the number of Bible studies and perhaps raising up another church. At the same time, it became obvious that the church plant would need another, larger building to meet in and would also benefit from a pastor, or Bible worker, that spoke Kinyarwanda, the common language of most church

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The church plant keeps growing! Some Sabbath's have reached an attendance of 50-70 people.



By Jennifer Hernandez

“You can count on me”. This assurance is one that each of us wants to be able to say to – and hear from – those who are important to us. If I had to choose someone in the Bible as my go-to person that I knew I could count on, it would be Joseph. It seems that in every situation, he was spot-on in demonstrating the heart of God in real life situations. Regardless of the circumstances, you could count on him to do the right thing. In Genesis chapter 50, Joseph is confronted with his father’s death. The Bible says that when Jacob died, Joseph threw himself over his father’s face and wept, not only fulfilling a traditional mourning ritual, but also demonstrating an act of respect and voluntary humility towards a father who had been the most significant person in Joseph’s walk of discipleship with God.

Jacob’s death came at an interesting time in Joseph’s life. He was surrounded by a world that had little understanding of what it meant to serve the God of Heaven. To them He was just another god and they were more concerned with ritual and tradition than anything else. In Egyptian custom, the embalming of the decedent’s body and filling the

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME

decedent’s tomb with goods for the afterlife was supposed to ensure the persons immortality. However, Joseph honored God and not tradition, and he also knew how important it was to his father that his remains be dealt with properly. Jacob wanted his remains to be taken to Canaan for burial, and this would require a long journey, sacrifice, and risk for Joseph. So, even though all of Egypt was watching, and even though Joseph was expected to honor tradition as a high government official, He did what he knew was right.

Joseph’s actions resonated on many levels, including in his own family, because the results of discipleship in the family life are always evident. And what was true with Joseph is true with us. If we show our children by our actions that we honor our parents, respect them and love them in every way possible, and we teach them to care about the well-being of others by practicing this with them, they will, in turn, feel responsible for doing the same. The story of Joseph teaches us that it is not only important to honor our parents when they are alive, but it is also important to honor them after they pass away, respecting their wishes even when we may not agree or when it might cause great hardship to fulfill them.

Joseph loved his father so much that he wouldn’t think of dishonoring him by not fulfilling his end-of-life wishes. This is a sacred trust, and though Joseph had been involuntarily estranged from his father for most of his adult life, he never lost the sense of his responsibility to honor his father. He went to Pharaoh and said, “My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan,

there you shall bury me” (NKJV). Pharaoh’s consent demonstrates how valuable Joseph was and the trust that this man of God had been given. Not only could his family count on him, but the entire middle-eastern world had learned to trust him. When I think of the kind of disciple and mentor I want to be, my prayer is, *God, make me someone that others can count on to fulfill Your purposes.* May God give us the emotional intelligence, the spiritual strength, and the determination to honor those we have lost and to maintain their spiritual legacies for the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Proof Positive: Our Pathfinder Ministry Still Works

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In total we baptized 1,311 people!
Our God is so good!

As I look back from the other side of that experience I have come to a conclusion. My conclusion is that the Pathfinder Ministry still works. I applaud the Pathfinder leaders of this conference for their dedication, commitment, countless hours and the patience that is required to successfully run a Pathfinder club. I know the ministry requires a great deal of work, and sometimes leaders wonder if all the effort is worth it. But, the 2019 International Pathfinder camporee has forever settled that question for me. The Pathfinder ministry is one of the strongest tools we have to disciple young people, lift up Christ in their lives and encourage them to commit themselves fully to Him. Our Pathfinder ministry still works!



THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

By Trevor Schlisner

One of my favorite and oft used sayings of my father-in-law goes like this: “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” It’s hard convincing people of anything, let alone why Seventh-day Adventist church schools are vital to the vision, mission, and growth of our movement. The emphasis on church is intentional. We do not operate independent schools, government schools, or classical schools. We operate church schools. Like church, schools are to be a spiritual, mental, and physical safe-haven for our children. Consider this quote from the second most important schooling manual: “In this time of special danger for the young, temptations surround them on every hand; and while it is easy to drift, the strongest effort is required in order to press against the current. Every school should be a ‘city of refuge’ for the tempted youth, a place where their follies should be dealt with patiently and wisely” (*Education*, p. 293).

