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When the angels sang for us



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British Union Conference Executive Committee notes

A 'thank you' and a plea for greater collaboration

As members of the British Union Conference Executive Committee met on 10 December via Zoom, to consider current financial realities and plan for 2021, their guiding principle in all matters was to help forward the mission of the church in the UK and Ireland.

'I cannot stress enough how grateful we are for the faithfulness of our members,' reported Earl Ramharacksingh (Treasurer). *'Per capita, BUC members return the third-highest tithe in the Adventist Church worldwide, a perspective we should not forget.'*

With BUC tithe by the end of October having reached 91% of 2019 tithe returns to the same period, the continuing faithfulness of members shines bright in challenging times. But, as the Union tithe report below shows, BUC-wide tithe is 8.9% down on 2019 (£1.7 million). For the BUC this is £213,000 below the expected level – a challenge the committee

worked together to address, facing the key question of what must be done to balance the 2021 budget in these fluid and uncertain times.

To help them in this task, they were informed and supported by the excellent work of the lay-led finance sub-committee, whose preparatory work helped keep in tension two challenges facing the Union:

1. What action must we immediately take to ensure that the BUC remains financially secure?
2. How can we ensure that the urgent and necessary cutbacks we make enhance mission?

Committee members agreed in recognising that a key role they have is to ensure, in partnership with the administration, that the BUC becomes ever more effective and efficient for mission.



As the discussion continued throughout the day, 'collaboration is key' was the recurring theme – particularly if we are to weather this financial storm.

Could building better strategic partnerships and finding other ways of doing things be the way forward? When it comes to church departments, the 'silo' mindset is over. In the corporate world, it is about collaboration, and it's time for the church to do likewise.

'Directors should be harnessing the energy and talent of those at grassroots.'

'I could not agree more,' commented Pastor Ian Sweeney; *'we have one mission, and our job is to find ways of supporting each other to that end.'*

As the committee came to the end of its work for the day, one thing was clear. On the matter of collaboration, the conversation has just begun.

EDITOR

British Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Tithe Report - October 2020

This Month	2020	2019	Inc / -Dec	Variance %
South	£1,546,280	£1,229,947	£316,333	25.7
North	£601,997	£472,500	£129,498	27.4
Welsh	£34,018	£28,980	£5,039	17.4
Scottish	£41,229	£34,230	£6,999	20.4
Irish	£93,246	£65,559	£27,687	42.2
Total	£2,316,771	£1,831,215	£485,555	26.5%

Cumulative to Date

South	£11,441,576	£12,615,767	£-1,174,192	-9.3%
North	£4,849,008	£5,404,684	£-555,675	-10.3%
Welsh	£349,563	£332,884	£16,679	5.0%
Scottish	£370,259	£346,917	£23,342	6.7%
Irish	£691,846	£741,739	£-49,893	-6.7%
Total	£17,702,252	£19,441,991	£-1,739,739	-8.9%

Budgets	Annual	To Date	Variance	%
South	£15,922,044	£13,268,370	£-1,826,794	-13.8%
North	£6,750,000	£5,625,000	£-1,125,000	-16.7%
Welsh	£426,000	£355,000	£-71,000	-16.7%
Scottish	£427,000	£355,833	£-71,167	-16.7%
Irish	£920,000	£766,667	£-153,333	-16.7%
Total	£24,445,044	£20,370,870	£-4,074,174	-16.7%
BUC	£2,379,967	£1,983,306	£-396,661	-16.7%

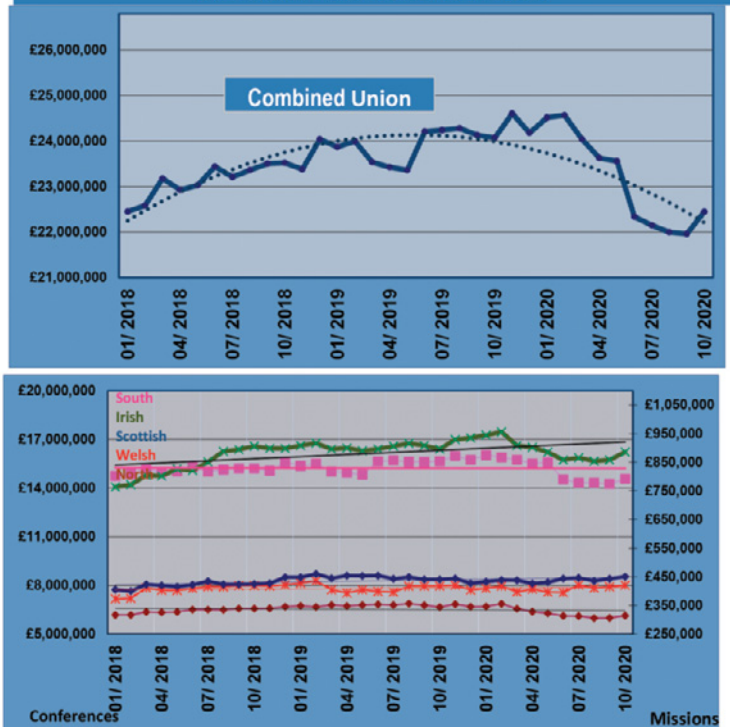
Dear trustees,

The month-long lockdown has now been replaced by tiered restrictions across the country. Tithe returns have greatly improved, and salient figures are mentioned below:

1. BUC-wide tithe is down on 2019 by £1,739,739 (8.9%).
2. SEC & NEC tithe is down by £1.17m (9.3%) and £555k (10.3%) on 2019.
3. The SM (+6.7%) and WM (+5.0%) continue to reflect positive returns during the pandemic.
4. The BUC projected budgeted tithe income is £213k below the expected level.
5. The SEC and NEC are £1.82m and £775k below their budgeted tithe income respectively.

British Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Annualised Tithe Trends 2018 - 2020



6. BUC cash flow continues to fall in the eight months to November 2020.

We pray for God's hand in bringing healing and comfort to all those affected. Ahead of our year-end meeting, the finance committee met to present suggestions for a balanced 2021 budget.

'Let's get extraordinarily connected with our communities. We will be much poorer as a society if we don't fight for the people we serve' (Caron Bradshaw, CEO, Charity Finance Group).

EARL RAMHARACKSINGH



David Neal, Editor

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight When the angels sang for us!

'Don't worry,' says the angel;
'I've got some good news for
you about Christ the Lord.'



For most of this year, whenever we have been able to gather together for worship, weddings, or funeral services, singing has either been prohibited or strongly discouraged. 'Singing . . . increases the risk of transmission through small droplets and aerosols,' state the Government's COVID-19 regulations for churches.¹ As much as we try to mitigate this with hymns played over the PA, we know there's something missing – our voices! It is just not the same as 'joining together' with fellow worshippers, 'lifting our voices' to the Lord. The current restrictions made me wonder about what actually happens to us when we sing hymns together.

First, through the words we sing, a hymn 'stir[s] up . . . love and good works' in us (Hebrews 10:24, ESV); **second**, it creates community, draws us closer together, and helps create a feeling of unity; and **third**, it helps us in 'spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching' (Hebrews 10:25, MSG).

Hopefully, it will not be too long before we can sing together again. As the year draws to a close, it feels quite a relief to think, with a thankful heart, that we have weathered the storm this far. By no measure can we say the pandemic in the UK and Ireland is under control, but the arrival of the vaccine provides hope. From a secular perspective, it is the current 'saviour of the world', able to deliver humankind from the power of the virus. It is as if it is the hope, in response to all the fears we've faced this year.

But revisit with me for a moment the Bethlehem story, particularly as recorded by

Luke (Luke 1:5-2:40). It is the story of the birth of Jesus, who existed in another form before human history began: how He entered our world, and joined the human race. It is a mystery. It is supernatural, and Luke 'goes big' on making that clear. Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:35). Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41). 'Just and devout' Simeon receives the Holy Spirit (2:25, KJV).

To the rational mind it is a crazy story – beyond reason. Luke, a physician and historian, is acutely aware of this as he writes to Theophilus, the educated and highly placed Gentile official. Carefully recording what eyewitnesses have told him, he knows he has to get this story right: the most important he will ever tell. As a companion of Paul, he's seen its effect far beyond Jerusalem, and is overflowing about the Person of Jesus, who joined the human race not just to save Jews, but everyone. Everyone is included, even a group of Bethlehem shepherds.

The Bethlehem orthodox people lived 'ordered' lives and were meticulous about how things should be. They had learned well, and expected others to follow suit. Their holy writings informed them that they were chosen. By extension, then, 'others' were not, and obviously were lesser people. 'Others' included a group of shepherds on the Bethlehem hills. They knew them well, and required their services to supply the temple, morning and evening, with an unblemished lamb to be sacrificed for worship.

Humble folk were the shepherds. How could they be expected to live an ordered and meticulous life looking after sheep? They are

on night shift, expecting it to be routine. It is not. Luke records: 'An angel of the Lord appeared to them' (Luke 2:9, ESV). They are terrified. 'Don't worry,' says the angel; 'I've got some good news for you about Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:10, 11, my paraphrase). The angel doesn't disappear, but is joined by a gigantic choir of angels singing an anthem.

