

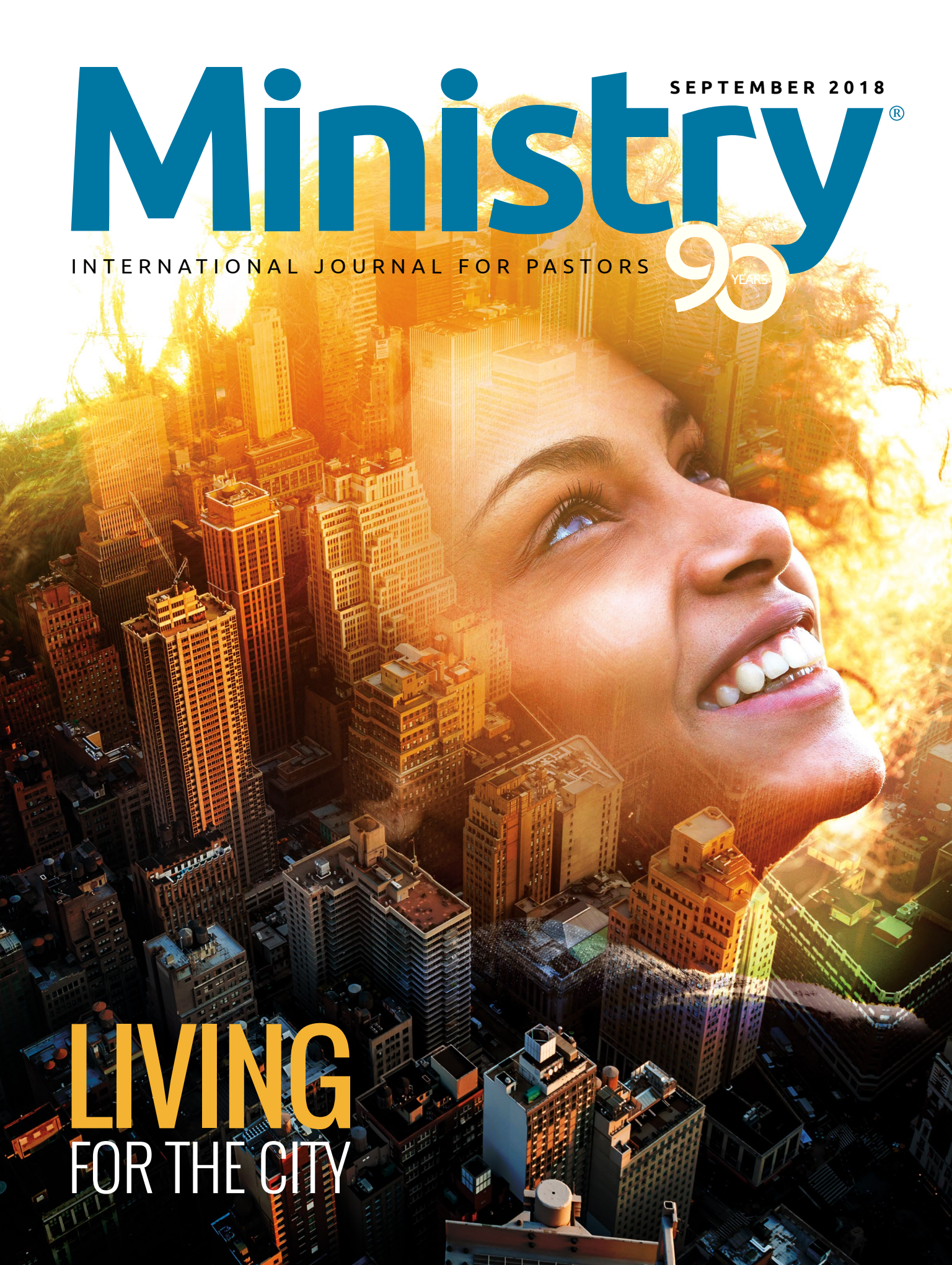
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90 YEARS

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The views that Dr. Arrais expresses are among the most Christ-centered views of leadership that I have read.

In appreciation

Thank you for the May 2018 issue. Pastor Jacques François's article ("No more sparklers!") was dynamite. I will keep it in my church office to look at whenever I fear that my latest sermon may be lacking in explosive quality.

I also appreciate the tributes to Billy Graham. And I noticed that there was only one citation of Mrs. White in the whole issue. Thank you. I think that if she (good teacher though she was) is not bound to be footnoted in every single article, your magazine will reach non-SDA people more gracefully.

—Pastor Robert Hellam, Church of the Oaks

Well done

Thank you for the two-part article regarding the Cornelius Code by John McVay (March and May, 2018), especially the "postlude". Well done and certainly thought-provoking!

—John Wagner, retired Adventist educator, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

I don't recall ever reading more creative and engrossing articles than "Cracking the Cornelius Code" parts 1 and 2 and "The Next Great Thing?" by Dr. John McVay in recent *Ministry* issues (March and May, 2018).

The only thing I would emphasize concerning these masterpieces is that the Holy Spirit brought those porkers, old goats, slithering serpents, and birds of prey to Peter. Peter was spending significant time in prayer and the Holy Spirit prepared him to be ready to receive the Gentiles who were being led by the

Spirit. I agree that we should not sit by in idleness concerning today's generation, but if we go about trying to convert those who are held captive by Satan by any other means than the Holy Spirit's baptism, we are likely to flee naked and bleeding like the seven sons of Sceva.

—Jim Kilmer, retired church growth coordinator, Upper Columbia Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Spokane, Washington, United States

Christian leadership

I just read your interview with Josmar Arrais ("To lead is to serve: An interview with Dr. Josmar Arrais," March 2018). The views that Dr. Arrais expresses are among the most Christ-centered views of leadership that I have read. It is indeed a pleasure and a blessing to read such views in a day when leadership continues to be viewed more as a function of position and power. Thank you!

—James A. Tucker, PhD, McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, Tennessee, United States

The interview with Dr. Arrais sets forth in clear and reasonable form the fundamentals that define competent leadership. It is an excellent summary of those commonly accepted behaviors and practices valued by contemporary, responsible, and respectable organizations.

The publication of Arrais's interview in a magazine for clergy leads the reader to conclude that the article is directed to clergy and those who are employed by a religious organization. It is a boon to those in a parish when a pastor


implements the principles set forth in the article. Likewise, clergy, and others, benefit when denominational leaders practice the skills and behaviors Arrais advocates. The questions that came to mind, as I read the article, include the following:

1. When a leader does not practice the leadership qualities Arrais associates with competent leadership, what then?
2. When a leader is not trusted and does not respect colleagues, including those whose specialized skills are ignored or denied, what is one to do?
3. When a leader uses his or her authority to control and manipulate others, what are the viable options to change behavior?
4. Arrais emphasized Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership model. When this model is absent in a leader, what action is called for?
5. When a leader is deficient in the skills Arrais identifies, might it be productive for the individual to employ a skilled management consultant to guide him or her to implement the leadership characteristics Arrais identifies?

There is an urgency to Arrais's statement, "If we confuse leadership with management and control, yes, we risk overemphasizing goals and results."

Arrais ends with an urgent appeal to pastors and leaders, "Give, up once and for all that search for position and power." When a leader disregards this admonition, expect upheaval and unrest to follow. Might the disaffection and distrust of leadership evident among congregations, and those who pastor them, have some relationship to the matters identified above?

Thank you for the invitation to share my thoughts.

—Lawrence Downing, DMin, retired pastor 

Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association and associate editor of *Ministry*.



Are you drinking yet?

I was born and grew up in Birmingham, England, a city of about one million people. When I was 21, I left Britain for the first time, to serve as a student missionary in Ghana. I read a book by Brother Andrew called *Battle for Africa*. The author stated, “A missionary should have two homes: heaven, and the country he lives in. Which excludes the country that he comes from.”¹ While overseas, I met missionaries who appeared to have more in common with diplomats of the countries from where they were coming than with citizens of the country in which they were serving.

The missionaries told me not to drink the water. “You will get sick,” they said. “Your western body juices can’t handle it.” Two Peace Corps workers taught at our school. They said, “They told you the truth. If you drink it, you will get sick. But in time, your body will adjust.” I was tired of responding to hospitality with the question, “Is the water boiled?” One day a local person asked me, “Are you drinking yet?” I made up my mind: I would drink the water. I drank it; I got sick. I ended up in the hospital with dysentery.

They gave me tablets to bind me. Too many. I got constipation. They gave me laxatives to free me. Too many. I got diarrhea. For days I alternated between constipation and diarrhea. In time (thankfully), my stomach calmed down. When I caught up with the missionaries, they had heard all about it and delivered a stern rebuke. I accepted it. I saw how drinking had cost me dearly. Inside, however, I was pleased that I could now visit in the homes of the people. I could now respond in the affirmative to the question, Are you drinking yet?

Incarnation often costs us dearly.² Our seminary professor, Ivan Warden, brought the author of our textbook to

campus.³ George Webber told us how he moved his family into a humble city apartment while bearing the title of president of New York Theological Seminary. I was very moved at the price he and his family were willing to pay.

Dr. Warden taught us how to conduct a church-community analysis when we would go to a new territory. We would study the historical background of the town or city and then complete a geographic and demographic analysis. We would consider the area’s economy, power structure, values, and community spirit. Our marching orders were clear: “ ‘Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper’ ” (Jer. 29:7, NIV). So, when we pastored in Toronto, Canada, our slogan became “Apple Creek: The Community-Driven Church.” Listening to each neighborhood’s unique story was an essential part of “exegeting” the city.⁴

My wife, Pattiejean, and I later attended a mission institute in the beautiful country of Mexico. One of the themes was “Serving Incarnationally,” and we had to participate in what was called an ethnographic field trip. It involved entering our nearby town, observing the culture, and eating and drinking with the people. In Jamaica, incredibly, pastors go into the heart of the city and invite gang leaders to a meal for fellowship and open dialogue. One person from each gang carries a large bag. That bag contains the guns—ready in case there has been a set up.

Ministry to the cities is not about slogans or occasional headline-making events. It’s about sitting with people and addressing their areas of pain. It is life and death. Police killed by citizens, citizens the police swore to protect;

In Jamaica, incredibly, pastors go into the heart of the city and invite gang leaders to a meal for fellowship and open dialogue.

citizens killed by police, citizens the police swore to serve. It has cost the lives of urban ministers and cross-cultural missionaries.⁵

I read about Someone else known for eating and drinking with the people. They called Him a glutton, a wine-bibber—and a friend of sinners. It cost Him, too. Nevertheless, I hear Him saying, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: *for I have much people in this city*” (Acts 18:9, 10, KJV; emphasis added). So, pastor—are you drinking yet? 🍷

1 Andrew van der Bijl and Charles Paul Conn, *Battle for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1977).

2 For an expanded understanding of the term “incarnation,” see Sam Wells, *Incarnational Ministry: Being With the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), reviewed on page 26.