Let me stop here and admit that people are not perfect – not even teachers. However, though we sometimes fall short of ideal “patience and wisdom,” the Lord still works powerfully through our schools; generations of young people have given their life to the Lord because of the influence of Adventist education. Because our schools are such a powerful ministry, they are also a special target for Satan’s evil work, and prayer support on behalf of the entire church is needed for our teachers and students so that Christ may be their foundation. We are told, “In the highest sense the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (*Education*, p. 30). Jesus Christ should not only be the foundation of church school, but the foundation of the church. This should be *our foundation*.

Here is my question for you. What foundation do you want for our

children? What is more important to you, character or career? I don’t even like posing such a question because it implies that our church schools are somehow inferior in academics. In reality, according to the CongitiveGenesis study performed by the Center for Research on K-12 Adventist Education (CRAE), Seventh-day Adventist schools nation-wide outperform public education in every subject area. This study was three decades long and is considered to be one of the most comprehensive research projects in existence on private education. But even if we perform well academically, the ultimate aim of Seventh-day Adventist education is recreating the image of God in human beings. Our church schools, rightly conducted, prepare our students for this world and for the world to come. Consider how you can help lay a foundation for the children in your church and community. Charles Spurgeon, the famous preacher, had it right when he said, “Take care of your lambs or where will you get your sheep from?”

*The Olive Branch Café –
A Bold Initiative*
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attendees. The Ark, a bold initiative designed to meet a huge need, was at a crossroad.

When the conference Executive Committee met in September, they considered the mounting financial losses at The Olive Branch Café, and considered what could be done if the available money was redirected. Their decision was not an easy one, as The Olive Branch Café was a beloved ministry. Still, the needs and opportunities at The Ark were compelling and drove their decision.

The volunteers that form the core of The Ark are meeting with The

Ark’s executive director, Scott Christiansen, to envision and implement a sustainable future for the Ark. It will include more involvement by a Kinyarwanda-speaking pastor, a Bible-worker focused on Bible studies and helping to raise up another worship group, and a continued emphasis on health education and health evangelism.

Here is what Northern New England Adventists can expect going forward: more bold visions, such as our Church Planting Project, and more initiatives that work, sorta work, and don’t work that need to be sorted through, refined, retooled, or retired. The work we are about, and the times we are in, require that we try new things and that we “go big” so we can go home.

Going To Oshkosh



GOING TO OSHKOSH IS A LITTLE LIKE GOING TO HEAVEN

By Scott Christiansen

The Oshkosh, Wisconsin-based Pathfinder Camporee is a big deal; some 55,000 young people and club leaders attend the quinquennial event. But most of what you read or see about Oshkosh has to do with being there, while the experience of getting there is probably just as interesting because going to Oshkosh is a little like going to heaven. No, seriously – it is!

First, there is the anticipation. Countless generations have lived out their lives wanting to go to heaven or hoping to get there without dying. So – great anticipation is involved. The same is true of Oshkosh, and if you ask a 13-year old how long they've been waiting to go to Oshkosh, they will tell you they've been waiting their whole lives.

Then, there is the preparation. Getting to heaven requires preparation, whether engaged in with intentionality or whether engaged in unknowingly through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. To prepare for Oshkosh, Pathfinder clubs carefully plan, generate resources, and equip themselves.

Just like going to heaven, the actual start of the Oshkosh journey can be hard to pinpoint. But one clear event is when Pathfinder clubs pile into vans, buses and cars that are liberally painted or posted with "OSHKOSH!" proclamations. And here is the thing: just like with heaven, almost nobody goes to Oshkosh alone. And at some point, on the drive to Oshkosh comes an emotional moment full of elation: the crowd headed toward God gets bigger. In and amongst the throngs of people in cars going nowhere life-

changing, another vehicle laden with painted OSHKOSH announcements is sighted. Horns are honked. Hands are thrust out the windows and waved frantically. People that neither group has ever seen before are hailed and welcomed as brothers and sisters. The excitement only builds as vehicle after vehicle of fellow travelers is sighted and hailed, and kids who have never been to Oshkosh before begin to get a sense of just how big, just how monumental, just how amazing the experience will be.