*'Glory to God in the highest Heaven!
Peace upon earth among men of goodwill!'*
(2:14, Phillips)

It was to simple men, 'the outsiders', that God's message came first. If a mass choir was required to announce the arrival of the Messiah, surely the great and the good should be told, and surely the prince would be found in a palace. Was there a purpose to being born to a low-status Hebrew mother, in a dirty cave underneath a house, usually used for animals (forget the stable/barn-type structure), in the insignificant village of Bethlehem?

Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem because of the Roman census. Away from their home surroundings of Nazareth, there were no friends around them to greet the news of a newborn. Tradition was that when a boy was born, local musicians would congregate at the house to greet and celebrate with simple music. For this Bethlehem newborn, this did not happen. No music to celebrate the birth of the Messiah? Not in the village, but on the hills!

Is it possible that the angelic choir celebrated with an anthem due to the absence of singing in the village?

Were it possible for us to gather for our regular carol services, more likely than not we would sing, 'O Little Town of Bethlehem'. The last line of the first verse reads, 'The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight', which for me speaks volumes about all that we've collectively been through this year – illness, suffering, insecurity, challenges, and grief – unimaginable from the perspective of this time last year, with more fear than hope.

Who hasn't wondered at some time during the year, 'Lord, what on earth is going on?' – causing us to consider Paul's question, 'Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us?' (Romans 8:35, ICB.) Max Lucado suggests that God answered our question before we asked it:

*'So we'd see His answer, He lit the sky with a star; so we'd hear it, He filled the night with a choir; and so we'd believe it, He did what no man had ever dreamed. He became flesh and dwelt among us. He placed His hand on the shoulder of humanity and said, "You're something special."'*²

Something so special that where we can't sing this year, angels can sing for us?

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july> ²Max Lucado, cited in *Amazed by Grace*, W Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee (2003)

An interview with Dr Carlton P. Byrd

Many *MESSENGER* readers will know Dr Carlton P. Byrd for his ministry at the South England Conference Camp Meeting and as speaker/director of Breath of Life Ministries. With twenty-six years in ministry, his experience is both deep and wide. The base for his ministry reach is Oakwood University Church on the campus of Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, where he serves as senior pastor. The editor recently zoomed in with Dr Byrd for a wide-ranging conversation about his ministry, the church, mission, and – of course – that election.

David Neal: Thank you, Dr Byrd, for taking time to share your ministry with *MESSENGER* readers. In the light of the recent US presidential election, what is your assessment of the state of the nation at present?

Carlton Byrd: 2020 has been a year we will never forget. We have experienced extreme wildfires and hurricanes. COVID-19 is going up. The unjust killings of Ahmad Arbery, Riana Taylor, and George Floyd by police officers have led people to speak out loudly against racism. Put all that together with the tumultuous federal election, and there is a spirit of unrest.

DN: Is the church unsettled?

CB: The church is a microcosm of the nation. There is racism within the church, real or perceived. There is also much concern about the church not growing. The North American Division (NAD) is experiencing flat membership growth. Consequently, has the time come to decentralise our resources – for our youth, in particular? Is it time for the local church to be better resourced? I say, 'Yes, it is.' Younger members continue to be concerned about the lack of progress regarding women's ordination and worship methods.

DN: I notice you express concern about youth.

CB: We are rightly concerned in the US about the physical loss of young lives; but COVID-19 has exacerbated a crisis we've known about for a long time: the loss of their spiritual life. In the era of Zoom church, video church, and virtual church, young people are not attending or watching church. Virtual programmes are planned, but they do not view. Church services are produced, but they don't watch.

DN: As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, how has your ministry adapted to the shutdown of your local church?

CB: When the pandemic began, the

awareness of our Sabbath worship television ministry shot up out of the roof with 8-10,000 viewers on one particular Sabbath. By the following mid-week, the number of views had risen to 50,000.

How's this for a reality? An online viewer requested to be baptised – and travelled down from New York to Huntsville (a 900-mile journey each way) to be baptised on a Friday evening. Naturally, we will work to link her with her nearest Adventist church. It makes me wonder, what is the post-COVID-19 church going to look like? Are members going to return? Is the virtual worship experience here to stay? What is the long-term impact on our youth?

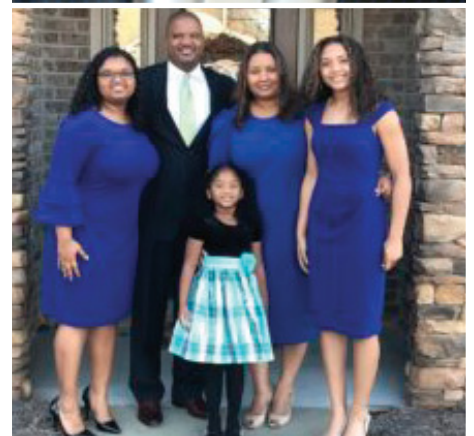
DN: In a 2017 *Ministry* magazine article entitled 'Give them a fighting chance' (referring to youth), you talked about the challenge of 'revelation without relevance'. What do you mean by that?

CB: Don't misunderstand me. There's nothing wrong with our message – the message remains constant – but the methods must be packed in a relevant way. Keep them packed as they are, and youth will leave. Sometimes there's a mindset that because we have the truth, that's all we need. We say that 'we want you to stay' – on our terms and by our methods! How does this work?

Take, for example, worship. If you are a conservative worshipper, go and win some conservative folk for Christ. Your energies should not primarily be focused on trying to tell youth (in particular) how wrong they are. Use your energy to proclaim the Gospel.

DN: I'm hearing you give permission for much-needed change – not only in the local church, but at all levels of church life?

CB: The question here, as ever, is about relevance. Is the way we currently operate helping or hindering mission? If not, time to retool and recalibrate for the sake of mission! If the COVID-19 story has taught us anything, it is that when we need to adapt – we adapt!



Dr Byrd with his wife, Danielle, and three daughters, Christyn, Cailleigh, and Carissa

With the increased demand for ministry relevance and engagement on the local level, I believe resources should be re-allocated to afford greater monies to be available to support the work of the local church.

DN: From your perspective, what does this look like in practice?

CB: The first question I would ask of the local Conference to the General Conference – all these positions we have, are they really merited? Do we need a full-time departmental director at every level?

DN: In one of your recent sermons, you painted a picture of the penal, judicial, education, and police systems as overtly and covertly contributing to the racial injustices in US society today. The election of the next US president is a symbol of hope for many. How does this pivot into the Adventist understanding of apocalyptic prophecy, particularly about the US? Are we still to sing the song, 'This world is not my home . . .', or do we join the movement for change?

CB: From a social and political perspective,

things aren't necessarily going to improve, given the possibility that economic systems may collapse. But from a spiritual perspective they are – Jesus is coming back to get His redeemed; that is the hope! Our view of what's going on in society is through a biblically Adventist lens, much different to that of our neighbour. We see the world half-full!

Let me illustrate. I love to watch American football, but due to my schedule I often need to record the game. When I watch the recording, I like to fast-forward to the end of the game to see who's won or lost. If my team wins I will watch the game, despite how they mess up during the game. It doesn't matter, because in the end they are going to win.

In our Christian experience, it often seems that we're losing and we're down: but there is always good news, because we know how the end is going to be. It's interesting that you raise this question, because in my 21 November sermon, shortly after the election, I felt a need to address the topic, 'It's going to get better', which *MESSENGER* readers are welcome to view at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nClIfmYO_U.

DN: How has COVID-19 affected the Oakwood University church?

CB: I just buried a church member this week. There is a lot of illness and a lot of hurt. But through this we seek to serve the community in a number of ways. For the election, we became a voting precinct for 3,000 people. We facilitate flu vaccinations and COVID-19 testing. For Thanksgiving we prepared 500

food baskets for the community with cars queueing up a mile long to receive a basket. I want to give thanks for the faithfulness of our members, for both their acts of service and their tithe return. We are experiencing a serious tithe gain.

DN: How does the local church connect with Breath of Life Ministries?

CB: Breath of Life Ministries helps our church reach beyond its walls; during COVID-19 its reach has increased locally, nationally and globally. Members and Bible workers cannot currently knock on doors, so Breath of Life and the church are partnering together to overcome this challenge. For each viewer we offer Bible study courses (including for youth), helping them not just to study further, but also to fall in love with Christ. Whether near or far, the local pastor is invited to follow up with a visit.

Frequently we connect with national US figures to both understand and inform. This summer we strengthened our global reach with an evangelistic meeting in Tanzania, where 16,000+ people committed to following Christ and were baptised. We are currently producing a special Christmas programme for ABC television to be aired in a few weeks' time.

DN: What does it mean for a pastor to minister with excellence?

CB: When a physician or attorney attends college – and, later, professional school – they prepare to serve with a high level of

professionalism. An Adventist pastor should prepare to serve at the same level. We need to be strong with customer service – not just pastors, but the entire church. If you visit my church, I want you to see excellence. If worship is to contribute to the evangelistic reach of the church, three things are required.

- Members have to want to be there.
- Members must be proud to invite their friends.
- Whoever attends should be eager to return.

Remember this. Our people are the best advertisement for our church. Whether we pastor a church of 30 or 300, the blessings of God are not on places, but on people. God rewards faithfulness.

DN: Dr Byrd, thank you for sharing these informative, encouraging and challenging insights with *MESSENGER* readers. Before we sign off, can you share a few thoughts on the role of the Bible for living in these times?