3 George W. Webber, *Today’s Church: A Community of Exiles & Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979).

4 See Sean Benesh, “10 Ways to Exegete Your City,” *Visioneering Blog*, Feb. 10, 2017, www.visioneeringstudios.com/2017/02/10-ways-to-exegete-your-city.

5 David Trim, “This Week in Adventist History,” in *Adventist News Network Bulletin*, broadcast Hope Channel, August 17, 2018.

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Understanding and compassion: *A recipe for urban mission*

A world-famous classical violinist, Joshua Bell, stood outside L’Enfant Plaza metro station in Washington DC, holding his \$3.5 million Stradivarius. It was morning rush hour on a cold winter day in 2007. Three days earlier, Bell had sold out Boston’s Symphony Hall, where “pretty good seats” cost \$100 each. That morning in the DC metro, Bell began playing the technically demanding “Chaconne” from J. S. Bach’s Partita no. 2 in D Minor. For the next 43 minutes he performed six majestic classical pieces. During the entire time, 7 people stopped to listen for at least a minute, while another 1,090 walked by. Some tossed loose change into his violin case, and 27 people gave money, for a total of \$32.17, to a musical genius who can earn \$1,000.00 a minute. Bell later joked that \$40.00 an hour was not so bad.

“I could make an OK living doing this,” he said with a laugh, “and I wouldn’t have to pay an agent.” But he did admit, too, “It was a strange feeling, that people were actually, ah . . . *ignoring* me.”¹

For Seventh-day Adventists, playing the “old, old melody” in urban areas can feel like busking to deaf ears in a metro station. Centuries ago the Jewish exiles in Babylon asked, “How shall

we sing the LORD’s song in a strange land?” (Ps. 137:4, KJV). Today we ask, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in the cities?” The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a strong rural heritage and focus. Many church members feel most comfortable in the countryside, and the cities, in many ways, remain a strange land. We know that the melody of the old, old story is the most magnificent, life-changing music in the universe, but how do we play it in such a way as to connect with city dwellers? We try playing louder, softer, with different instruments, with greater virtuosity, but urban dwellers still, for the most part, rush past, tuned to their agendas.

Look, listen, and learn

In early 2016, Hillsong Church, a large Pentecostal church based in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia, with campuses around the world, announced plans to plant another church, this one in San Francisco, California. Ben Houston, son of Hillsong Church founders and senior pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston, would lead the initiative. Nate Lee, a blogger in San Francisco, responded online with a piece titled “Hillsong Church: Do Not Colonize San Francisco.” In his response, Lee expressed disgust at pastors who come

to the city, post iconic pictures, and say how much they love the city and claim “God is going to do *amazing things* here in San Francisco,” without taking the time to understand it. They do not spend any time trying to understand the city, argues Lee, and they come with their prepackaged agenda.

Pointing to ethnic churches that have been operating in San Francisco for decades, Lee said that Hillsong’s language, which suggests God’s work will start with their arrival, “is indicative not only of terrible theology, but of white Christian exceptionalism, the oppressive belief that the correct kind of salvation and healing can be facilitated only through *us*, on *our* terms with *our* methods.” Lee went on to say that it’s this type of attitude that “destroys and undoes the faithful Gospel work” that is already happening in the city. He concluded, “Wake up, Ben Houston—the plan started without you a long time ago, so guess what? You aren’t special. This city doesn’t need you.”²

Although Lee has Hillsong in his crosshairs, the Seventh-day Adventist Church could, perhaps, be subject to a similar critique. At times we have focused so strongly on evangelistic programs that we have not taken the time to understand the context in which they

take place. Instead, we have conducted short-term sorties into the city to try to persuade people to become Seventh-day Adventists while we have often neglected social care or community development.

But evangelism does not occur in an isolated bubble; it occurs in tangible social contexts and communities that have their own histories and cultures. As educator Paulo Freire wrote nearly 50 years ago, “I imagine one of the prime purposes that we Christians ought to have . . . is to get rid of any illusory dream of trying to change man [sic] without touching the world he lives in.”³ Bidding people to follow Jesus is one component of a wholistic ministry that also includes mixing with people, showing sympathy, ministering to their needs, and winning their confidence.⁴ In our experience with Global Mission urban centers of influence and urban church planting projects, we have discovered that this kind of impact does not happen overnight. It takes time. It takes commitment. It means making sure the gospel melody touches people’s lives, not just their ears.

Lee may overstate his case, but he raises several legitimate concerns about urban mission. It is vital to consult with, listen to, and learn from those already living in the city and those who are engaged in the city, whether secular or religious organizations. Any authentic new Christian mission in a city cannot be conceived at a distance, planned in some remote denominational boardroom, or voted by some isolated church committee. It must either spring from or be shaped by the existing urban community. It must be approached with a spirit of humility. This spirit of humility will prevent any attempt to bring an outside, prepackaged product to the urban community. An attitude of humility will lead to taking the time to listen to the community itself—residents, leaders, and social organizations.

When the apostle Paul ministered in Athens, he first walked through the city and looked at the sights, particularly the Athenians’ objects of worship. In fact, we are told that he “looked carefully” (Acts 17:23, NIV). At one level, like any tourist,

he was probably interested in seeing the pinnacle of Greek culture on display in the center of Greek civilization. But more importantly, he was seeking to better understand the environment. One object of worship, the statue to the unknown god, particularly caught his attention. He then used it as the foundation for his later presentation in the Areopagus on Mars Hill. In that speech, the statue in honor of the unknown god became his connecting link from Greek culture to the One True God.

Like Paul, we also need to take time in our cities to look, listen, and learn. We need to walk through city streets, rub shoulders in supermarket aisles, and participate in community events. We need to study local newspapers and websites. Look at community noticeboards. Make conversation at bus stops. Discover what people are doing with their time. What might be causing our urban neighbors distress and pain? What is bringing them joy? What are they “worshiping”? They may not be formally religious, but everybody worships something.

Compassion in the community

In 2010, leaders in the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church planted a church in the historic district of downtown Mexico City, one of the world’s largest cities. They rented a facility to function as a worship center and a place where needy people in the community could find spiritual and physical care. A few years later, they became convicted to do more. They purchased the facility and then became more intentional in seeking to understand their community. They surveyed the territory around the center, prayed, and studied. They wanted to make sure that their ministry was appropriate and relevant to their community. As a result of looking, listening, and learning, they decided to focus on four demographic groups near the center: sex workers, homeless children, criminals, and indigent adults. Today this ministry is flourishing, embedded in the community, and ministering to real needs in that community.⁵

When two young pioneers, Maeli and Shouling, moved to a city in Eastern China to plant a new group of believers, they started by visiting homes in the neighborhood. As they went from door to door, they were surprised to find that many of the houses had teenage girls living alone. They were part of the so-called “left-behind children”—children left at home to basically fend for

An attitude of humility will lead to taking the time to listen to the community itself—residents, leaders, and social organizations.

themselves while their parents moved to other areas seeking employment. Naturally such arrangements left these girls vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. As Maeli and Shouling talked with these girls, their vision sharpened and the focus for their ministry became clear. They began to provide practical care for the girls, helping wash clothes and cook their meals. They invited them to their own home, where they sang songs and shared Bible stories.

Soon they were holding prayer times after the girls finished their homework. They also built connections with their parents when they came home to visit. Every week these two young women give an average of 15 Bible studies. If you had asked Maeli and Shouling what their outreach plan was for the new city, they probably would have told you something like, “We’ll visit homes and share literature.” But as they “looked carefully,” studied the situation, and

began to understand the community better, they adapted their ministry to the needs.⁶

No strings attached

Jesus' no-strings-attached compassion was constantly displayed as He traveled through villages and towns healing people and telling them the good news of how they could be part of His kingdom. When Matthew writes that Jesus had compassion for the crowds, he uses the Greek word *splagchnizomai*, which does not describe some superficial feeling, a mere metaphorical nod toward caring (Matt. 9:36). It denotes almost a physical reaction, a feeling deep within one's body. Amanda Miller says this Greek word literally means "moved in the guts,"⁷ and Daniël Louw refers to it as "a theology of the intestines."⁸

The theme of compassion dominates the story of Jonah, whom God called on an urban mission to Nineveh. Ironically, the pagan sailors in the story show more compassion for the Jewish prophet than he shows for pagan Nineveh (Jonah 1:12–14). In a further ironic twist, Jonah gets more upset about the death of a plant that has been sheltering him from the sun than he does about the prospective death of thousands of people in the city (Jonah 4:7–10).

The culmination and most important part of the story is the final verse of the book, where God asks Jonah a rhetorical question: " 'And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city?' " (v. 11, NRSV). The Hebrew word translated here as "concerned," *achus*, is also translated as "compassion" and "pity." It is used to full ironic force because a few verses earlier Jonah had felt *achus* for the plant that died. And so here, in verse 11, the translation should probably be, "Should I not be *even more* concerned about Nineveh, that great city?" God's capacity for compassion is so great that it bewilders and threatens one of His prophets (Jonah 4:1–3).

Compassion was a notable attribute in the lives of early Christians, most of whom lived in urban areas. Susan Wessel traces the origins of demonstrating

compassion, in the sense of truly feeling for someone else's suffering, to the early Christians.⁹ Sociologist Rodney Stark describes how compassionate ministry fueled the growth of the early church: "Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world."¹⁰ He adds that Christianity's doctrines "prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations."¹¹


During times of plague and sickness, pagan priests fled the cities while Christians remained to help the sick and suffering. In an oft-quoted statement, Tertullian said: " 'It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!' " (*Apology* 39, 1989 ed.)¹² Emperor Julian wrote: "The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us."¹³

A new paradigm

The compassion of Jesus must be at the heart of meaningful urban mission. This fact means that attention and priorities should be refocused and realigned not only in terms of geography, toward the cities, but also in terms of motivation. Historically, for example, Seventh-day Adventist "success" in mission endeavors has largely been measured in terms of numbers of baptisms and membership accessions. These numbers are regularly celebrated in official church reports and front-cover news stories in church magazines.

A compassion-driven mission will also measure success in terms of no-strings-attached faithfulness, integrity, and compassion. The cities should be seen not as mission projects but as places full of people we should view with compassion, as Jesus did. As the story of Jonah reminds us, the church's concern must extend past its own community of faith to others from different worldviews, cultures, beliefs, and geographical locations, including the city.