As it is with Oshkosh, so it is with heaven: the journey there makes it even more spectacular, the relationships that form along the way are priceless, and being in the swelling crowd of fellow believers is, well, unbelievable. Ask a Pathfinder – they'll tell you.



The Mount Vernon, Vermont Club sent a large group.



The roads at the camporee were closed to automobile traffic and were constantly filled with hordes of Pathfinders as well as drilling marching bands.



Cars are lined up, slowly making their way into the campground. This is pretty much "peak excitement" for the kids who have been waiting so long to get to Oshkosh.



Photo Credit: Naquan

Kurt Amos, Pathfinder Director for NNEC, was a man who never stopped moving for the whole of the camporee.

Going To Oshkosh



Photo Credit: Sanchez

Isaac Tardif and Meagan Hodson, both Pathfinder Teen Leadership Trainees, carry the flag for the Woodstock Club during the grand march.



Photo Credit: Naquan

From Left to Right: Michelle Nuñez, Pathfinder Club Director, Denver Grant; Nancy Alvarez, Pathfinder Deputy Club Director, Emelda Tardiff; and Constanza Fisher hold the flag for the Westbrook Bilingual church's King's Knights Pathfinder Club.



Photo Credit: Naquan

Jumbotron screens made the evening program visible to the huge crowd.



Perhaps the biggest event at Oshkosh was the nightly meeting, which acted out the story of David, complete with an elaborate stage and original musical score. There were even fully costumed "sentries" guarding the edge of the meeting place.



Photo Credit: Naquan

Mount Blue Moccasins club leaders Cindy Schlager, Rocky Schlager, and James Sweet savor a quiet moment.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE CHURCH

By Scott Christiansen

You've heard it said in regard to raising up a child that "it takes a village", which is to say that an entire community that plays supportive roles is needed for a young person to develop into a valuable and sustaining member of the community. But here in the Northern New England Conference, that familiar saying could – should – be changed to read "it takes a church".

Adventists have several solemn responsibilities, but primary among them is proclaiming the soon coming of Christ to the world and showing – living – the character of Christ to our youth. Both of these responsibilities come with eternal consequences, and in both cases the responsibilities lay on the entire church. Fortunately, there is a role for everyone in carrying out our responsibilities to our communities and to our youth.

In the home, parents are responsible for demonstrating the kind, loving, nurturing, patient character of Christ in all interactions – an exceedingly difficult task that can only be achieved through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. In the church, members should demonstrate the character of Christ and fill young minds with a full range of Bible knowledge through Sabbath School lessons. Each church that has youth should also have an Adventurer club and a Pathfinder club, each of which engages in activities that help young people develop confidence and an array of skills while engaging in study and service. Even in play and leisure there are ministries that support our youth, in particular Camp Lawroweld. Our young people are further brought to Christ through the unmatched ministry of our

church schools, from kindergarten to college. And when our youth are of college age, there are additional support systems for them, including GYC annual meetings and Young Adult meetings at Camp Lawroweld.

Basically, the design is that our youth should be constantly engaged in learning and should be surrounded by members, clubs, and classrooms through whom they are shown the character of Christ. By this they are fitted to resist the temptations and deceptions of the world and confidently proclaim our soon-coming savior.

We have a very comprehensive and intelligently-designed system for nurturing our youth that, in its fullness, is Youth Ministries. Do we perfectly reflect the design and intent of that system? Are all of us

in all our interactions supportive of our various youth ministries and reflective of the character of Christ? No – there is room for improvement. But even though short of perfection, the system we have for nurturing our youth is an excellent one within which is an opportunity for service and participation by every member of the church.

Currently, youth across denominations are leaving Christian denominations, including Adventism, at a rate of between 60 and 80 percent. If we as a church fully support and engage in supporting our well-designed youth ministry and showing our youth the character of Christ, we can reduce the number of young people who are successfully picked off by the plans and snares of Satan. Doing so is one of our two great responsibilities.



SAVE THE DATE!

Join the Mission To Mongolia mission trip in August, 2021*. The trip will be led by Scott Christiansen, Conference Evangelist, who lived and worked in Mongolia from 1994 to 1999. The Adventist Church in Mongolia, which had one baptized member in 1994, now has over 5,000 members and an extremely active outreach program! Members of the mission trip will

have an opportunity to serve on a health-and-community service team in the countryside or on an evangelism team in the city.