CB: The Bible is still our most valuable resource. For these times, study the life of Christ. Study Daniel and Revelation. Prophecy, for me, makes the Bible make sense. As preachers, we have a sacred responsibility to make the Bible come alive with relevance. If we want people to join the advent movement, then we've got to preach the Adventist message. I often wonder if we believe in our message like we used to.

To see more about the work of Breath of Life Ministries in 2020, go to this link: <https://breathoflife.tv/>

Contemporary Evangelism for the 21st Century

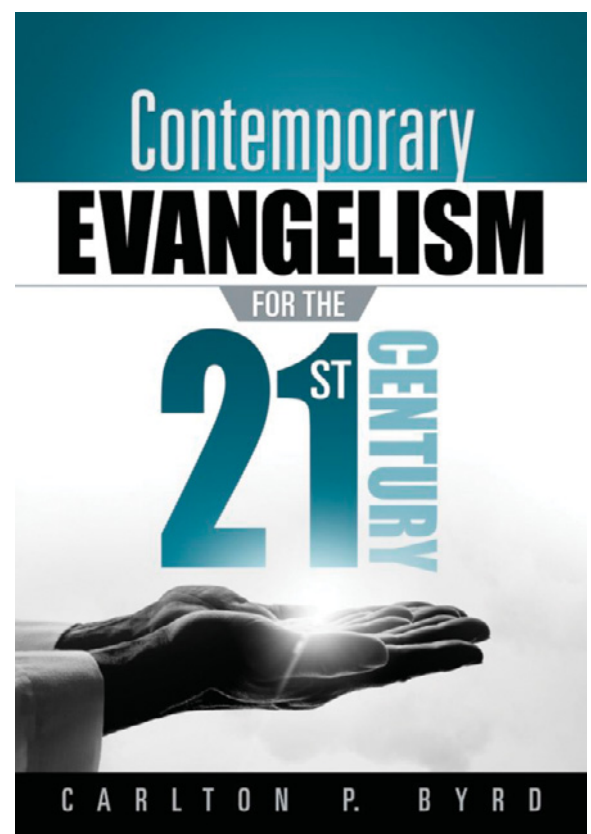
The Seventh-day Adventist Church must continue to develop and embrace effective methods of reaching the unsaved. These contemporary approaches should demonstrate the relevance of our message to the issues of today and still adhere to the fundamental tenets of our faith.

Dr Carlton P. Byrd is in a unique position to explore the topic of contemporary evangelism. The attendance at his previous church, Atlanta-Berean, quadrupled in a few short months after his arrival. His ground-breaking approach to worship and evangelism together has been a catalyst for growth and change.

In this book, *Contemporary Evangelism for the 21st Century*, Dr Byrd has done just that. He carefully outlines the historical successes of evangelistic efforts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He goes on to provide a thoughtful, tested means of adapting the key elements of our prior successes to our highly secularised, socially diverse, and economically dissimulated culture.

Available for £12 + p&p from:

<https://lifesourcebookshop.co.uk/product/contemporary-evangelism-for-the-21st-century/>



Lockdown – what lockdown?

A new word is commonly used these days: namely, *lockdown*. This is the word that describes the interruption to the economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pubs, clubs, theatres, sports centres and many businesses have been forced to close temporarily to try and slow down the spread of the pandemic, and some businesses have folded due to financial pressures.

So, what about the church? Has it been forced to close due to the lockdown? Well, yes and no. True, we have been forced to close down temporarily, view services online, and be subject to restrictions on our return to church, but this hasn't stopped us from being active – in fact, it has opened other doors.

Well, that has been the experience at Balham, as some have taken advantage of the opportunities the lockdown has presented with both hands. The interest coordinator has used Zoom technology as a platform to start Bible studies – enabling participants to study the Bible from their homes. Another study/fellowship group has also sprung up using new technology. Members told their friends and families, and at its peak a total of 20 people have been studying in the two groups from places as far away as the US, Canada and Zambia. Lockdown? What lockdown? The spreading of the Gospel hasn't been locked down – that's for sure!

Just one day before the latest national lockdown, Marcia, Malika and Doreen gave their lives to Christ and were baptised. How Marcia and Malika came to Christ is shared in the stories they tell . . .

Marcia Biggs was christened in the Church of England and worshipped as an Anglican for several years; but during these years she kept on searching. At one point in her spiritual journey, many years ago, she was given the book *The Ministry of Healing*, providing an insight into Adventist teaching and practice; and more recently she attended one of our churches. She responded to an advert for a sewing class at Balham, aimed at connecting with the community; and sewing and discovering good friends led to Bible studies. Learning about Christ being Lord of the Sabbath became a 'wow' moment – and the rest is history.

Due to a health condition, Marcia was unable to enter the water for baptism, but was accepted into fellowship on profession of faith and appealed for others to consider baptism, as she believes it would be the 'the best decision they could ever make'.

Malika Cornwall wasn't brought up in a Christian home, but frequently stayed with her grandparents, who were Christians. Often they would visit her Adventist uncle and aunt, members of the Plaistow church.

While at university, Malika occasionally attended an Adventist church with her Adventist neighbour, and after graduating she decided to discover more about the Christian faith. Contacting the South England Conference office for information, she was directed to Balham Church and joined one of the Bible study groups.

As her love for God grew, nurtured by her friends, she decided to give her life to Christ in baptism. When asked what she would say to someone considering baptism, she replied, 'Once you set your heart on doing it, just do it!' She is thankful that she made the decision to do it.

So, God can open doors even during the lockdown – whether through an online or telephone Bible study; calling church and family members to see how they are doing; shopping for an infirm or elderly neighbour; or providing food to those who are financially strapped. We can still do something! Lockdown? I say, 'What lockdown?'

ERROL ANDERSON



Malika Cornwall



Doreen Daley



(Back row, left to right): pastoral team – Sally Brown, Bartholomew John, Sharon Cameron, Pastor Akakpo
(Front row, left to right): new members – Malika Cornwall, Marcia Biggs, Doreen Daley

Photos: Paul Brown

BUC online Christmas schedule of programmes on YouTube

(Search 'BUC News YouTube')

Friday 25 December

5.30pm London Adventist Chorale (Dr Daniel Duda)
6.30pm BUC Children's Thanksgiving Concert
8.00pm Three Cosmic Messages – Mark Finley

Saturday 26 December

10.00am BUC Online Service



Reading West Life Development – reaching out in faith

Reaching out to our community during lockdown and the UK tier system has been problematic to say the least. However, Reading West Church decided to look at our situation positively and utilise the technology we had to reach out into our community in ways not tried before.

Zoom was new to us all in March, but by June we began to see opportunities for a church without walls. What if we could build relationships with community groups who would share our church programmes within their respective communities?

By God's grace we were blessed to have a church member, Cecily Mwaniki, connect us with groups supporting mental health services. Cecily invited me to join one of the groups, and within a few short weeks Reading West had launched its first Life Development programme for the community.

Pastor Victor Hulbert presented a programme titled 'A Matter of Conscience', discussing the terrible time his grandfather faced as a pacifist in the time of war. On that first Tuesday evening with over 30 participants, 10 were friends from the community.

As Pastor Victor shared his presentation, followed by questions and reflection, one community participant, Mary, told us that her parents were leaders in the Salvation Army during wartime and also struggled with the same problems.

We soon realised that the programmes we had been running within the walls of the church building for years were of great interest to the wider community. More programmes followed: 'How to Boost Your Immunity' (a health programme by Sonia Locker), and 'COVID-19 & Social Stigma' (presented by two psychiatric department heads in Oxford and Reading).

August, September and October followed with more health and social care programmes. Mufalo Aka, the South England Conference Area 5 Health Coordinator, ran a 'Know Your Numbers' programme, highlighting statistics for weight, BMI, blood pressure, and blood sugar.

This programme was picked up by Thames Valley TV, who requested to interview Mufalo and promote the programme on their channel reaching the Thames Valley area. Due to the programme's success, Mufalo is now running the NEWSTART health programme on a monthly basis into January 2021.

October also saw another step forward for outreach to the community. The Reading West Small Group Evangelism leadership group discussed different types of outreach. We concluded that health and social care programmes are subjects of interest to all and easily accessible. However, as a follow-on, we felt it would be appropriate to try and answer the faith questions that community friends are asking. With this in mind we launched our 'Tough Questions' programmes.

Pastor Dan Serb, President of the Irish Mission, was our first speaker on the subject, 'Is There a God?' This meeting was attended by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and atheists. Pastor Dan spoke confidently, respectfully and tactfully to all, showing that there is a God.

What does the future hold for Reading West Life Development? It takes time and preparation to plan for these programmes. It takes a great deal of time and effort to attend numerous community programmes, to make friends and build relationships – but it is worth it!

As Reading West has built relationships in the community, it seems



Pastor Victor Hulbert



Mufalo Akayombokwa



Pastor Dan Serb



Annice Thomas



Sonia Locker

the community now wants to know more about us. As we make our presentations, we pray at the beginning and end, and speak openly about our faith.

It is our experience that, far from being offended, people from other faith backgrounds appreciate the fact that in a secular and pluralistic society we can speak openly about our relationship with God.