As the Adventist Church moves forward into the twenty-first century, we must follow the example of Jesus' compassion-driven ministry in our urban mission. His example demonstrates that urban ministry cannot be done from some separated religious enclave or on a short-term basis with only passing contact. It involves rubbing shoulders, touching hands, looking into eyes with compassion (Matt. 9:36). It is not just *telling* people about the truth of God's Word, but *demonstrating* the truth of that Word.

Parks will be cleaner, children better educated, the hungry better fed, the poor less exploited, the elderly less lonely, and spiritual seekers fulfilled because Christians who understand the city are demonstrating Jesus' compassion in the city. This is the melody that will find its way past the ears of urban dwellers—and into their hearts. 

- 1 For the full story, see Gene Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast: Can One of the Nation's Great Musicians Cut Through the Fog of a D.C. Rush Hour? Let's Find Out," *Washington Post Magazine*, Apr. 8, 2007.
- 2 "You will come and sit at the feet of Black, Latino, and Asian American elders. You will not say a word. You will do this for years, until those elders say you're ready." Nate Lee, "Hillsong Church: Do Not Colonize San Francisco," *natejlee.com* (blog), Mar. 1, 2016, natejlee.com/hillsong-church-do-not-colonize-san-francisco.
- 3 James D. Kirylo and Boyd Drick, *Paulo Freire: His Faith, Spirituality, and Theology* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2017), 83.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 143.
- 5 Bettina Krause, ed., *It's Time: Voices From the Front Lines of Urban Mission* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015), 90, 91.
- 6 Krause, *It's Time*, 87, 88.
- 7 Amanda C. Miller, "Good Sinners and Exemplary Heretics: The Sociopolitical Implications of Love and Acceptance in the Gospel of Luke," *Review and Expositor* 112, no. 3 (Aug. 2015): 465.
- 8 Daniël Louw, "Compassion Fatigue: Spiritual Exhaustion and the Cost of Caring in the Pastoral Ministry. Towards a 'Pastoral Diagnosis' in Caregiving" *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (Oct. 2015): 8, doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.3032.
- 9 Susan Wessel, *Passion and Compassion in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1, 2, 24.
- 10 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 161.
- 11 Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 211.
- 12 Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 87.
- 13 Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 84.

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Jonah: A preacher God wanted to save—a city God wanted to reach

The book of Jonah records one of the most provocative stories in the Bible. It contrasts God’s and humans’ attitudes toward sinners.¹ It is a story of God’s love and compassion that stands in contrast to human indifference, condemnation, and bigotry toward wayward sinners who are in need of salvation. Its primary purpose was to teach Israel that God’s love is for all people, not just for Israel. The book is also for God’s people throughout history who find it hard to accept the truth that no person is out of the reach of God’s love and salvation.

The person of Jonah

The book was most likely written by Jonah himself as his personal testimony of God’s salvation for both the Ninevites and himself. According to 2 Kings 14:25, Jonah was from Gath-hepher, a town in Galilee not far away from Nazareth. He was a prophet of God from the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who reigned from 793 to 753 B.C. Under this king, Israel enjoyed peace and prosperity; after many years of political and economic decline, the situation in the kingdom significantly stabilized. The borders of the land expanded to an extent that had not been witnessed since the golden

age of Solomon (see 2 Kings 14:23–29), filling the Israelites with national pride.

At that time, Assyria was in a slight decline due mainly to weak rulers. However, the reputation of Assyria, which was characterized by cruelty, was known throughout the ancient world. Ancient Assyrian records show the ruthlessness and cruelty that the Assyrians exercised towards captives. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians captured the capital of Samaria, displaced the 10 tribes, and scattered them among the nations.

Running from God

The book begins with God ordering Jonah to warn Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, of impending destruction. However, Jonah declined the call and boarded a ship to Tarshish, in the opposite direction from Nineveh, attempting to run away and hide from God. Isaiah describes Tarshish as one of those cities and regions that have not heard of God’s fame or seen His glory (Isa. 66:19). Jonah chose that distant city to run away from God—to be out of His reach.

Why was Jonah unwilling to go to Nineveh? He explained later in the book that it was because he knew that God was gracious and compassionate. If the Ninevites somehow repented, God would forgive them and spare the city

destruction (see Jonah 4:2). This would cause Jonah embarrassment, and he would become an object of ridicule. Another reason could have been that Jonah was well aware of Assyria’s brutality. Since Assyria was the enemy of Israel, he could have been motivated by fear and, as a result, refused to deliver to Nineveh the message of impending destruction.

However, Jonah’s escape from God was expressed by his descent. While God ordered him to rise and go up to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1, 2; 3:2, 3), he first went down to Joppa (Jonah 1:3), then further down to the ship (v. 3), and then even further down to the lowest part of the ship (v. 5). Finally, he sank to the bottom of the sea, where he ended at the lowest possible point, the very realm of death (Jonah 2:6; see Ps. 88:4–6).

However, the good news is that no person is outside of God’s reach, regardless of how deep he or she has fallen. Even if we descend as low as Jonah, God will be there, ready to save us.

The great city

Nineveh is described as “the great city” (Jonah 1:2; 3:2; 4:11).² Jonah 3:3 states that it was “an exceedingly great city” (NKJV). This description refers

not only to the size of the city but also to its importance to God. The city is populated with “more than a hundred and twenty thousand people” (Jonah 4:11), who are to perish.

This great city was filled with evil (translated as “wickedness”) that reached to heaven (Jonah 1:2; 3:8, 10). About a century after Jonah, the prophet Nahum addressed Nineveh as “city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims” (Nahum 3:1). However, God wanted to save this great city filled with evil. That was the reason why He wanted to send Jonah to them with a warning message.

The content of the whole book seems to revolve around two words,

a great storm on the sea (vv. 4b, 12), threatening to destroy the ship. The sailors were in fear for their lives (v. 5). While they were fighting for their lives, Jonah was sleeping. They woke him up to pray to his God. Jonah admitted that all the evil that came upon them was because of his disobedience to God. Finally, to save the ship, the sailors threw him into the sea.

God’s great activities resulted in a great response from the sailors. As the storm subsided, they “greatly feared the LORD” (v. 16), offered a thanksgiving sacrifice, and made their vows to Him (v. 16). God even used this situation to reach out to the sailors from various lands.

down in the dust. Likewise, the people and animals humbled themselves by putting on sackcloth and engaging in a total fast, thus expressing full sorrow and repentance. They turned away from their evil ways and begged God for mercy (v. 8). Jesus presented the repentance of the Ninevites as an example of genuine repentance to the Jews of His day (Matt. 12:41).

As a result, God heard their prayer. He relented from the evil He had determined to bring upon them. This is expressed in the verse that is the key text of the book: “When God saw what they did, and how they turned from their evil, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the evil He had threatened” (Jonah 3:10, my translation).

This record of Nineveh’s repentance brings hope and comfort to every person regardless of how deep he or she has been in sin. The truth is that God is “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Jonah 4:2) and is ready to accept a person who repents as much as He was ready to accept the Ninevites.

Evil in Jonah

The repentance of Nineveh was not pleasing to Jonah. In contrast to the sailors and the Ninevites, Jonah responded to God’s great work of salvation with great anger (v. 1). He had a very bad attitude toward heathens, he could not believe that the wicked could be forgiven. The realization that God had decided to spare the city upset him greatly. His attitude is completely contrary to God’s character. God has pity, but Jonah does not (cf. vv. 10, 11).

At this point, the Hebrew reading of Jonah 4:1–6 gives us deeper insight into Jonah’s situation, something that is generally not expressed in Bible translations. This is how Jonah 4:1 reads in Hebrew: “However, it was an evil to Jonah, a great evil.” Only here, concerning Jonah, are the words for *great* and *evil* conjoined.

Jonah 3:10 stated that God saw that the Ninevites turned from their evil ways. So God relented from the evil He had threatened to bring upon them.

Our focus cannot be transfixed solely on Jonah. To what extent do we believe that God’s grace extends beyond the walls of the church?

great (occurs 14 times) and *evil* (occurs 10 times). These words are central to the theological message of the book. Unfortunately, their meanings are usually lost in Bible translations and replaced by other words. The word for *evil* in Hebrew is used in the book for calamities that come upon people as a result of their evil ways. When people do evil, an evil comes upon them.

God’s great acts of salvation

God wanted to save Nineveh, a city outside of the nation of Israel, from the evil that was about to come upon them. Great acts are required to preempt great evil. To save that great city, God used great means and activities. He sent a great wind (Jonah 1:4a) that stirred up

Next, God ordered a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah spent three days in the belly of a fish. During that time, he learned that it was impossible to run away from God. He prayed, asking God for forgiveness. God heard his prayer and ordered the fish to cast him safely upon the land.

Nineveh repents

After the great deliverance, God once again ordered Jonah to go and preach to Nineveh. This time the reluctant prophet obeyed. In response to his preaching, the whole city, together, believed the message (Jonah 3:5–9). The powerful and proud monarch led the city in repentance; he humbled himself by taking off his royal attire, covering himself with sackcloth, and sitting

To Jonah, however, God’s compassion toward the Ninevites and His readiness to forgive them was “a great evil.” In other words, while the Ninevites had repented and turned away from their evil ways, Jonah was filled with evil. For him, God’s love toward the Ninevites was an evil thing—so much so that he assumed for himself the role of judge, thus putting himself above God.

God asked Jonah whether it was right to be so angry because He showed mercy upon an evil city that responded with repentance to His message. Such great repentance of a wicked city should have caused the prophet to rejoice greatly. In response, Jonah told God that he had known that this would happen. He knew that God was gracious and compassionate and that if the Ninevites somehow repented, He would forgive them and not bring calamity on them (Jonah 4:2, 3). That was the reason that he had run away in the first place.

Now, his fear came true. He felt that God’s forgiveness was about to cause him embarrassment. He became indignant to the point of death. The person who earlier had prayed to God not to let him die now asked God to take his life (v. 3).

So Jonah went outside of the city and made for himself a booth on an elevated place overlooking the city. He sat there in the shade, hoping that God would change His mind and somehow destroy the city. However, the sun’s heat became unbearable. To help Jonah in his discomfort, God caused a plant to grow quickly over the booth to provide some extra shade over him. The plant made Jonah very happy; he obviously felt great joy only when he personally received blessings (v. 6).