To get your name on the list of those who are interested, contact Scott Christiansen at schristiansen@nnec.org

*Final dates for this two-week trip to be determined by June of 2020.

Young Adults



Photo Credit: Keith Holland

THE MOUNTAINTOP & THE MULTITUDE

By Jackie Howard

In October, the second annual NNEC Young Adult Prayer Ministries Retreat was held at Camp Lawroweld. Young Adult Prayer Ministries – a ministry led by young people for young people – was established as a collaboration between Youth and Prayer ministries. The organizing idea this year was to present attendees an opportunity to evaluate and recalculate their Christian experience. You can think of it like this: just as with a GPS, sometimes people need to reroute.

Pastor Ramsey Asenjo of the Waterville and Norridgewock



Photo Credit: Keith Holland

Joy reverberated throughout the Someone Cares building from this Spirit-filled weekend.



Photo Credit: Keith Holland

Pastor Ramsey had the young adults break into small groups to dissect and discuss scripture and practical application questions.

churches was the speaker, and he communicated the balance Christians need to achieve between the mountaintop experience (which Christians experience as God transforms and sanctifies their life) and the multitude experience (which occurs when Christians share their life with others). There was a magnified focus on how Christ's followers understand the middle ground between the two, including the impossibility of staying on the mountaintop isolated from the world to only receive blessings, and the futility of forever mingling in the multitude, content without transformation. The young adults who attended were able to process what both of those experiences can look like when they work in tandem, and how they can move closer to being balanced, loving Christians.

The young adults said that, above and beyond the hues of crimson and flecks of gold they viewed together from the top of Tumbledown mountain, a special atmosphere was shared during "Holy Ground." Those

who have participated in Prayer Ministries retreats are familiar with this concept. Basically, what happens is women and men separate and have intercessory prayer with each other. The team values vulnerability and authenticity, and this is a time together that is saturated with it. It's no wonder that "Holy Ground" is a powerful thing because it's full of the Holy Spirit! In the women's holy ground, a chair was set up – the "hot seat" – in front of the other women; one woman would come forward and take a seat as she described her greatest need. Perhaps it was something she wanted to overcome, or perhaps something was holding her back from a thriving relationship with God. She would be heard and not interrupted. She could speak without someone attempting to fix her. Instead, the women would lay hands on her and pray life into her until a natural ebb in the prayer flow was apparent. This was done for a few women each night. One woman even described how God answered her prayers from the last retreat,

and she believed it was because of the fervent prayer from the previous Holy Ground.

There's a saying that the most precious gift is watching an open heart respond to God. Anyone could see this gift was given to the diverse group. There were young people from our very own Northern New England, and Southern New England, Canada, Rhode Island, New York and beyond. These attendees, all with different life stories, believed they were on equal ground at the retreat. They believed God gave them both a personal and corporate spiritual experience.

Young Adult Prayer Ministries is doing a vital work, and these intensely, spiritual gatherings are essential in building camaraderie, a sense of community, and a common mission. If you know a young adult who would benefit from attending the next Young Adult Prayer Retreat, contact leaders Natalia Jamrog and Jackie Howard at youngadults@nnec.org.



Leaders Jackie & Kyle Howard get some of the youth group to pose for a pre-camp picture (From Left to Right: Kyle, Joshua, Jackie, Kyla, Ashanti, & Jordan).

UNDER THE STARS

By Jackie Howard

What do you get when you have songs, smores, and an excited group of teenagers? Camp night, of course! The youth group from Auburn, Maine recently decided to camp out under the stars and spend some rich, quality time together. The Auburn church believes that discipleship in community is important for everyone to experience – especially the youth. So, naturally, the teens *had* to go camping and experience community together!

The event kicked off on a Saturday evening, and while the group was setting up tents, an organic nerf gun war broke out. The adults dodged the foam pieces as best as they could, but the obvious was inevitable – the teens collaborated to trounce the adults. The interesting thing was that while watching these teens, you wouldn't have known they were wildly different from one another. From the way they were sharing laughter together and engaging in impromptu teamwork, you'd have

thought they'd spent years together outside of church. A game of nerf darts may have been the catalyst, but the teens were already forming a community, one which could be used to instill spiritual values.