At our 8 December session, Pastor David Neal led a discussion on 'If God Exists, Why Is There Suffering?' and community champion Anthony Darway spoke about his work in war-torn Sierra Leone to empower women and young people to become self-sufficient on 15 December.

At the time of writing this article, I answered my phone to an interviewer from BBC Radio who had received the promotion for Pastor Neal's programme; he wanted to contact and interview Pastor Neal.

It is our prayer that we will continue to build healthy relationships with other well-meaning groups in the community, and that through these relationships we will in the fullness of time see decisions being made for the family of God.

PASTOR TREVOR THOMAS

BUC celebrates 25 years of Women's Ministries

by Sharon Platt-McDonald, BUC Director for Women's Ministries, Health & Adventist Community Services



How would you mark a quarter of a century? Twenty-five years is a significant milestone.

Sunday 4 to Sabbath 10 October saw the acknowledgement of 25 years of God leading Women's Ministries – a reciprocal demonstration of love, commitment and service to the work of God.

Under the theme, 'Celebrating the Journey', the celebrations, hosted by SEC Women's Ministries, continued for seven days, providing a rich feast of Women's Ministries highlights on YouTube and Facebook. The prerecorded segments shared the milestones of the progress made, and God's interventions along the way. We reviewed the present successes and challenges, the people we have been grateful for, and the possibilities that lie before us, petitioning God for His future leading.

A key blessing were the presidential interviews, where the leaders of all our BUC territories and their wives shared words of encouragement and commendation.

Sunday commenced with the theme: '**The Journey Begins**'. Heather-Dawn Small (Women's Ministries Director for our world church) spoke about the commencement of Women's Ministries at the General Conference, and her role in office over the past 19 years; and we also heard from Heather Haworth (our first Women's Ministries director at the BUC) in an interview with Jacqueline Otokpa (SEC Women's Ministers Director). Additional interviews featured enriching testimonies, including that of Jacqueline Otokpa.

Monday featured '**Journeying with the TED**', an overview of events, initiatives, programmes and resources produced by the Women's Ministries Department of the Trans-European Division. Clair Sanches (TED Women's Ministries Director) gave an inspirational sermon to help us 'dress' for the journey with character-building spiritual attire.

On Tuesday we focused on **the British Union Conference**. The rich reports of in-reach and outreach initiatives in the Missions yielded appreciative comments from the viewers, and past and present Women's Ministries leaders and assistants were acknowledged. Sharon Platt-McDonald (BUC Women's Ministries Director) emphasised the impact of Jesus coaching us on our journey in preparation for heaven.

Wednesday evening's programme, '**Journeying with the SEC**', featured a rich collage of nationalities sharing their music, testifying of God's leading, and describing how challenges were overcome and individuals made an impact. Raquel Arrais (Associate Director for Women's Ministries at the General Conference) described women being touched by God to rise in service for Him.

Thursday took us on a journey to the **North England Conference**, where women shared



their inspiring testimonies of God enabling them to overcome. The leaders' encouragement, engaging reports, and inspirational singing gave evidence of God's leading. Beulah Plunkett motivated us to continue in committed and focused work for God.

On Friday we reflectively analysed **the events of Elim**, one of the spots where the children of Israel encamped following their exodus from Egypt. It is an oasis in the desert. Drawing comparisons with the bitter waters of Marah, viewers were invited to leave the bitterness of life behind, in exchange for the refreshing waters of Elim. Enriching sermons from Annell Smith and Linda Kuwada, together with uplifting songs and testimonials, transported us heavenward.

Sabbath 10 October marked the culmination of our journey in a full day's programme. Beulah Plunkett reviewed our lesson study, followed by powerful testimonies of God breaking through in the lives of women and their families. Heather-Dawn Small's enlightening sermon reflected on **reasons to celebrate our journey with God** with thanksgiving. Florie Belle Yang opened the afternoon segment with a reflection on the Israelites' journey from Marah to Elim, followed by celebratory singing, instrumentals and interviews uplifting the God we celebrate.

We are grateful to all who have assisted our journey to this point, including our film

crews, photographers, singers, musicians and all our speakers and presenters. Special acknowledgement goes to Peter Oppong-Mensah for the incredible amount of work he undertook to edit and prepare the video footage for public viewing.

The BUC wishes to acknowledge the tremendous work of Julia Smith and her significant contribution to Women's Ministries in the SEC. Though no longer with us, she has left an indelible legacy, for which we continue to give God thanks.

As we review this milestone week, we give God our highest praise for His leading thus far. With His continued guidance, we embrace the words of Ellen G. White in her reassuring statement: '*We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.*'

To God be the glory; great things He has done, is currently doing, and will continue to do. You can view the week's programme via the following platforms:

SEC Women's Ministries YouTube Channel
(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPsSleyR3606KUWNjCmAy9A>)

SEC Media YouTube Channel
(<https://www.youtube.com/user/secadventist>)

SEC Media Facebook Channel
(<https://www.facebook.com/SECmediaHD>)

Thank you for journeying with us.

Life is a journey

As reported on the opposite page, Clair Sanches, Trans-European Division Women's Ministries Director, gave an inspirational Monday sermon, a summary of which we share here.



'God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together' (Colossians 3:12-14, CEV).

When my boys were small, we would head out to Sweden, a two-day drive. We packed the car and caravan and were ready to go; but soon came the dreaded question, repeated constantly: *'Are we there yet?'* All our kids were focused on was our final destination. They weren't interested in what was on the way: they just wanted to arrive!

This is how many of us are when it comes to God's will for our lives. The Bible portrays the Christian life as a journey. Of course, the destination is important to us, but is it possible that the journey is just as important as the destination – or even more important?

My dear sisters, don't make the mistake of thinking, even for a moment, that lacking knowledge of God's will for your life means that you are not making any progress. You may be going through a great struggle, but that struggle is all part of the process of birthing all God wants to do in your life. God *always* prepares us for what He has in store for us! That process may be uncomfortable, but it is necessary.

When I was growing up, we weren't exactly poor, but we weren't well off either. I remember receiving a lot of clothes from friends and family. Today I want to present you with some hand-me-downs: clothes from Jesus Christ, which He invites you to wear.

In Colossians 3:12-14 God tells us to 'clothe' ourselves. *'Dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you'* (Message). There's a reason why Jesus has provided these clothes for you, and why you must put them on.

Put on caring

We live in a proud society. We think that the world revolves around us; and, when it doesn't, we try to *make* it revolve around us. But what if we showed gentleness, instead? What if we were to show patience, instead of resentment and revenge? These are the threads that go into the garment of 'caring', and they were woven into Jesus' life.

Compassion

A compassionate person not only balances his chequebook, but also helps the people around him. What's going on with the people at church; my family; my colleagues; neighbours; friends? Is everything OK? What can I do to help them? 'Clothe yourselves with compassion . . .'

Kindness

Kindness includes not only saying nice things, but doing nice things. Kindness goes above and beyond the call of duty to help someone out. A woman's small child began pulling all the sweets in a shop onto the floor. One of the packets burst open and there were Smarties everywhere. 'Don't worry about this,' said the attendant; 'I'll clean it up: you just do your shopping.' 'Clothe yourselves with kindness . . .'

Humility

Humility means recognising your own weaknesses, not thinking about how great you are.

Meet Moses, described as the humblest man on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). Leading two million people through the desert probably helped! 'Clothe yourselves with humility . . .'

Gentleness

I remember how nervous I was when a friend let me hold a vase worth

over €3,000. You cannot begin to imagine how careful I was, placing that vase back on the table. That's how God wants us to treat people around us. 'Clothe yourselves with gentleness . . .'

Patience

The Greek word here contains the idea of being patient in unpleasant circumstances. Ever had your patience tested by a call centre operator? Even UK-based operators don't always get what you want just right; but how do you react to the call centre person from India or the Philippines? Be patient with those around you, even in trying circumstances.

These first five are *very* important. From now on, I resolve to wear these items of clothing. This is who I want to be. *I will be* compassionate; *I will be* kind, humble, gentle and patient. I will deal with people in a way that pleases God. It is a journey; it takes time and effort: but don't give up.

Forgiveness

And then there is the sixth item of clothing. If someone promises to pick you up at 2pm, and they forget and leave you standing out in the cold, you have a grievance. I'm sure we all could come up with a list of legitimate reasons why we are upset with certain people. But from now on I want to be a forgiver, whatever my grievances.

What does it mean to forgive? The last part of Colossians 3:13 says, *'Forgive . . . as Christ has forgiven you'* (CEV). Jesus, our Lord, could have many grievances against us, but He forgives us completely. Any sin in our account He wipes clean, without grudges – forgives and forgets! That's how Jesus wants us to forgive those around us, even when we have legitimate reasons to be upset.

Put on love

Finally, verse 14 says: *'And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony'* (ESV). That's the seventh and biggest item of clothing. After you have put on all these other virtues, put on love. What kind of love are we talking about? God is talking about a one-way kind of love. Love even those who are unlovable.

A personal challenge?

Spend time with Christ, and He will change you. Learn about His humility, His compassion, how He has taken all your sins away, and how far He was willing to go to save you. This will turn you into a forgiver. This will be my journey. My character is the only thing I will take to heaven with me.

'Take on an entirely new way of life – a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you' (Ephesians 4:22-24, MSG).