Then, surprisingly, God sent a worm to destroy the plant. Next, He sent a scorching east wind that brought unbearable heat upon Jonah’s head, causing him to nearly faint (v. 8). Jonah’s discomfort escalated, so he again wanted to die: “It would be better for me to die than to live” (v. 8).

A preacher God wants to save

Once again the Hebrew text gives us deeper insight into what was going on: as Jonah was outside of the city hoping that God would change His mind and somehow destroy the city, God caused a plant to grow quickly over his head to “deliver him from his evil” (v. 6). In other words, God’s purpose in growing a plant was not so much to protect Jonah from the heat of the sun but rather to deliver him from the evil that was in him. God’s activities regarding Jonah were for the same purpose that they were used for the Ninevites. Both the rapid growth of the plant and the sending of the worm to destroy it were God’s object lessons used to teach Jonah and help him gain a broader understanding of the universality of God’s compassion and love for sinners, and thus free him from his prejudice and bigotry.

The book concludes with the dialogue between God and Jonah. Jonah realizes that he needs repentance as much as the people in Nineveh. Although the book does not state whether Jonah changed, he obviously did because the book that he wrote was his testimony of God’s compassion toward sinners, especially himself.


Although a record of God’s acts of salvation in antiquity, the book of Jonah offers a number of life lessons for today’s Christians. The central focus of the book of Jonah is not so much about the salvation of Nineveh as it is about Jonah’s salvation. The story of Jonah describes the great acts and patience of God toward His runaway child whom He tried to save as much as He tried to save the sailors and the Ninevites. However, it appeared that it was easier for God to change pagans than to influence a proclaimer of His Word.

A city God wants to reach

The greatest lesson that comes from the story of Jonah is the reaffirmation that God has, from the onset of sin, been trying to reach past the borders

of Israel to save His people. Jonah illustrates how difficult a concept this is for people of God to grasp.

The book of Jonah is not just about the Jonah of the past but is also about the many Jonahs throughout history until today. We each have to ask ourselves whether we behave like the Jonah of old, for there is a kind of Jonah reflected in all of us. Our focus cannot be transfixed solely on Jonah. To what extent do we believe that God’s grace extends beyond the walls of the church? Do we believe that God loves people everywhere and wants to save them as much as He wanted to save the people of Nineveh? The Israelites of old were rebuked for their response to the surrounding cities (Matt. 12:41). Are we any better than they?

The story of Jonah confronts us—whether believers in the pew or pastors—with our prejudices and helps us gain a broader understanding of the greatness and universality of God’s compassion for the cities. The book urges us not to withdraw into a state of religious pride, exclusivity, and self-centeredness. God’s people were always called to be a blessing to others. The book of Acts informs us that the early church was also filled with prejudice against the Gentiles. So God chose Joppa—the same place where centuries earlier Jonah tried to run away from his task—to show Peter that no one is outside the reach of God’s love and salvation but that “in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35). 

- 1 I am indebted for many insights in this article to Terence E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977); James Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 17–132; James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1993); and John R. Kohlenberger III, *Jonah and Nahum*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 9–75.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New International Version.

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By any means necessary: An urban ministry interview with Pastor E. Douglas Venn

Editor's note: *E. Douglas (Doug) Venn, MDiv, serves as director of Global Mission's Urban Center at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.*

Jeffrey Brown (JB): Christians in many places, including Seventh-day Adventists, are coming together now to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church regarding ministry in our cities.¹ Year after year I have heard, "We are not reaching the cities." Sure, we can all do better, but do you have quantitative criteria that can tell us if we are moving forward with the goal or slipping backwards?

E. Douglas Venn (DV): Yes, we do. Because more than half of the world's population now lives in cities, the Seventh-day Adventist Church must do its part in responding to the mandates of Matthew 28:19, 20 and Revelation 14:6, 7. So, we have seven key performance indicators: (1) a twenty percent increase over five years in total audited membership in urban areas of one million people or more; (2) at least one center of influence for every 250,000 people in each urban area of one million people or more;² (3) improved ratio of

membership to population in all urban areas of one million people or more; (4) improved ratio of worshiping groups to population in all urban areas of one million people or more; (5) institutions actively assisting with mission initiatives in urban areas of one million people or more; (6) interdivisional sponsorship and support functioning for ministry in one hundred of the most unentered urban areas of one million people or more; and (7) regular reports being made at General Conference, division, and union mid-year and year-end meetings on progress in reaching our objectives.

JB: Are there criteria, other than the amount of church members, that are, for you, significant markers when it comes to reaching the cities?

DV: Yes. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all people groups." We are asking, What marginalized people groups do you see that we need to do a better job in reaching? How well are we reaching out to (1) thought leaders, (2) public campus students, (3) housing complex residents, (4) professionals, and (5) special needs persons?³ Revelation 10:11 compels us to go to country leaders as well as those in business, education, and media. We

must ask, Who in my neighborhood is that leader that I must reach out to? And remember, today's universities house tomorrow's thought leaders.

JB: My *Church and Urban Ministry* class textbook was by George Webber, president of New York Theological Seminary. He says, "Our job is to discover those who have been forgotten and do what we can to be a sign of love and hope. Our signs will not be for the sake of getting new members or winning converts. Simply, we live in the style of our Lord, where there is hunger, seeking to feed, where there is sickness, seeking to heal, where there is loneliness, offering our love *without any ulterior motive*."⁴ Do we have a no-strings-attached approach to urban ministry?

DV: The outreach programs "Gauteng for Christ" in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and Metro Manila in the Philippines, are two initiatives which have gathered together Christian professionals such as engineers, doctors, and lawyers, to minister to their fellow professionals. If persons joined our church, glory to God, but their goal was to heighten awareness of the challenges and stresses felt in these leadership positions. In Johannesburg, the question was asked,

“How can you care for your peers?” In Bangkok, we asked businesses, “What are your needs? How can we offer a practical service for your employees?” In British Columbia, Canada, a local church offers auto repairs and vehicle donations to at-risk single mothers. No strings attached.

JB: My seminary urban ministry professor, Dr. Ivan Warden, spearheaded the compilation *Ministry to the Cities*.⁵ Was there a discrepancy in our obligation to urban as opposed to rural communities? Does it still exist?

DV: Over the years, the Adventist Church has faced the trap of binary thinking—either go into the city or not—Jesus served in the city and the outskirts. See for example Matthew 9:35–37. We are recognizing now that there is a place for both.⁶ Our projects aim to provide physical and spiritual healing to all communities, laying the groundwork to plant new churches. Last year Global Mission helped fund 80 new churches in major cities in Argentina, Congo, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Russia, and in a number of closed countries.

JB: We know that the cities of the world are populated by people of color. We are also aware, as John Cassidy states, that “Blacks and Hispanics should no longer be labeled ‘minorities’, but ‘part of the world’s majorities.’”⁷ Does the church acknowledge that tremendous ministry to the city has been taking place by these groups long before slogans and funding may have made it fashionable?

DV: Their contribution is invaluable. I read once about African-American evangelist E. E. Cleveland who would organize dental and medical screening in the city’s neighborhoods. Elder Cleveland won the support of the community. “In E. E. Cleveland’s Oakland and Detroit crusades, the Black Panthers supported the Adventist tent efforts by protecting the Bible workers and the areas around the tents, as well as guarding the various community health programs run by Cleveland’s team.”⁸



JB: So the ratio of Christians in general, and Adventists in particular, to the general population is one of the criteria, perhaps the major criteria, of measurement regarding reaching the cities. Which geographic areas are weak?

DV: North Africa, Europe, and parts of Asia.⁹ So Global Mission helped finance fifteen urban centers of influence last year. These include a refugee training center in Houston, Texas, United States; a school with an emphasis on special needs students in Toulouse, France; a community center offering refugee integration programs to youth and young families in Hanover, Germany; a health center offering psychological counseling, family therapy, and fitness and lifestyle training in Tallinn, Estonia; a health center with counseling services, mental health seminars, a Christian bookstore, and a health food store in Miskolc, Hungary; a health center with a dental clinic in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; a community education center with healthy cooking classes, language classes, clothing charity services, and job training in Yekaterinburg, Russia; a vegan café in Maine, United States; and clinics, youth community

centers, and preschools in several closed countries.

JB: I see that our institutions are strengthening their urban ministry.¹⁰ Are there cities in the world where urban outreach has been particularly successful?

DV: The church has made great inroads in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and many of the islands of the sea. Lusaka, Zambia, and São Paulo, Brazil, are particularly strong. In São Paulo, the church is contextualized for every neighborhood. There is a vast array of church ministries to serve the diverse people groups. Of the two thousand, one hundred twenty-nine neighborhoods, thirty-eight percent of them have a church, school, day care center, exercise facility, or some other ministry. Yet even there, the majority of these neighborhoods have little Christian presence—and certainly no Seventh-day Adventist church.

JB: In the past, mission enterprise was one-way traffic, from the west to the rest of the world. Today we know that the theme of missions is from

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everywhere to everywhere. Do “the strong” have anything to teach “the weak”? And are the weak willing to learn from the strong?

DV: The day of mission has changed. We must now think globally. The internet has taught us that we can all learn from each other. The developing countries are now sending missionaries to the west. Sometimes they come as formal missionaries. Sometimes they come disguised as students, health care workers, and businesspersons. Other times they come as immigrants and refugees. We who were once the teachers must be humble enough now to be taught.

JB: You’ve heard Dr. Cliff Jones’s story, Doug. “How vividly do I recall an encounter I had with a mayor of Benton Harbor, a small city that lies a few miles north of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. On being introduced to the mayor at a community event, I was asked where I lived. When I responded that I lived in Berrien Springs, a farm community dominated

by people associated with Andrews University, the mayor, visibly agitated, informed me that the residents of her city did not appreciate folk from outside the city walls descending on them armed with all the answers to their plight and problems. What her city need and would be appreciative of, she stated, were people courageous, committed, and caring enough to live in the city.”¹¹ I get the relevancy argument but isn’t it, as some say, too dangerous to live in the cities?

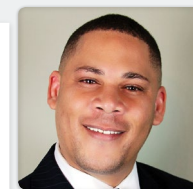
DV: We must be, as Kleber Gonçalves puts it, “incarnationally present” in our cities.¹² This requires us to include cities in our perspective of the mission field. Just as we have believers who travel to live in faraway lands, so believers can travel to live in cities nearby. The same God who protected the missionary in her country will protect the believer in his city.

JB: As you look at the urban landscape and its burgeoning challenge, Doug—how hopeful are you?