When the tents were finally up and the darts rested on the ground, the group fellowshiped over a warm meal. The conversation ranged from questions about science and the formation of rainbows to spiritual

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BAPTISM SABBATH AT SACO MAINE

By Brenda Johnson

Baptism Sabbath at Faith Chapel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Saco, Maine, was a unique experience for its members and for candidates Ray and Tara Rumery and Sharayne Kerr. “We are going to have the baptism on the daycare center’s playground in front of Noah’s ark,” Pastor Brenda announced. A portable baptistery made it all possible. The proximity to Noah’s ark made some wonder if it might rain, but the Lord provided a beautiful fall day and the heater in the tank worked perfectly - the water was 80 degrees!

Baptisms are always moving, but the testimony Ray gave was particularly powerful and moved many in the audience to tears. Ray and his brother were true seekers after truth, and after coming across various Seventh-day Adventist television ministries, they became convinced that Jesus was coming soon and that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was the church that understood Bible prophecy. Ray told how his brother died before they were actually able to find our church. “He would have been right here with me,” he explained. Ray witnessed to Tara, his wife, who was also a seeker, and she began taking Bible studies in the pastor’s Sabbath morning class.

The testimony of Sharayne Kerr was special. Sharayne, who had been raised by an Adventist aunt, met our member, Gaylon Kerr, and he began studying with her. As Bible truths unfolded before her, she too, decided she wanted to be baptized. Shar and Gaylon were married at the church the week before the baptism, so the baptism was a special addition to their marriage celebration.

In one High Sabbath of baptisms and celebration, the Saco church grew by fifteen percent!



The baptismal candidates enjoyed the experience of having their baptisms held next to “Noah’s Ark”.

Church News

Under The Stars

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topics including what heaven is like and how God works intimately in our lives. After dinner, there was a campfire complete with smores and songs, and finally (mercifully, for the adults) bedtime.

Morning worship was one of the highlights of the camping experience. The group decided to journey through Ephesians 1:1-14 – a passage that is full of treasure. In this passage, the teens discovered some of the pieces of their identity and learned how God saw them as “chosen,” “lavished,” and “sealed.” The fellowship breakfast that followed had one of the teens saying that he hadn’t ever experienced such an amazing Sabbath and weekend before. He said it didn’t feel like an obligation that weekend, and that he could see how God was specifically blessing him. No one wanted the experience to end, but when it did, it ended in the best way possible – with hugs and goodbye waves.

The Auburn church wants its youth to keep getting closer to each other and to keep meeting with God in these settings. Plans include events like paint night, serving in the community, and visiting people who don’t get out. The group will even manage a holiday get-together before the end of the year. And this is what’s really special: as the youth group gets more engaged and excited, the members of the church are getting excited about the youth group, and they have graciously opened their homes for youth events. As friendships are fostered, and as the wise and the young come together, God continues to bless and raise a church body whose first instinct is becoming more and more about pressing in together as a family.



Jordan & Kyla team up as an unstoppable nerf-gun duo.



The campfire glows with different colors from a fire color pack!

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.

THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

By Scott Christiansen

Selfishness is an absolutely terrible organizing principle upon which to base any system. The problem with selfishness as the basis for a system is that the resulting system collapses in on itself; system failure comes from the inescapable nature of selfishness – it drives all members of a system to be in competition with each other and to progressively grow ever more aggressive, ever more lethal, ever more ruthless. In the end, every member of the system perishes.

The bottom line is that you don't want to be a part of any system that is based on selfishness. And yet, tragically, we are. When we read the account of God's creation of the world, we can understand that it was created in complete harmony with His character. That is to say, nothing hurt or destroyed. Nothing killed anything else. Basically, nothing took as the basis of its existence. Instead, and consistent with the character of God, everything gave as the basis of its existence.

If you strain to understand such a system, that is normal; only the tattered remnants of this system are in evidence around us, and so the concept is foreign. Our physical and societal world, created with love as its organizing principle, is now based on selfishness and is collapsing in on itself. This collapse is slow at first but accelerates dramatically as the end-game is reached. And here is the thing: we are in the end-game.