Let's pray.

O Lord Jesus, by this time next year, help me to be more compassionate, more kind, more humble, more gentle, more patient. By this time next year, help me to be a forgiver. Help me, more and more, to show that special, one-way kind of love that You have shown to me. Be with me through Your Holy Spirit as I journey towards all that You want me to be. Amen.



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LifeSource Bookshop will be an official vendor for tickets. See our website for more information: www.lifesourcebookshop.co.uk
This festival will feature some of our very best Adventist artists, including London Adventist Chorale (UK), Aeolians (US) and Take Six (US).

For more information, contact Trevor Johnson: tjohnson@stanboroughpress.org.uk

As supplied, errors and omissions excepted.

Stanborough Park Toy Service – 55th year

- In keeping with a 55-year tradition, Stanborough Park Church held its toy service on Sabbath 12 December, attended by the Mayor of Watford and social service officers. The toys were distributed to needy families under their care.
- The preacher was Pastor John Ferguson. A recording of the service and his sermon can be found at the following link: <https://livestream.com/accounts/640318/events/3160916/videos/214783975>



ADRA-UK Virtual Gift Box Appeal

Sent – 138 gifts given to Enfield Social Services for children in need in the borough. These were provided by the Houndsfield community hub run by the Edmonton church. They are one of the seven hubs throughout the UK who are distributing gifts and supporting children during the festive season, with the support of donations from the ADRA-UK 2020 Virtual Gift Box Appeal.



Seasonal reflections

by Bert Smit (CEO, ADRA-UK)



2020 will go down in history for many as the 'Year of COVID-19'; and, while it is true that the virus has impacted our world in so many ways, I will remember 2020 as the 'Year of Giving'. In 2020, despite the financial challenges, the introduction of the furlough scheme and the loss of jobs, people were generous. They gave of their time, their resources and their finances.

In 2020, people raised funds for ADRA-UK in different ways. Our yearly ADRA Appeal had to be adjusted. The door-to-door element wasn't viable, and the usual sponsorship activities that take place during the campaign were prohibitive due to the Government's restrictions. However, despite this, you remembered ADRA.

We ran appeals this year: the Hope and Restoration Appeal, the Beirut Emergency Appeal, and our Virtual Gift Box Appeal. Some of you participated in fund-raising activities, virtually and in person. Others gave their 'lunch money' as they were working from home; and our 'golden audience' continued to be open-hearted and donated much to the work that we do.

Thank you to all of our donors, who have given so generously in 2020.

In 2020 we were unable to visit our overseas projects, due to the pandemic. However, we continue to manage these projects with care, attention, due diligence and financial rigour.

Despite the pandemic, the Department for International Development (DFID), now merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to become the FCDO, provided funding for ADRA-UK to conduct a major new humanitarian project in Yemen.

Thank you to all of our staff and trustees, who have worked beyond the call of duty in 2020.

In 2020, under *The Umbrella Project*, part of our I AM Urban initiative, we were able to work with 73 grassroots community hubs in the UK and provide them with funding, some of which was provided by the Trans-European Division and Barclays PLC.

Thank you to the thousands of our volunteers who have worked so hard in 2020.

As we enter 2021 there is much uncertainty. The year will begin with 'Brexit being done' and a rollout of vaccines throughout the world. Early in the year, the world will welcome a new president of the United States.

In 2021 there will be many changes; but I am encouraged by Ellen White's words: 'We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us . . . in our past history.'

Here at ADRA-UK, we look forward to you continuing on our journey with us, as together we seek to build a better world while here on earth, through justice, compassion and love, so 'that all may live as God intended'.

AVAILABLE EARLY JANUARY 2021! **ONE-BEDROOM FLATS FOR RENT IN BINFIELD**

Located in the sought-after village of Binfield, close to shops, public transport and Bracknell town, these one-bedroom, one-bathroom semi-furnished flats have ample resident parking and are ideal for single professionals or couples.

With a private entrance off Terrace Road South and situated on the edge of the quiet campus of Newbold College of Higher Education with its preserved green spaces, these flats with open plan living and dining area are available to rent from early January. Windows are double-glazed for your comfort.

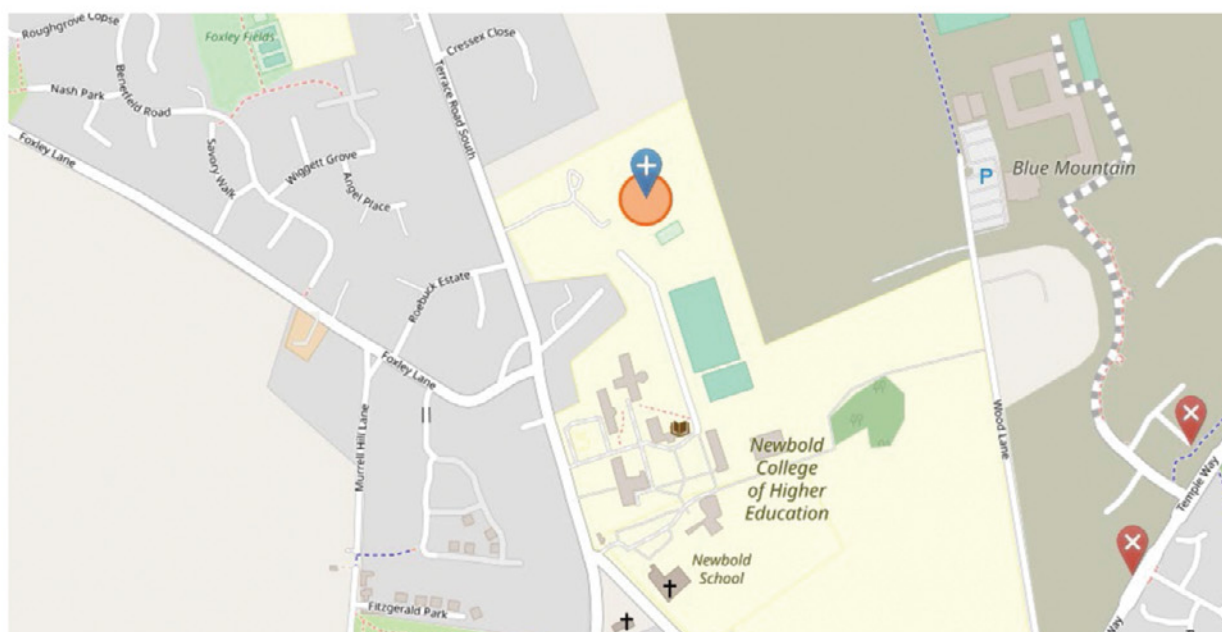
These semi-furnished flats include a double bed and mattress, a fridge/freezer and cooker, a two-seater sofa bed, and a dining table with four chairs.

Rent: £841/PCM plus utilities.

More information: Please send expressions of interest, or requests to view, to vderico@newbold.ac.uk

Key features

- Sought-after Binfield location
- Close to shops and transport
- Ample resident parking
- Available furnished
- Quiet location
- Ideal for single professionals or couples



November Diversity Lecture – 'Does Poverty Have a Colour?'



For its final lecture of 2020, the Newbold Diversity Centre was delighted to welcome Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, the CEO of Christian Aid, on Tuesday 10 November. The fact that she so clearly identifies as a Seventh-day Adventist added an extra dimension to the event. She framed her topic as a question: 'Does Poverty Have a Colour?' The subtitle added an extra dimension to her subject: 'How the Church can restore dignity, justice and equality for all'. As she surveyed the church universal and her own Adventist community, her answer to her own question was a resounding 'yes'.

Though she has only been in her current post for two years, Amanda has 25 years of experience in relief and humanitarian aid organisations like the United Nations and Voluntary Service Overseas. She has seen poverty and its devastating effects at close quarters. Part of the power of her lecture was her stories about places and people that she had visited in the course of her work. She opened with an account of her work with a women's group in Ethiopia, a country which has witnessed drought more and more frequently in recent years. Vast areas have become infertile, and people's lives have been put at severe risk.

She pointed out that the primary driver of much poverty in this case and many others is climate change, which has disrupted centuries-old cultural patterns and ways of survival. While people in the West debate the causes of climate change, millions elsewhere feel it in their stomachs. 'Those who suffer the worst consequences of environmental disaster are those outside the developed areas,' said Mukwashi. Those who are the greatest culprits when it comes to carbon emissions – the USA, Europe, Russia, China – experience the least impact on their daily life.

Everywhere, black/Asian/minority ethnic people are 'at the bottom of the food chain' and living in extreme poverty around the world. In the UK, children of colour are more likely to be in care and less likely to be legally adopted. Where ethnicity intersects with gender, women of colour will find themselves most disadvantaged.

The reasons for all of this are of course complex; but it is clear that an economic system based on slavery which has evolved and continues to evolve into a particular sort of capitalism is a primary cause of inequalities

and injustices. The UK is by no means blameless in these matters. For example, it is extraordinary to discover that it was only in 2015 that the UK Government finished paying off the debt it incurred by compensating slave owners, and that with the monies of taxpayers who are themselves the descendants of victims.

So – to the big question of the lecture: 'Where does the Adventist Church stand on these issues and others like them?'