DV: We cannot grow weary in well-doing. God will finish His work—and it is our privilege to be a part of it. God has a multitude of people that will be saved, a multitude that no person can number, from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people and, God willing, every city. God will get His message out, one way or another—by any means necessary. ☞

- 1 *Urban Mission and Ministry Congress* (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States), September 6–8, 2018; *National Urban Missions Conference* (Best Western Plus Hotel, Philadelphia), October 15–17, 2018; *The Gospel and Our Cities* (The Moody Church, Chicago, Illinois, United States), October 18–20, 2018. See also christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2018/june/stewarding-gospel-movement-in-chicago.html.
- 2 Urban centers of influence, or life hope centers, adapt themselves to the needs of the community, (e.g., health food store, vegetarian restaurant, community center, gymnasium, or mobile dental clinic).
- 3 G. Uba, “The Rise and Walk Family” in Romania,” Seventh-day Adventist Church Inter-European Division News, November 4, 2015, news.eud.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2015-11-04/the-rise-and-walk-family-in-romania/.
- 4 George W. Webber, *Today’s Church: A Community of Exiles & Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 94.
- 5 A PDF of Ellen G. White, *Ministry to the Cities*, is available at egwritings-a.akamaihd.net/pdf/en_MTC.pdf.
- 6 See Jeffrey McAuliffe and Robert McAuliffe, *The Ephesus Model: A Biblical Framework for Urban Mission* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Global Mission Urban Center, 2017).
- 7 John Cassidy, “History Turns Its Back on America’s Heroes,” *The Sunday Times* (London), July 28, 1991, 15.
- 8 E. E. Cleveland, *Let the Church Roll On: An Autobiography* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2014), 49–54.
- 9 Richard McEdward and David J. B. Trim, “Reaching the World’s 500 Largest Cities: A Demographic and Statistical Analysis,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 1–20.
- 10 Oakwood University www2.oakwood.edu/oakwood-university-expands-degree-programs, Washington Adventist University www.reachcolumbiaunion.org/about/ and Andrews University www.andrews.edu/sem/DMin/concentrations/urban_ministry/.
- 11 R. Clifford Jones (president of Lake Region Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and immediate past associate dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University). “Urbanization and Christianity: Reaching the Urban Community for Christ,” in Maier, Rudi (Ed.), *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 197.
- 12 Kleber Gonçalves, “Missional Models of a Church for Postmoderns in Urban Contexts,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014), 87.

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I can't breathe

The image of Eric Garner being choked to death on July 17, 2014, for allegedly selling untaxed cigarettes on a street corner in Staten Island, New York, remains burned into the consciousness of the American psyche. While being placed in a chokehold for 15 to 19 seconds, Mr. Garner can be heard on a cell phone video saying 11 times, “I can’t breathe.” His dying declaration helped spark the Black Lives Matter movement and came to symbolize the plight of minorities in America. Mr. Garner’s words can also be seen as a greater metaphor symbolizing the asphyxiating condition of urban residents.

Anguish of spirit

We remember Moses’ frustration with the children of Israel and their struggles to trust God throughout their wilderness experience. Again and again the Israelites complained about the slightest hardship. This reaction began in Egypt when Moses first approached them. Yet, while the Israelites received scathing rebukes for their stubbornness and lack of faith once they crossed the Red Sea, God did not condemn or chastise them for their faithlessness when they were in Egypt.

The Lord understood the spiritual, emotional, and psychological experiences that affected the way the Israelites received Moses and, ultimately, God Himself. The debilitating incidents of everyday life in slavery left the Israelites in a state of human exhaustion. “So Moses spoke thus to

the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage” (Exod. 6:9, NKJV). It was not that the Israelites were naturally a recalcitrant people, but, rather, the cruel bondage, which produced anguish of spirit, rendered them incapable of heeding Moses.

This expression *anguish of spirit* comes from the two-word Hebrew phrase *miq-qō-šēr rūah*. *Miq-qō-šēr* means “shortness, to be lacking, or to be missing.” *Rūah* means “spirit, breath, or to breathe.” Literally translated, the phrase indicates shortness of breath or not being able to breathe. Exodus 6:9 leads us to understand that the Israelites could not listen to Moses because they could not breathe. *Miq-qō-šēr rūah* tells us that the shortness of breath resulted “from anguish, inward pressure, which prevents a man from breathing properly.”¹ The Israelites had been so overwhelmed by hardship and systematic oppression that they could not breathe.

Principalities, powers, and pain

The psycho-emotional condition of the Israelites in Egypt has profound relevance for the way we should approach urban ministry. Like Moses, those who develop and execute inner-city ministries struggle to relieve the asthma of the everyday life of urban jungles. Principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world have created such malignant systems and malicious structures that we find

ourselves dealing with urban communities that cannot breathe.

Moreover, such conditions are not restricted to any one race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The effects of urban life take their toll on all peoples. The opening lines of Charles Dickens book *A Tale of Two Cities* summarizes the plight of urban life: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us . . .”

On the one hand, urban life offers sprawling condos and newly built townhouses, attracting the upwardly mobile. Higher wage jobs, the convenience of commute, revitalized communities, and the influx of industry and opportunity make urban living quite inviting. However, with those opportunities come unintended consequences, such as a workload that places unrealistic demands on personal and family time and leaves many disconnected from family and community. The high financial costs of urban living cause many to live beyond their means and become burdened with debt. Many attempt to numb the pain of the resulting dysfunctional relationships with alcohol, prescription drugs, and opioids, the latter producing an ever-growing opioid crisis.²

On the other hand, urban life presents massive gentrification that

displaces entire communities, uproots families, and further cripples economic opportunities. Police fatalities are coupled with police brutalities. Urban camping laws criminalize homelessness. The defunding of mental health facilities has led to unnecessary incarceration of the mentally disabled. In addition, the daily indignities associated with poverty further worsen the problem.³

Addressing the symptoms

Anyone who suffers from asthma knows the terror of an asthma attack. The need to breathe becomes all-consuming. Regardless of an individual's spiritual ability, educational level, or socioeconomic status, trying to have a rational discussion about politics, finances, or religion with someone suffering from an asthma attack is

hand clapping and toe tapping of the old country church.

Pastor John D. Aaron Jr. of the Nazarene Missionary Baptist Church in Alexandria, Louisiana, told me during my first year of pastorate after the seminary, "Son, you do not just pastor a church, you pastor the entire city." How do churches, pastors, and ministries address and relieve these symptoms so that urban dwellers can be in a psycho-emotional and spiritual place to hear the life-changing gospel of Jesus? The answer and the work are not quick, easy, or glamorous but may be achieved through the following strategies.

Peruse. Both Moses and Jesus assessed the circumstances, situations, and needs of their people before they launched into a strategy. "So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, 'Please let me go and return to my brethren who are

become keenly aware of urban life, the life of our cities.

Because of the modern commuter church phenomenon (members traveling into the community where the church is located but not living there or being connected to its issues/concerns), many of our members are detached from the church's immediate environment, so they can offer little meaningful assistance by way of urban ministry. Perusing the situation and realities of our communities helps inform our members of real needs and awakens a sense of urgency.

Pastors and congregations that wish to be relevant and have a meaningful influence on their cities will take the time to become informed about the issues affecting their residents. While all cities have similar basic issues, we can develop specific approaches only from an informed perspective on and understanding of the needs and situation of each community. Too often pastors attempt to transpose successes from other cities into their current context. Learning about an individual city and its citizens will lead to more relevant, long-term methods and strategies.

Participate. The needs and challenges of urban ministry are too vast for any one church to address individually. Pastors and congregations should seek to collaborate with other entities that can impact the city. Our collaboration partners should consist of the following four groups: ministerial alliances, community activist organizations, community organizers (e.g., the PICO⁴ [people improving communities] National Network), and community development organizations. At times the church needs to lead marches against unjust laws and policies. Other times it should help communities organize so that they can chart a path of self-reliance and growth. Often a church must plan strategies and develop resources to bring about development (e.g., affordable housing, mental health services, addiction recovery programs). And sometimes our churches will have to provide financial and volunteer support for community

The psycho-emotional condition of the Israelites in Egypt has profound relevance for the way we should approach urban ministry.

unrealistic at best and inhumane at worst. As with the Israelites in Egypt, urban centers increasingly produce souls who, crushed under the burden of life, cannot breathe.

In urban centers, evangelism often borders on the anemic as people cannot hear the gospel when they cannot breathe. Perhaps the church's insensitivity to people's asthmatic response to modern urban life is one of the causes of the secularization of America. Denver activist and attorney Elizabeth Epps noted that urban African Americans are leaving the traditional church, and for too many blacks, Christianity has become more of a cultural religion, reminisced with fond memories of the

in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive' " (Exod. 4:18, NKJV). "When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36, ESV).

Scripture informs us that both Moses and Jesus heard the divine Voice communicating the plight of the people. Today's divine Voice is heard when reading various local newspapers, attending civic and community association meetings, visiting with elected officials and community leaders, riding city transportation, joining interfaith ministerial alliances, and interacting with neighbors surrounding our churches. Our objective is to

organizations. Every city has individuals and organizations that seek to improve the community, and we should and can, without compromising our core biblical beliefs, partner with such entities. The purpose is altruistic motives, not ulterior ones.

Collaborating with organizations and churches on the front line of urban compassion keeps us from reinventing the wheel and appearing arrogant and aloof from the very people who need to help us further the gospel's objective. Moreover, cooperating with such entities also provides an indispensable commodity—credibility. If trust is necessary to move a church forward—a church that shares our theological views—how much more is it vital when we interact with the unchurched and those with opposing theological understandings?

Practice. No church, no matter how large, has the ability to address all urban needs and challenges. Churches have to determine how they are going to affect their city. This is where perusing and participating become even more relevant. Too often churches tend to veer to one of two extremes: they either become rigid and provide no real ministry to their community or attempt to become all things to everyone and ultimately do not serve anyone. Pastors and congregations should be clear about their resources and abilities and should focus on those things they can do well. It is far better for a church to provide one ministry to their community successfully (e.g., an addiction support small group) than to attempt many ventures with half-hearted sloppiness.⁵

With a desire to be strategic and relevant, Pastor Dave Kennedy and the New Day Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Denver, Colorado, area partner with various organizations, helping raise funds and connecting church members with volunteer opportunities. This partnering has allowed them to maximize their congregation's resources. They have launched a new

ministry, offering young adults cross-cultural Christian experience.

Pastor Terrence Hughes of Alpha and Omega Ministries began by setting up a folding table in the section of Denver that has the most homeless people and offering water and snacks to the homeless, as well as clean needles.