Jesus Himself described what the world would be like in the early end-game stage. Or, as He put it, "the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8). In a riveting discourse to His disciples,

Jesus described in Matthew 24 (and Luke 21, and Mark 13) a world that was beset by epic famine, drought, disease and conflict. He described a world where both natural and human societal systems were in collapse, and panic was setting in as mankind realized the extent of the rapidly accelerating crisis (Luke 21:26).

As we look at the simultaneous accelerating decline of earth's natural systems and human society, we know what to expect: epic drought, epic flooding, epic heat waves and cold waves, forced human migration (and desperate migrants turned back by nations whose hearts have gone cold: Matthew 24:12), famine, disease, and massive conflict between people groups and between nations. We are seeing, in real time, the start of all of this.

We – you and I – are called on to proclaim to the world that this twisted kingdom we live in is doomed, and that we should turn our backs on Satan and his kingdom and should embrace Christ and His kingdom of love. We should also be demonstrating what this kingdom of love is like by living out the character of our King. After all, if we don't show the world what a kingdom of love looks like, how will they know one exists?

Recently, a single day in the news cycle brought an article that showed that poison algae is now spreading rapidly through our warming oceans and killing an epic amount of sea-life. The trend, if plotted out, could easily end in near-dead seas filled with red, blood-like algae. Another article pointed to the astonishing series of natural disasters in California and asked if it was still a livable place, then pointed out that the rest of the nation and world would soon



be experiencing disasters of a similar nature. Another article said the sea level rise and its impacts have been underestimated, and some 300 million will be forced to migrate in the near future to escape rising seas – except that many have literally nowhere to go.

When Christ sat with His disciples and told them of the future, He included specific counsel for us: Don't be afraid, because all that is happening must happen (Matthew 24:6). With the fullness of the Bible as our resource, we now know why He said that. Satan's system ends disastrously, and the only way to show the entire universe that Satan's system is a complete fraud is to let it play out. While the collapse of Satan's system is playing out, all those who reject Satan and accept Christ as their Savior will be able to join Jesus in the earth made new – a stunningly beautiful creation that has love as its organizing principle, where nothing hurts or destroys, and where there is no suffering, no pain, no sickness and no death.

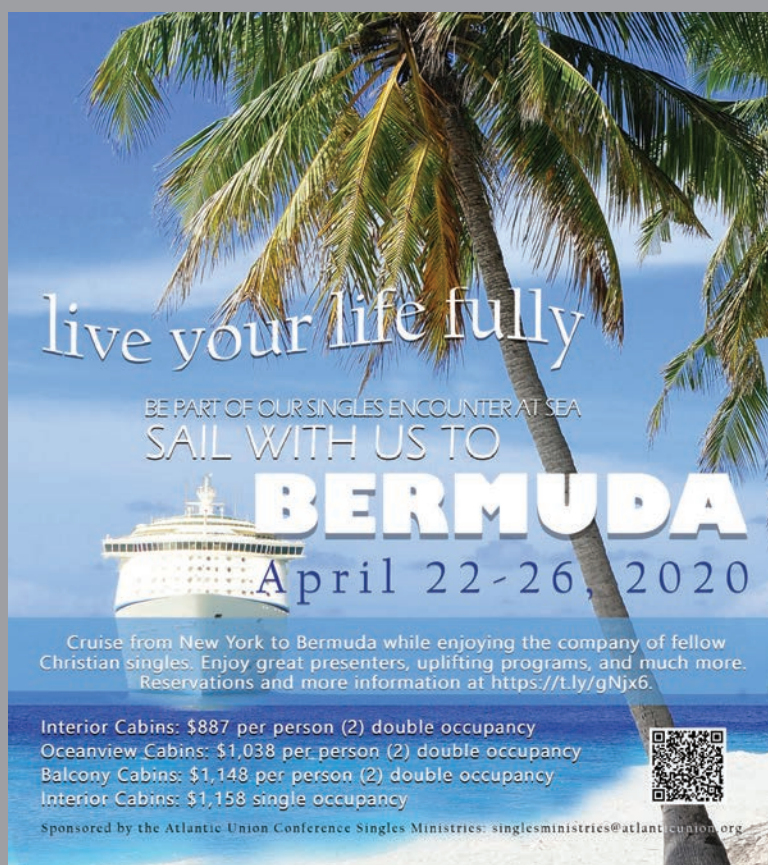
We're in the endgame, brothers and sisters, and we have much work to do in the short time that is left.

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