It is important that the Christian church confesses its deep complicity in the slave trade. 'The church was not only actively involved and engaged in grading black Africans as subhuman,' said Mukwashi. 'It provided a rationale and gave permission for people to do so.' The church has slowly changed its view, but there is still much to be done in the business of restoration.

When it comes to developing dignity, love, justice and equality in the world, the church continues to do much to support the status quo. Its own structures replicate power structures and financial structures which are little different from their secular counterparts. The church still operates with hierarchical, male-dominated power structures. It still invests members' money in enterprises which use large quantities of fossil fuels.

Amanda testified that she had become an Adventist while at university, largely because of Adventist teaching on holistic human living; but, she observed, 'Adventists are not looking holistically at the business of production and consumption.' If the role of the church is to restore dignity to all human life, it cannot continue some of its current practices. It must redouble its efforts on behalf of the poor; it must work towards greener economies, and must grow towards true gender equality.

These matters are all intertwined – they are all about justice. The church will lose, is losing, its moral capital. It must engage with such issues.

Most of all, we can individually be models of inclusiveness, people who are quick to welcome and slow to exclude. God has dignified us, so we must bring dignity to others – and poverty is one of the great destroyers of dignity. So many of the causes of inequality and poverty are beyond the reach of individuals, but Mukwashi advised us to play a part locally. We can increase our charitable donations, of course. We can write to our MP. We can keep going to church to keep alive the sense of the dignity of the individual. We can talk more than we do about poverty, dignity and equality from the pulpit and in Bible study groups, without being party-political. We can review the way we as families and as a church spend our disposable income. We can lend our weight to groups which lobby for greater social justice in our world.

To conclude the lecture and the Q&A session which followed, Mukwashi left her online audience with a number of challenging questions to the church universal and the Adventist Church in particular. 'How would Jesus relate to the way we invest and in what we invest?' 'Are we using the power and influence we have to change things? What is the role of the church in restoring sacredness to human life?' 'If the church remains silent on these issues, then what is the role of the church?' 'We talk about redemption, love and compassion, but is the world experiencing love and compassion through us?'

The lecture's title question was answered – and more! 'Does poverty have a colour?' Yes – it is black and brown. Is the church in the business of 'restoring dignity, equality and justice to all'? Yes, but it has its blind spots. Our job is to be as clear-sighted as possible about what those failures might be.

If we keep listening to the voice of Amanda Khozi Mukwashi and others like her, maybe our eyesight will improve!

MICHAEL AND HELEN PEARSON, NOVEMBER 2020

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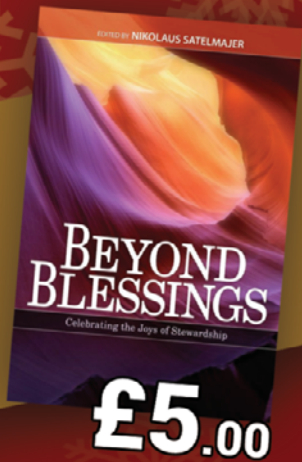
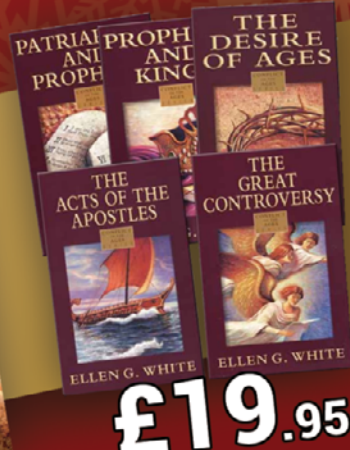
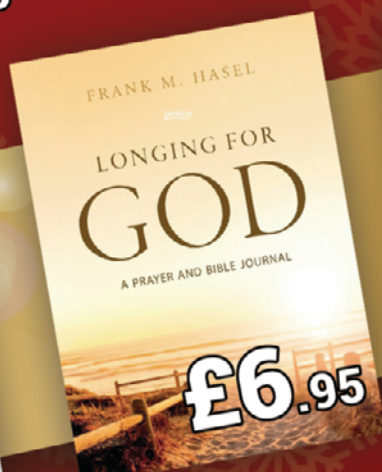
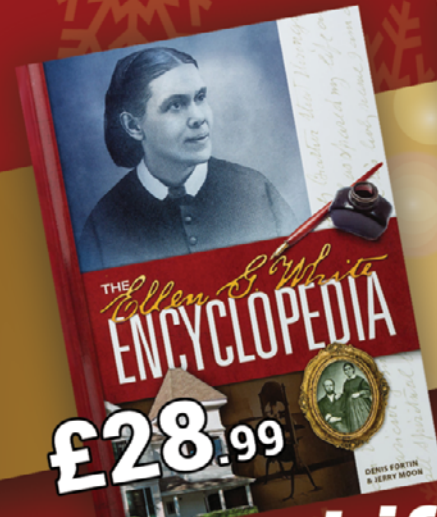
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New children's book on stewardship . . .

Lynne Sesinye-Samwinga has had a conviction about the principles of Christian stewardship for a long time: but over the last few years, as she has tried to share these principles with her children, she has noticed a resource gap. 'What can I do?' she thought, on discovering that by far the majority of stewardship resources were aimed at adults.

The result is a new children's picture book featuring bright, colourful illustrations which every child aged 3-9 can enjoy. *My Health: Eight ways I care for my body* is an excellent way of teaching children the important ways they can care for their bodies to be healthy. But, as Lynne explains, it is far more than that. 'I want children and parents to think of this book not simply as a book about teaching a

child to care for his or her body, but one in a series of books teaching that everything we are and do is because of God and His goodness to us.'

Lynne has written this first book under the banner of 'mini-stewards', and is in the process of publishing further volumes, teaching children the importance of looking after things which surround them, such as their environment, money, possessions, abilities, and time. 'As I develop this resource for children, I am also trying to extend the principle of stewardship beyond the return of tithe and the giving of offerings, as important as they are.'

An active member of the Newcastle church, Lynne continues, 'The six main principles of stewardship I decided to focus on are all about

taking care of everything God has placed in our care, using an easy-to-memorise acronym – 'STEWARDS', which stands for Sunlight, Trust, Exercise, Water, Air, Rest, Diet, and Self-control.

Stewardship means putting God first in our lives, taking care of the resources He provides, including caring for his creation. One day He plans to renew the earth. In the meantime, as Lynne points out, 'What can have a more solid biblical foundation than teaching our children to be responsible global citizens?'

The General Conference Stewardship Ministries Department could not agree more, as they currently consider ways of using Lynne's publishing skills to help build their stewardship ministries for children.

To purchase this book, go to: <https://lifesourcebookshop.co.uk/product/my-health/>

Readers interested in stewardship resources for young children may also appreciate the book *My Gifts*, a stewardship colouring book by Anne Pilmoor, available at: <https://lifesourcebookshop.co.uk/product/my-gifts-colouring-book/>

No man left behind

by Pastor Matthew Herel



No man left behind.' What started as a rallying cry to motivate friends and students at Newbold College became a motto for both ministry and mission for the late Pastor Andrew Davis. During Andrew's time at Newbold, he quickly observed that the rigours of theology would at some stage make every student think about giving up! And so he embraced this pledge, made famous by the US military – nobody would be left behind.

He encouraged his classmates to understand that making sure everyone made it through was everybody's mission. His contagious enthusiasm helped everybody to buy into this sentiment. But Andrew wasn't just concerned for the student body's academic progress. Even when surrounded by prospective pastors who could take responsibility for themselves, he was mission-focused, thinking about everyone's spiritual growth. He established Power Hour, a weekly worship session, for students, by students, to develop confidence in their preaching, while the listeners were challenged to grow in faith by what they heard.

This mission focus extended beyond the Newbold campus. While still a full-time student, Andrew, together with classmates Anthony Fuller and Max McKenzie-Cook, established a church plant in south London. South London has always had a healthy number of Adventist churches, but Andrew identified a gap in the market. He wanted to establish a church that was accessible to people with no knowledge or experience of God or Adventism: a church with an

informal and relaxed feel, which could present the Adventist message in innovative packaging. This vision was also driven by his motto: no man left behind. Andrew didn't want to see anyone left out of the kingdom – particularly friends and family he loved, but also those who hadn't quite been able to find a place with the Adventist Church in the past. It was this desire to help people find God that drove him.

Following completion of his studies and internship – making time to marry Natasha Davis (née Taylor) along the way – Andrew was placed in his first district: Ipswich, Colchester and Clacton-on-Sea. It was here that he really began to come into his own, marrying some of the principles from his time in church planting with the conventions of established churches. Andrew's vision was to maintain tried and tested formulas such as revivals and preaching series, while also launching friendship evangelism-based activities.

He started a badminton group, and would hold banquets at an Indian restaurant adjacent to one of his churches. These were initiatives aimed at creating friendly, enjoyable spaces for unchurched people to mingle with his church members. This marrying of approaches bore fruit, and Andrew enjoyed baptising new members into the fold during his time at this district.

From here, he moved to Newbold Church as an associate pastor. While at Newbold, his 'no man left behind' motif broadened its focus and incorporated children, none more so than his own children: Leila, Malachi and Zoe! As a pastor's kid himself, Andrew was well aware of the challenges his kids might face

growing up in the church, consequently totally immersing himself in mission-based children's activities and events, in order to help children become disciples of Jesus. As a new Master Guide, he became an integral cog in the Newbold Pathfinder and Adventurer clubs, helping them thrive; and he took this passion for ministering to children nationwide, as a speaker for Pathfinder camps and a regular participant at the annual SEC Family Camp.