Help them breath again

Because pastors have a limited amount of time each day, they have to make decisions regarding its use. How will the pastor balance his or her time with pastoral visitations, managing church projects, and administrative work related to finances and organization as well as the need to be relevant to the community?⁶ We cannot accomplish urban ministry in the pastoral study or the boardroom. It is successful only when we get out and just do it. We cannot ignore the labored breathing of communities crushed by the weight of urban living.

Like Moses, we are called to see the condition of the people in our communities, join hands with the workers, and share a strategy of freedom. Through the breath of God (*rûah* רֹחַ), we can help our cities breathe again. 🌬️

- 1 Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 304.
- 2 See Josh Katz and Abby Goodnough, "The Opioid Crisis Is Getting Worse, Particularly for Black Americans," *New York Times*, December 22, 2017. [nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/22/upshot/opioid-deaths-are-spreading-rapidly-into-black-america.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/22/upshot/opioid-deaths-are-spreading-rapidly-into-black-america.html)
- 3 See Karen Weese, "Why It Costs So Much to Be Poor in America," *Washington Post*, January 25, 2018. [washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/01/25/why-it-costs-so-much-to-be-poor-in-america/?utm_term=.20f57b65a141](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/01/25/why-it-costs-so-much-to-be-poor-in-america/?utm_term=.20f57b65a141).
- 4 PICO National Network is a national network of progressive faith-based community organizations in the United States.
- 5 Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2011).
- 6 See for example Greg McKeown, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2014).

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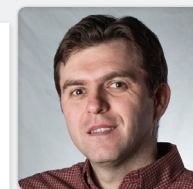
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Effective relationships with postmodern people in the context of urban mission

I met a young Romanian man, Cosmin, who had a good job as a lawyer in a nice city. Although he came from an Orthodox family, his worldview was soaked in postmodernism. Literature by philosophers like Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Plato, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Søren Kierkegaard was bread for his soul. As I related to him stories of my experience as a Christian, it was obvious he was thirsty to find meaning for his own life. This thirst was the starting point for Bible study.

One day he shared, “You know what? Last night I couldn’t sleep. At two in the morning, I opened my computer and watched a very interesting debate on your TV channel, Hope Channel. It was amazing.”

Curious, I asked for the title of the talk show and realized that it was a debate about the Sabbath School topic for the week. I was surprised to see how interested he was in spiritual issues. I had captured his interest with simple experiences of faith and discussions about the meaning of life.

Thinking about this, I realized that reaching people for Christ involves building creative bridges according to people’s actual needs and mind-sets. My encounter with Cosmin sparked my interest in understanding urban

witnessing in the context of the postmodern mind.

Godly values instead of human pleasure

Urban mission, especially among postmodern secular people in cities, represents a challenge for Christians because of the differences in worldviews. Charles Taylor wrote, “Our age has seen a strong set of currents which one might call non-religious anti-humanisms, which fly under various names today, like ‘deconstruction’ and ‘post-structuralism,’ and which find their roots in immensely influential writings of the nineteenth century, especially those of Nietzsche.”¹

Taylor points out that even secular humanism is moving beyond simply “human flourishing”² in its desire for something greater and more fulfilling than mere pleasure in this life. In Taylor’s thinking, beyond this flourishing is the fullness that takes place when a person stands in the presence of God and experiences a conversion of values.³ Could this be the bridgehead for Christian mission, a need to live for God’s glory even in this life?

Authenticity instead of contingency

Witnessing to the postmodern person first involves understanding

their worldview. Without taking time to approach, and eventually grasp, how they think, what they believe, and why they function as they do, the relationship may fail.

Authentic love, involving warm relationships, with *no strings attached*, is a way to overcome what has been deemed the “hermeneutic of suspicion.”⁴ I saw signs that my secular postmodern friends, though living life in contrast to Scripture, were looking for some direction. After some time, they found me credible, not because of my pastoral title but because of my Christian care. One stated, “You Protestant Christians have something special—a different type of love.” For them, a real leader is a person who does good for others, even at the cost of personal sacrifice.

Demonstrating instead of telling

In postmodernism, truth is relative. Zane Yi indicates that “rather than a denial of the truth, properly understood postmodernism denies the ability of humans to perfectly or fully apprehend and control it.”⁵ Thus Gary Krause posits, “It is not just about *telling* people about the truth of God’s Word, but *demonstrating* the truth of that Word.”⁶

Just as human beings cannot fully understand God’s truth, so the missional

mind needs to admit that it cannot fully grasp all angles of the divine plan. Such an admission can become a pathway to engage the postmodern mind, not with authoritarianism but with the goal of fellowship found in the communal search for truth, followed by the joy of discovery. With such an exchange, there is now a shift from an intellectual to an experiential approach in which the common experience becomes the focal point of a triangular relationship: two human beings, one God.

Community instead of hierarchy

In 1 Corinthians 12:27, the apostle Paul is envisioning a body, a community as “the locus of Christ’s activity”⁷ and not only of human interaction. Skip Bell writes that “the presence of God, because he is a relational God who fosters community, is intended for a city.”⁸ City dwellers are attracted to places where warm relationships are created. They are also searching for networks of people with common values, hobbies, interests, or beliefs. Creating such a group, or penetrating an existing one, may not be an easy task, but after a while, a common trust is built that becomes the platform for open discussion and activities.

It is important for postmodern people to find a place where they feel accepted, a second home. They are searching for both horizontal and vertical intimacy, both with other persons and with God, and they may feel alienated when they do not find it.⁹ The solution for this need is a warm community, one that is not locked in irrelevant rules or a hierarchy but that is functional in an organic way.

Incarnation instead of isolation

Jesus stated clearly that the church “cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14–16, NIV), it needs to spread its light. Even Christian monasticism, at its beginning, started as a movement of serving people in their daily lives. This is the example of the incarnated Jesus: to be among people, dwell with them, and understand their

needs, not for a short time but for His whole life on earth. Kleber Gonçalves, speaking about the early church, says that its work was “contextual,”¹⁰ being immersed in the culture of their time and developing a mission in their present circumstances.

In today’s world, the church should understand the people, places, and worldviews that it intends to change. Stanley Patterson proposes that “we must adopt an incarnational approach that reframes the Word into language that maximizes the possibility of engagement and connection consistent with the platforms upon which their culture is built. What Jesus did for us, we must do for them.”¹¹ To be where the people are, understand what they need, and respond to those needs is what the missional church is called to do.

We may develop a social network that will multiply its branches by discipleship training involving the native leaders. These leaders will, in turn, take over the responsibilities thus creating self-sustaining cells of mission. Although developing such a network will require the church to immerse itself in the postmodern culture and worldview, it must do so still bearing the uniqueness of the gospel message but presenting it in a way that is innovative, creative, and relevant.

Stories instead of statements

John Caputo writes that “the deconstruction of Christianity is not an attack on the church but a critique of the idols to which it is vulnerable.”¹² Jean François Lyotard affirms that the “incredulity towards metanarratives,”¹³ in general, is the essence of postmodernism, and one thing under the magnifying glass of the postmodern deconstructivism is the Christian metanarrative. As a critique, Christian thinkers argue (and justifiably) that the deconstructionism taught by Jaques Derrida and by postmodernism constitute metanarratives themselves.¹⁴ Anyhow, the role of the Christian mission is not so much to put a correct label on postmodernism but to find ways to transmit the gospel message in this context.


It is important for postmodern people to find a place where they feel accepted, a second home.

In spite of the fact that many Christian thinkers claim that “once you deconstruct truth, it is impossible for anyone to speak the truth to power,”¹⁵ the Bible says this about God: “In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony” (Acts 14:16, 17, NIV). In other words, these verses show that the barrier of relativism, pluralism, and deconstructivism is not impassable.

Speaking about the biblical verse that says that we must “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5, NIV), Curtis Chang argues that a good strategy is to, first, *enter* into the other’s story; second, to retell that story; and, third, to capture that story into God’s story.¹⁶ Chang stresses that the Christian missionary should focus on understanding the postmodern story before presenting one’s own side.

Abigail Doukhan considers the fact that “we find, in the biblical metanarrative, a key to a mode of storytelling which both escapes the pitfalls of a metanarrative discourse and the relativistic/subjectivistic trap of postmodern storytelling. Indeed, the biblical narrative falls more closely under the rubric of storytelling than of a metanarrative.”¹⁷ This is a new perspective, strange from a modern point of view—but pertinent. Many of the Bible’s legal, prophetic, and poetic passages are linked to stories or developed in a narrative context. Richard Sessoms presents a strategy of communication: “this [postmodern] audience often reacts

negatively to logical, abstract presentations, tending to distrust ‘truth’ that is expressed propositionally as dogmatic and confrontational . . . Telling them a story will often avoid this difficulty, for when Truth is embedded in story, people tend to recover their own stories in the light of God’s story.”¹⁸ Stories can be used in moral motivation, leadership training, or discipleship formation, and they address each age category.

The so-called barriers to Christian mission can, if we are open, bring new opportunities to reach people—people such as my postmodern and urban friend, Cosmin. To see these as opportunities, though, requires a new vision and motivation to research the Word of God to find methods to present the gospel through effective relationships adapted to the context of secular postmodernism, which is so prominent in urban settings. 

- 1 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 19.
- 2 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 20.
- 3 Stephen J. Costello, “Beyond Flourishing: ‘Fullness’ and ‘Conversion’ in Taylor and Lonergan,” in *The Taylor Effect: Responding to a Secular Age*, ed. Ian Leask (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 39–48.
- 4 N. T. Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion* (London: SPCK, 2013), 68.
- 5 Zane Yi, “Through a Glass Darkly: Speaking of Truth in Post-Modern Times,” in *Narrative, Meaning, and Truth: Fulfilling the Mission in Relativistic Contexts*, ed. Kleber D. Gonçalves and Bruce L. Bauer (Global Mission Centers, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2017), 111.
- 6 Gary Krause, “Seeking the Shalom: Wholistic Adventist Urban Mission and Centers of Influence,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 50.
- 7 James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 72.
- 8 Skip Bell, “Christ in the City: A Brief Theology,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 102.
- 9 Kleber de Oliveira Gonçalves, “A Critique of the Urban Mission of the Church in the Light of an Emerging Postmodern Condition” (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 2005), 226.
- 10 Kleber D. Gonçalves, “Missional Models of a Church for Postmoderns in Urban Contexts,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 87.
- 11 Stanley E. Patterson, “Framing the Gospel for the Relational Context of Postmodernism,” in *Narrative, Meaning, and Truth*, 43.
- 12 John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 137.
- 13 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.
- 14 Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of Our Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 103.
- 15 Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth*, 66.
- 16 Curtis Chang, *Engaging Unbelief: A Captivating Strategy from Augustine and Aquinas* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 26.
- 17 Abigail Doukhan, “Christianity for Postmoderns: From Metanarrative to Storytelling,” in *Narrative, Meaning, and Truth*, 37.
- 18 Richard W. Sessoms, *Leading With Story: Cultivating Christ-Centered Leaders in a Storycentric Generation* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2016), 43.