Following his tenure at Newbold Church, Andrew moved to the Reading Central and Parkside district of churches, and continued his patented blending of traditional methods with new innovations, seeking to connect with as many people in the community as possible. Again, even in a relatively short space of

time, his efforts led to a number of baptisms, before his ministry was cut short by his tragic passing.

Even while Andrew is no longer with us, the words of his rallying cry remain ever present for his friends, colleagues, and the many members he served: *no man left behind*. Long-time friend and colleague, Pastor Max McKenzie-Cook, reflects on this call to mission: 'In my hardest struggles I knew that Andrew was always in my corner, and knowing that gave me Active Christians Transforming Society (ACTS), a church plant of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. "No man left behind" provided the confidence to keep pushing on.' Indeed, it is for us to carry forward this cry, and to do our best to ensure that no man, woman or child within our circle of influence need miss out on the promise of abundant life in Jesus.

'I've got your back'

by Andrew Rigby

Since we laid our beloved Pastor Andrew Davis to rest, not a day passes when he is not in my thoughts and prayers. As I look back, Pastor Andrew was aware of me long before I was aware of him, or indeed my calling to faith.

I joined Reading Community Gospel Choir some three years ago; and, as time passed and I witnessed the kindness and strength of faith, I was drawn to ask if I could attend Parkside Church on Sabbath. A few Sabbaths passed and I was drawn to this enigma, Pastor Andrew Davis: this brilliant smile with a razor-sharp wit that made religion come to life. Sermons became something to be anticipated. Everyone was included – and everyone was made welcome.

One Saturday, like any other, Pastor Andrew gave his sermon, and at the end he asked a simple question: 'If anyone is considering baptism, please raise your hand.' I had not woken that morning expecting my response. There was, following the question, a silence that felt like an age. Pastor Andrew repeated the question and I felt a calling, and with the nerves of a small child I half-raised my hand. Pastor Andrew of course saw me, and acknowledged me, but recognised my fear and said no more until the service was concluded, when he made a point of finding me. He gave me a hug and simply whispered four words into my ear: 'I've got your back.'

Time passes, and this is to be the first baptism at Parkside. Those baptised are taken off to a separate room by Pastor Andrew for our 'I dos'. Questions are asked by Pastor Andrew, to which I respond 'I do', but at the end I hold back and ask a question: 'Pastor, am I ready to be baptised at this stage of my journey in faith?' All I remember is that smile and a simple response as he said I only need to remember two things: 1. love God; 2. treat others as you yourself expect to be treated.

So the baptism took place, and I realised that my choir leaders had agreed with Pastor Andrew not to play the song I had chosen, but to turn up en masse and sing it for me live as I was being baptised. My life has been brought joy, and that is the biggest tribute I can pay to Pastor Andrew Davis, as it was he who showed me the path.

Andrew's family was always his first ministry

by Natasha Davis

Not long after we got together as a couple, my first big conversation with Andrew about marriage – prior to being engaged – was related to ministry. We chose to sit down and understand what ministry would look like for us as a couple. This was all before Andrew had graduated from seminary. Andrew was always very clear that his marriage and family would be his first ministry; and so we wanted to understand how we could do ministry together.

We soon realised that family and couples' counselling was something that we both had a passion for, and could be a specific ministry that we could offer together within the Church. We both started undertaking training to become professional counsellors, so that we would be equipped to work together. During this period we would put our developing skills into practice. At one of our churches we led a Friday night series together for young people on sex and relationships, which went really well. We held family life weekends at three of our church districts, which would culminate with us preaching the sermon together as a couple on Sabbath. Andrew was on course to



complete his studies and graduate in the summer of 2020. I'm continuing my studies, and will fulfil our dream of using counselling to make a difference in people's lives.

Andrew would also use me as a sounding board for his ideas for his churches – both the conventional ideas, and the out-of-the-box ones too. We would talk them over, and I would offer my input. Then we

would pray and fast about their implementation. He'd also go over his sermon ideas with me. He would start sharing ideas at the beginning of the week. And then, in what became our Friday night tradition, he would preach his draft sermon to me – not once, but twice! – to get a feel for the material, and to get constructive feedback.

We were very much a team. When things worked, we gave

God thanks. When they didn't, we gave God thanks. Some of the toughest times in our lives came as a result of church ministry experiences, but these times brought us closer together as a couple, praying together and supporting each other. Andrew's family was always his first ministry, but also the vessel he used in his church ministry, to touch as many lives as possible for Jesus.

LETTERS

Product endorsement

Dear Editor

We were in Calcutta – so it must have been around 1961 or 1962 – when my aunty sent us a book about this new wonder cure. We read it with fascination – it cured everything from ingrowing toenails to cancer. We bitterly regretted that you could not buy apple cider, honey and vinegar in India, and so we were deprived of these wonderful benefits.

The following year the same aunt sent us another book about a new wonder cure which solved every problem from ingrowing toenails to cancer. We had never heard of vitamin E before, but it seemed odd to us that there should be two such wonderful cure-alls and the medical world not be aware of them.

Later on that year, we ran into a missionary doctor whose views we thoroughly respected, and we asked him about them. He not only knew about them, but he was able to give all the facts and figures that the books glossed over, and he assured us that while they weren't exactly poison, they were not wonder medicines.

Ever since then, I have entertained a healthy scepticism about these 'snake-oil' remedies, and I'm sorry to see them being peddled in the *MESSENGER*.

God bless,

KENDALL K. DOWN

Editor's response:

I concur 100% with the point Kendall makes. Evidence-based medicine is a non-negotiable principle. My use of apple-cider vinegar in the *MESSENGER* 23 editorial was

Corrigendum

On page 2 of *MESSENGER* 23, 2020, in the Leader's Corner, it was incorrectly stated that Fred Shone was the acting treasurer of the North England Conference. The editor apologises to Pastor Richard Jackson and the NEC leadership for this error.

to illustrate the point that we sometimes resist change until it is forced upon us. I am happy to clarify that product endorsement was not my intent.

Vision & action

Dear Editor

Since my baptism into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in August 1966, I have watched the church change with great interest and personal concern, causing me to raise the following questions:

Upon what biblical basis does the Adventist Church run its finance?

Much has been written in recent issues of *MESSENGER* on church finance. Do we still not know how and where to return tithe and give offerings?

Would our church leaders, given the financial hardship of many of our members, consider reducing their own salary, and review their pension scheme?

I have no criticism of any church leader or workers in particular. My concern is about how we are running our church. As Pastor Anthony pointed out in his *MESSENGER* 21 article, it is the organisational structure that is the problem. What if we made a real attempt to consolidate all the administrative offices under one roof?

Are we open to the still, small voice calling us to re-think and re-plan, to reform for revival? With many of our ministers 'office based', does this limit our effectiveness in 'going', 'teaching', 'baptising' and fulfilling the Gospel Commission, given the challenges we face reaching the UK and Ireland?

Are we making the best use of our property assets? Wouldn't a failure to use such assets to maximum effect be a waste of our resources?

'Action without vision is only passing time, and vision without action is mere daydreaming, but vision with action can change the world.' (Nelson Mandela)

'Time for fresh thinking?' questioned Pastor Anthony. I think the 'thinking' is long over. Our church may claim to have vision, but today what we need most urgently is action – radical action to accomplish our Gospel Commission – otherwise we are simply daydreaming!

JOHNSON WONG

Santa Claus and Jesus

by Vicky Beamish

I recently came across a new book called *When Santa Learned the Gospel*. It's written in a catchy poetic form and is obviously aimed at children. The storyline is that one of the elves becomes a Christian and shares her faith with Santa, who subsequently realises that in his life the message he has supported is that children have to be good to get presents, and naughty kids get lumps of coal; and trying to be good enough is OK. In contrast, he realises that the Gospel is about God being the only good one, and that He offers forgiveness because salvation isn't earned. Santa repents and starts a new life as a follower of Jesus with a new message to share.

Now, while the idea is nice (and this might be an interesting message for adults to consider how they are bringing up their children), and some see this as a way to get the Gospel into homes where it might not otherwise go, I do wonder whether using a purely fictional Santa Claus will be counter-productive for children in the end.

Many of us will know that the modern Santa Claus has his roots in the story of Saint Nicholas, who was probably a bishop in the fourth century. Many stories and legends have grown up around this man, who was said to be one who thought of others and served them by helping in difficulties, whether it be helping to find lost sons (and performing a miracle in the process), or providing money anonymously for poor families.

The modern Santa and 'what he can give me' has now become the focus of Christmas for most children. He is used as a means to try and get children to behave, and has boosted materialism and Christmas spending. I think this has helped contribute to a very selfish attitude towards Christmas, which began as a time of giving. From God's gift of a Saviour to a sad and dying world, to shepherds giving their praise and wise men bringing gifts to Jesus, the true story of Christmas is one of serving others.