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This world is not my home— or is it? *Urban ministry and the crisis of city housing*

When I walked into the room for one of my regular pastoral visits, the man of the house, Casey, said, “Pastor, I’m glad you’re here. Anika needs your help. She needs a place to live.” Anika was the younger sister of Casey’s long-time live-in girlfriend, Danika. Slowly I approached her and asked what was going on. She began to cry. Between the sobs, she muttered something about trash cans and dumpsters and being accused of having her trash strewn all over the property. What was clear was that neither she nor I knew what to do next. After a few phone calls to the landowner and others, I reached a local legal aid office that processed the request for services and almost immediately began to offer counsel.

During the following weeks, I carted Anika back and forth from the legal aid office to hearing after hearing as the opposing attorney filed petitions and continuances ad nauseam. What amazed me was the way in which the property manager used the legal system to restrict or take away a basic necessity from an innocent person. It reminded me of the passage in Revelation 13 that tells us that the government will ultimately remove innocent people’s right to buy and sell and receive basic necessities and services. The law sometimes works to deny people basic rights.

Assessing the issue

This was the very first of many cases in which someone requested my aid

for a housing issue. As a matter of fact, it seemed while pastoring there that I had more requests for help with housing issues than for all other matters combined. Through those experiences, I have come to believe that access to affordable, quality housing is the single most important issue facing urban centers in our generation. With so many disparities facing urban residents, the church can serve as the buffer between corporate and political interests and people’s needs.

Years later, serving in a different neighborhood in the same city, the church I pastored found itself in the middle of a major community revitalization project. City officials, community development organizations, and private developers formulated plans and negotiated deals for a revitalized business corridor, and the city applied for a \$30 million federal housing development grant to replace a large group of public housing units in the neighborhood. All of this was happening around our church. The business corridor was two blocks away in one direction—and the public housing project two blocks away in the opposite direction. It was certain that new housing units were coming to our street. Our church was caught right in the middle.

The housing program required the public housing units to be replaced on a one-for-one ratio. However, the new housing units would not all be low-income housing.¹ Rather, the new developments would be “mixed-income,”

and such a plan could materialize in a variety of ways. It could be one-third low income, one-third affordable income, and one-third market rate, yet this formula was not set in concrete.² Nevertheless, at best, it could displace up to two-thirds of the residents from the public housing units. This was a classic case of gentrification that would price long-term residents out of the place that they had always called home.

During the planning phase in the more recent case, grassroots community development professionals organized community faith leaders to shore up community services and entities and to plan among ourselves for what was coming. They encouraged us to assist in the planning process to help influence the new housing plans in a way that would ensure that the project would ultimately displace the least number of local residents. In addition, they encouraged churches and faith-based organizations to buy properties, educate church members, and establish service organizations to create more opportunities to improve the quality of life for community residents.

In faith communities, we constantly speak of believers as pilgrims, aliens, and sojourners. We say, “This world is not my home. I’m just passing through.” We have songs which proclaim, “I got a home up in that kingdom, ain’t that good news?” Yet we dare not see social and political engagement with secular society as a distraction from our mission to seek and

save the lost.³ Failing to engage with the issues that directly affect the well-being and overall quality of life of city residents, puts in question the church's relevancy to the community and jeopardizes its viability and growth.⁴

Grassroots community development professionals sought to prevent the kind of unfortunate incidents that had happened in the past and to keep the neighborhood safe from anyone lacking a real commitment to the community's well-being. Churches that do not care for the economic needs of community members guarantee that future members will not be able to make significant and systematic financial contributions. Also, when residents get displaced, the local congregation loses potential members. It is important to note that an increase in local crime and changes in property values and zoning designations could make it difficult for a church to maintain its place in the community. Churches that do not engage with pressing civic issues threaten their own survival.

Biblical commands and warnings

Scripture teaches us that God is always on the side of the oppressed (Pss. 9:9; 10:18; 82:3; 103:6; 146:7). God declared through the prophets that we ought to champion the cause of the oppressed (Jer. 9:23, 24; Isa. 1:17; 56:1; Mic. 6:8). Jesus said His ministry was to “set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18, NASB). We have preached countless sermons on His command to His disciples to care for “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40).⁵ The very heart of the story of salvation history is that of God liberating His children from the oppressive power of sin. For “anyone who sins is a slave of sin” (John 8:34, CEV). That work must pervade everything that we do as an active embodiment of the gospel. Furthermore, we find apocalyptic implications here as well.

The second angel in Revelation 14 announces that Babylon is fallen. When we get additional details in Revelation 17, the passage describes Babylon as “the mother of harlots” and “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with

the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (Rev. 17:5, 6, NASB). From this perspective, the conflict might appear primarily spiritual. She has martyred God's faithful followers. However, Revelation 18 gives a much wider perspective. The chapter features a lament for the political and economic partnerships that will fail now that Babylon has lost her stranglehold on the masses.

Revelation 18:3 implicates political and economic leaders in Babylon's drunkenness, for “in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of *all* who have been slain on the earth” (v. 24, NASB; emphasis added). These leaders mourn not only for her (Babylon) but also for their own losses, because they have depended on her oppressive power to help them in their quest for prosperity (vv. 11, 19). The reality is that innocent people are often collateral victims in the quest for political and economic power.

The question we have to ask is, Have we been faithful to identify systems of oppression as part and parcel of Babylon's league of predators? Have we sought to speak truth to power and to defend the weak? Or have we been complicit with such unjust forces through our silence and own brand of ecclesial capitalism? We must learn to recognize institutions that defraud and exploit—and commit ourselves to setting the captives free. After all, Jesus gave us the power to overcome every machination of the enemy (Mark 3:15; Luke 10:19; 2 Cor. 10:4).

A legacy of discriminatory policies

While the founders of the United States proclaimed that all were created equal, society often perpetuated freedom for one segment of the population and a subhuman existence for another. This has always presented Americans with a stark dilemma.⁶

Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz explore how the industrial revolution required a global shift as cities found themselves forced to open their doors to immigrants to meet the demands of the assembly line. A global pattern of urban expansion toward ethnic and

cultural diversity began to explode, even though cities were reluctant to accept the new reality.⁷

Richard Rothstein tells how in the 1930s Midwest factories posted signs warning minorities that their labor and services were not welcome. By the end of World War II, however, those very same companies had no choice but to accommodate an expanding labor force.⁸ Nevertheless, despite the benefits to the workforce and the economy, financial institutions were reluctant to provide mortgage loans for minorities and forced them to live in rental properties in neighboring towns. A concerted effort to keep minorities out of certain neighborhoods denied them housing purchases, resulting in segregated neighborhoods and cities under the guise of “respecting local attitudes.”⁹

From all quarters there were persons of goodwill who pressed for multicultural integration to move society forward. Local attitudes, however, often ensured that diversity would not gain a strong foothold in mainstream society. Such practices have perpetuated themselves in a myriad of ways.¹⁰ The war on drugs in urban communities, the explosive growth of prisons, and the limited availability of quality housing for released prisoners, have rendered the plight of many nothing short of drastic.¹¹

Finding solutions

At the outset, I was careful not to identify the city to which I was referring, but rather to draw attention to issues that are pervasive in the major cities of America. To hear a story about my city is to hear one about yours. What is needed are churches that are willing to become centers for advocacy and engagement and that will help provide solutions to this crisis. I am embarrassed to admit that when informational meetings took place just blocks away from my church during the housing redevelopment planning process, only two members of our church attended, myself and a visiting professor from Europe who was researching urban redevelopment. As a church, we were not nearly as involved as we should have been.

How can believers, in the context where they serve, help to care for the needs of people?¹²

1. *Host community development and community engagement events.* Midsize and large churches can really thrive by offering their facility for community events. Community leaders are constantly trying to enlist the support of clergy because they know that clergy-persons have regular contact with the people they are trying to reach. They love to see us at meetings and are thrilled when we offer to host such gatherings.

Also, banks are required to invest in their local communities. If invited to facilitate a first-time home buyers class or a personal finance program of some sort, they would be happy to do so. Another strategy is to organize a panel of community leaders to address housing issues. It was one of the approaches I used. My members would not go to the meetings, so I brought the meetings to them. We held town hall sessions in which members could hear directly from activists, political leaders, bankers, and developers about the issues pressing around them.

2. *Adopt a family.* Maybe your resources for drawing a crowd or organizing the community are meager. However, God always positions us to help people. Adopting a family is a prime strategy for a small church. As a young pastor, I heard stories of clergy who had adopted a family to provide them with extra care and support and to help them navigate the complex financial and legal systems of the city. If we can make ourselves a resource for at least one family (your church might be able to adopt two or three) at a time, we can make a difference in helping them climb out of the devastating poverty that would otherwise prevent them from having a decent quality of life.

3. *Buy back the block.* Churches with larger congregations and greater access to resources are more likely to have success here. Maybe the church can afford only one house. And perhaps that one house can serve as a rental property to support the family that the church decided to adopt, disciple, and nurture.

But maybe your church can do what Minnie McNeal inspired the Coatesville, Pennsylvania, church to do in buying an entire block of row houses and renovating them to provide housing for low-income families and people in transition.¹³

Stories abound of churches that had an opportunity to purchase property near their building but failed to act. They either lacked faith, worried about the cost to maintain the property, or suffered from some other internal dysfunction or bureaucratic matter that prevented them from moving forward. Such instances usually result in collective regret. I would much rather err on the side of taking action for the sake of service rather than inaction because of fear.

It is true that this level of engagement requires a great deal of organization and commitment. While there may be financial resources for nonprofits to help these plans materialize, it still requires resources to execute efficiently. Nevertheless, we have seen that it can be done.

A seat at the table

I mentioned that I transported Anika back and forth to the legal aid office and for hearings. After what seemed months, she won her case! The sad news is that she still ended up losing the apartment for some other reason later on. Such work is never finished. For me, it was the first case where I realized that my work had just begun. The organization that owned the properties got so tired of my calling and visiting their office to advocate for tenants that one day they asked me to serve as a member of their advisory board. I then committed myself to help people sort through legal and financial complexities to help them survive life in the city.