While the new story mentioned above tries to address this balance, with Santa attempting to teach the world about Jesus and grace (maybe it would be better entitled, *Imagine if Santa Learned the Gospel*, or, *The Legend of Santa and the Gospel*) – and while some legends can have



Why Jesus Is Better than Santa Claus – author unknown

Santa lives at the North Pole. –
Jesus is everywhere.

Santa rides in a sleigh. –
Jesus rides on the wind and walks on the water.

Santa comes once a year. –
Jesus is an ever present help.

Santa fills your stockings with goodies. –
Jesus supplies all your needs.

Santa comes down your chimney uninvited. –
Jesus stands at your door and knocks.

You have to wait in line to see Santa. –
Jesus is as close as the mention of His name.

Santa lets you sit on his lap. –
Jesus lets you rest in His arms.

Santa doesn't know your name. –
Jesus knew our name before we did.

Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly. –
Jesus has a heart full of love.

All Santa can offer is 'HO HO HO.' –
Jesus offers health, help, and hope.

Santa says, 'You'd better not cry.' –
Jesus says, 'Cast all your cares on Me.'

Santa's little helpers make toys. –
Jesus makes new life and mends wounded hearts.

Santa may make you chuckle. –
Jesus gives you joy that is your strength.

While Santa puts gifts under your tree,
Jesus became our gift and died on a tree.

their place (almost like parables, to lead us to God) – will this story do this, or eventually the opposite? If a child believes heartily in Santa (as many do), and then hears this story and believes in Jesus too, what happens when he finally and perhaps with much disappointment discovers that Santa is not real; that, all the time, he was being strung along? Will he throw Jesus out as being not real too? Will she think Jesus is just part of the Santa fable? Will Jesus lose all credibility?

Maybe a better way to get children's attention would be to use direct stories of the Nativity; and also the comparison above, which can be found on the internet. Whatever method you choose, may you and all your family grow closer to Christ as we remember His birth.

Endurance Week of Prayer

by Dejan Stojkovic and Anthony Fuller

I remember very clearly that day in class when Professor Daniel Duda said, 'Please remember that ministry is not a 100m sprint but a marathon.'

Well, for somebody that never ran a marathon and only had to run 100m in school, what I got from that lesson is that endurance will be key on this journey. And, once again, I need to say that my professor was right. Nobody expected that the way we do life and church would change so dramatically and our endurance would be tested every hour, even every minute of each day, because of COVID-19. As the virus physically separated families, friends and church communities it was, and still is, easy to forget that with God we can still endure. This is why all youth directors from the British Union Conference came together to plan a week of prayer where we could be an encouragement to our youth through song, prayer, and the spoken word, including real-life testimonies that reminded us that despite these uncertain times there is still hope in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Week of Prayer traditionally has been driven primarily by the spoken word, with prayer at times being an afterthought. Hence, we wanted this year to ensure that prayer had a special role. If we're honest and listen carefully, most of our young people still struggle to pray. This is despite how accessible and easy we portray prayer to be. So we aimed to be intentional about highlighting the relevance and power of prayer. We used all of our social media platforms to allow our youth to share their requests and ensure that each request was prayed for. We had an encouraging response from youth and young adults, who asked us to pray for 'peace and to do the will of God', 'to cure depression among our young people', 'for family, health and studies', 'healing from COVID-19', and that 'we read and study the Word of God more'. We had more personal requests from those who needed 'serious help and forgiveness for past criminal activities', 'support for PTSD', and those who thought they knew God, but who, as a result of the week of prayer, asked to know God personally.

We knew not everyone would feel comfortable to share, but we ensured that everyone was prayed for, including those who would watch the programme at a later date. We believe Paul when he says, 'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and



Pastor Dejan Stojkovic



Pastor Anthony Fuller

supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:6, 7, NKJV). Each youth director across the Union had the privilege to lead the prayer sessions and was blessed by the opportunity to serve. We aimed to get the message across that youth shouldn't just 'try prayer', but instead should be encouraged to endure and devote themselves to prayer as a way of life: to pray big, to a God who is bigger than all their problems.

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Sunset

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	London	Card	Nott	Edin	Belf
Dec 18	3.53	4.05	3.49	3.39	3.58
25	3.56	4.09	3.53	3.43	4.02
Jan 1	4.03	4.15	3.59	3.50	4.09
8	4.11	4.23	4.08	4.00	4.18



South England Conference rallies

by Pastor Max McKenzie-Cook

Sunday 29 November was a crisp autumn day, but that didn't stop hundreds of people walking, running or biking virtually to support the homeless this Christmas. Church members, their families and friends of all ages turned out to raise £5,000. At the time of writing we have raised £5,174.

Many people recognised that 2020 would be a challenging year due to the impact of COVID-19 on their charitable work – faced, as they were, with the reality that government restrictions would make it difficult for some of our significant projects to continue. One example is the Advent Shelter. For 10 days during the advent season, 250 meals are served daily at the Advent Centre in Central London: but considerable

investment is always needed to cover operating costs. It goes without saying that the situation this year presented us with a financial challenge.

But our church is resilient because of its resilient people – it's built into our DNA. Under Elsie Staples, the former South England Conference (SEC) Community Ministries director, the Advent Shelter was born with similar challenges. During the 2012 London Olympics, the Government informed the SEC Community Ministries Department that they would need to close their Waterloo feeding programme because of this major event; yet they were determined not to leave the homeless helpless that year. That spirit of resilience is still with us.

In a groundbreaking partnership between

the SEC Youth and Community Ministries departments, all ages came together to raise money in our first virtual fundraising challenge. 'Power 300' was designed to bring young and even younger people together to walk, run or bike their individual distance for a collective total of 300 kilometres. Those taking part registered their interest on Eventbrite and then asked others to sponsor them on our Gofundme page. We are still collecting and verifying the results, but the initial tally suggests that we have already surpassed our 300k goal.

The Youth and Community Ministries directors were overwhelmed with the response. Pastor Adrian Peck took his bike and cycled right around the Isle of Wight. Hanwell youth leader John Harkup cycled the length of the Thames. The Area 6b Federation president took a walk in Cornwall and gave us a wonderful glimpse of her walk, providing further evidence of the broad spectrum of our membership involved in this campaign.

It was beautiful to see Adventist youth pulling together for a good cause, and a reminder of how ready they are to show the love of Jesus through their actions – with a heart of service and compassion. In a time of extreme turbulence, our church pulled together to support the homeless this Christmas.

Blinders or blinkers?

by Renée Joseph

Engaging; intriguing; edifying; illuminating: these are all words that come to mind to describe the Scottish Mission Youth Day of Fellowship hosted on 21 November. Though the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the rousing face-to-face meeting that is hosted annually, Scottish Mission youth demonstrated their resilience, and adaptation to 'the new normal', by eagerly logging on to the Zoom platform to connect with familiar faces they had missed seeing at church programmes throughout the lockdown. A YouTube link also provided others with the opportunity to be blessed by the offerings of the day.

And what beautiful presentations they were! For the morning programme, it was joyful praise and soulful worship, married to heartfelt prayer and motivational testimonies. Young people openly shared about how their lives had been affected by the pandemic, and how they had personally witnessed the faithfulness of God and experienced the outpouring of His abundant blessings, in spite of the challenges that the pandemic had given birth to. The meat of praise and thanksgiving, however, was glazed with the mild-mannered yet chastening sermon from Dr Daniel Duda, Education Director of the Trans-European Division. Using the Abrahamic prophecy, Dr Duda challenged listeners to confront subjective notions held as Adventist Christians, and to analyse how such preconceptions could actually contribute to spiritual stagnation. In contrast, we are advised to increase in wisdom and knowledge, learning the spiritual truths the Holy Spirit wants to reveal to us.

As we appreciated the solid spiritual meal Dr Duda provided, we were left with a challenge to do some 'removal' activity: remove the blinders of these preconceived ideologies, and submit to the Holy Spirit, whose blinkers would lead to the discovery of present truth.

Armed with an arsenal of questions, Scottish Mission youth returned to the afternoon session ready for action. To use a cricketing metaphor, Dr Duda took his place at the wicket, in the direct line of fire from yorkers, bouncers and spinners bowled by the exceptional, philosophical, intellectual and quizzical Scottish Mission youth, together

with their regional and international friends. With great humility and expert management, each delivery was artfully returned in a manner that once again urged his audience to cast off their illusion of knowledge, based on traditional interpretations of prophecy, and to analyse varied angles and perspectives that have given rise to a multitude of conspiracy theories.

Even when challenged by debate, Dr Duda remained undaunted, and emphasised that if Adventist Christians remain cemented in their present knowledge, and haughtiness as a result of that knowledge, they would lose out not only on new revelations from the Holy Spirit, but also on the privilege to be used as guiding lights to signal to others the way to salvation. Needless to say, such an outlook left many feeling uneasy, but seriously thinking. At the end of the session, which interestingly turned out to be too short to explore the length and breadth of the topic, 'Prophecy or Conspiracy: Unmasking Fake News', Pastor Claudiu Popescu, Scottish Mission Youth Sponsor, conceded that Dr Duda had opened a Pandora's box, and would therefore need to return soon, and for a longer period, to respond to the clamouring of the youth to close the box once again.

Engaging; intriguing; edifying; illuminating: these are the words to describe our day together. However, there is but one apt description to define the impact of the learnings of the day upon the young people who digested all the programme revealed – **life-changing!**



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