I am often reminded of the promise Jesus made that He will cause His faithful servants to recline in the kingdom while He serves them (see Luke 12:37). That promise always makes me think about the questions in Matthew 25:37–39. We will ask him, “Lord what did we do to deserve such lavish treatment?” To which He will reply, ““Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did for me”” (Matt. 25:40, GW). I want to recline

at that table. But I am always mindful that although I have the promise to recline at God’s table in heaven, many do not have “a seat at the table” here on earth. Here’s to our helping them find a seat. And if there are no additional seats, we will bring them a folding chair. ☺

- 1 Urban Institute and Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, *Choice Neighborhoods: Baseline Conditions and Early Progress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2015), 12–19, accessed May 20, 2018, www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Baseline-Conditions-Early-Progress.pdf.
- 2 Urban Institute and Manpower Demonstration, *Choice Neighborhoods*, 12–19.
- 3 “Social action is a living witness to our soon-returning Lord. When we take a stand for justice, compassion, and healing, we demonstrate the values of the coming Kingdom.” In *Adventist Community Services International, Keys to Adventist Community Services* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2008), 6.
- 4 “The churches that were dying or had already died disconnected from and stopped serving their communities. Their inward focus and self-serving killed them.” In May-Ellen Colón and Gaspar Colón, *Adventist Churches that Make a Difference* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2016), 126.
- 5 “No individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for ‘the least of these.’” Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Warner, 2001); Christopher Thompson, “The Least of These: Revisiting Our Ministry Mandate to Forgotten Groups,” *Ministry*, Mar. 2015, 13–16.
- 6 James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 4.
- 7 Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 70–74.
- 8 Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018), 8.
- 9 Rothstein, *The Color of Law*, 37.
- 10 Taylor Gordon, “8 Major American Banks That Got Caught Discriminating Against Black People,” *Atlanta Black Star*, Mar. 3, 2015, atlantablackstar.com/2015/03/03/8-major-american-banks-that-got-caught-discriminating-against-black-people.
- 11 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: New Press, 2010), 144–148. See also www.npr.org/2016/12/17/505996792/documentary-13th-argues-mass-incarceration-is-an-extension-of-slavery.
- 12 To read additional strategies for addressing the displacement of urban residents, see Conn and Ortiz, *Urban Ministry*, 291–294.
- 13 Celeste Ryan-Blyden, “2016 Notable Persons of Honor Recognized,” *Visitor*, November 17, 2016, accessed May 20, 2018, columbiaunionvisitor.com/2016/2016-notable-persons-honor-recognized.

Timothy P. Nixon, DMin, pastor, Lake Region Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Mokena, Illinois, United States.



Invisible People

In the summer of 2013, I conducted one of the Net New York '13 evangelistic series planned for New York City. For me, it was a homecoming because I am a native New Yorker. As I drove to “The City” through the Holland Tunnel to lower Manhattan and then took the Manhattan Bridge into downtown Brooklyn, I was filled with excitement and anticipation. I decided to take a drive to reacquaint myself with my city. As I drove the streets of Williamsburg into downtown Brooklyn, on block after block I saw something that startled me: the facilities had been improved, and the inhabitants had been removed. “Where have all the black people gone?” I asked myself. Were they actually there but had become invisible?

No, they were not invisible, but in some ways, at least metaphorically, perhaps they were. The reason for their stark absence from an area of Brooklyn where they once thrived was because of *gentrification*. “Gentrification is the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste.”¹ Downtown Brooklyn had indeed been transformed. The streets were clean and refined with bike lanes. There were outdoor sidewalk cafés. The basketball and hockey arena had been relocated to downtown Brooklyn, and several other mainstays had been renovated and/or completely rebuilt. The transformation was stunning. Everything had been altered—including the inhabitants.

It seemed to me somewhat immoral that, after all of these years, when the city finally decided to invest billions

of dollars to transform downtown Brooklyn, those who spent the bulk of their lives in that section of the borough would not be the beneficiaries of the investment. The same brownstones that were once dilapidated were now overhauled for the new inhabitants. It was like an act of Robin Hood in reverse. The poor were robbed and displaced to benefit the rich, and the once-abandoned area of the city had now come alive with activity, entertainment, opportunity, and excitement.²

As we think about the church and its ministry to the urban centers of the world where gentrification is a growing economic strategy, what should be our response? Peter Moskowitz maintains that gentrification brings “changes to the city’s basic services,




particularly its school system, and disadvantages poorer families.”³ In the case of New Orleans, after the devastating floods of Katrina, the city “dismantled the teacher’s union, which had helped to build part of New Orleans’s black middle class” of the city.⁴ Does the church have a responsibility to speak for those who have been displaced and overlooked by their society?

God has always placed Himself in allegiance with those who have been made invisible by the inequities of the social structures. The psalmist writes, “I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy” (Ps. 140:12, NIV). Ron Sider devotes almost two hundred pages to biblical passages expressing God’s love for and commitment to the poor.⁵

Jesus directed His ministry to the invisible of society. When He announced His ministry in Nazareth, He reaffirmed the commitment to the oppressed established by God the Father (Luke 4:18). He focused on the oppressed and forgotten of society. He identified with

the plight and concerns of the marginalized and the disenfranchised. As Christ’s disciples, Christians must join Him in representing those who cannot speak for themselves. James Cone writes, “In view of the biblical emphasis on liberation, it seems not only appropriate but necessary to define the Christian community as the community . . . which joins Jesus Christ in His fight for the liberation of humankind.”⁶

In order for the seed of the everlasting gospel to take root in our great urban centers, the church cannot disengage from the issues of inequality, poverty, injustice, and economic oppression. After all, is that not what the ministry of Jesus was about? When asked why He spent so much time with the outcast and the destitute, Jesus said, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17, KJV). Urban ministry requires us to face the power structures of society and stand with the voiceless and the powerless—the invisible people. 

- 1 “Gentrification and It’s Effect in Housing,” NewsChannel5 Network, Mar. 29, 2018, www.newschannel5.com/plus/openline/gentrification-and-its-effect-on-housing.
- 2 Spike Lee famously asked the question, “Why does it take an influx of white New Yorkers in the south Bronx, in Harlem, in Bed Stuy, in Crown Heights for the facilities to get better?” in Richard Florida, “The Complicated Link Between Gentrification and Displacement,” Citylab, Sept. 8, 2015, citylab.com/equity/2015/09/the-complicated-link-between-gentrification-and-displacement/404161/.
- 3 Peter Moskowitz, *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2017).
- 4 Gillian B. White, “The Steady Destruction of America’s Cities,” *The Atlantic*, Mar. 9, 2017, theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/gentrification-moskowitz/519057/.
- 5 Ronald J. Sider, *Cry Justice: The Bible Speaks on Hunger and Poverty* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980).
- 6 James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 3.

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Incarnational Mission: Being With the World

by Samuel Wells, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018.

The world is urban at its core—over half the world’s population live in cities, and most of the global poverty resides there too. Urbanization affects all of us, whether we live in cities or not, and this impact will increase in the coming decades. In *Incarnational Mission: Being With the World*, Samuel Wells urges Christians to embrace their neighborhoods, no matter how foreboding they may appear. He seeks to equip Christians with various approaches to spread the gospel.

According to Wells, “Mission is responding to what the Holy Spirit is doing in the world” (18). Simply put, the essence of God’s being is present within the neighborhoods in which we serve. For mission-minded Christians, the book provides some helpful ideas that can enhance their approach to sharing the gospel with all kinds of people outside the church.

At the beginning of the book, Wells describes the world as the kingdom that is anticipating God’s work. Persons living within the kingdom have their own set of beliefs and needs. Consequently, individuals may have varying perceptions and attitudes towards God and the church.

Wells shares the stories of being with (1) individuals who have lapsed, (2) those who are seeking, (3) those of other faiths, (4) those who have no faith, (5) those who are hostile, (6) neighbors, (7) institutions, (8) governments, and (9) those who have been excluded. Thus, “being with the world” requires disciples to understand the different viewpoints of people within their community.

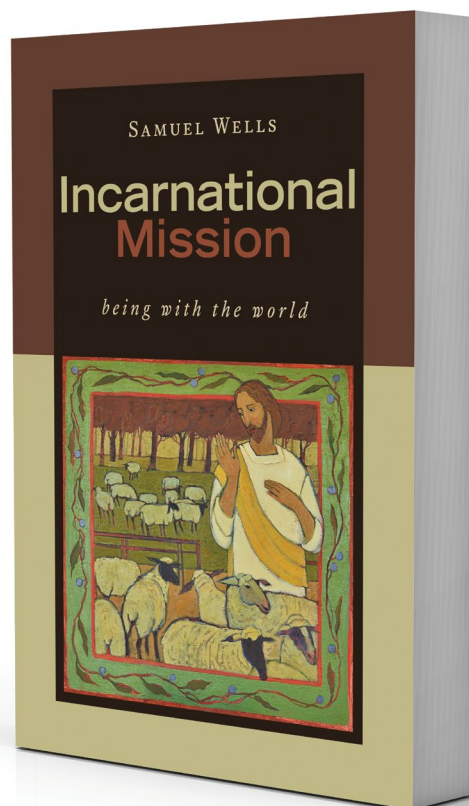
Drawing on the Gospels, Acts, and personal insights gleaned from more than two decades in ministry, Wells presents eight dimensions of mission

that illustrate the concept of *being with*: presence, attention, mystery, delight, participation, partnership, enjoyment, and glory. The stories that Wells shares provide examples of the eight dimensions being used to strengthen the relationship between disciples and non-Christians. Applying these dimensions requires disciples to be humble, open, and present within the communities during celebration and tragedy.

The final chapter, “Being With the Excluded,” truly encompasses mission and the application of the eight dimensions. For example, people who have suffered hardships face “poverty, discrimination, disadvantage, hunger, homelessness, and migrancy. These are not problems to be fixed for a person; they are conditions that are shared with a person” (221). To lead an individual to freedom from their situation, one must take the point of view of the oppressed person.

Encouraging and assisting a person who is experiencing difficulties requires the presence of, attention to, and participation between disciples and non-Christians. The skill sets and resources from local organizations, institutions, and government are sometimes necessary to assist a person. However, the collaboration between community partners provides an opportunity to showcase God’s work to help individuals find freedom from their situations.

This book is an excellent resource containing principles and practices that



challenge the reader to become an active participant in urban mission. In each chapter, Wells’s illustrations and personal insights will benefit beginners and veterans in the mission field. Church members, ministry leaders, and pastors can apply the concepts of the eight dimensions to strengthen current and future ministries of the church. God’s compassionate presence in the community is truly reflected in the phrase “being with the world.” Indeed, “*With*,” says Wells, “is the most important word in the Christian faith.”

—Reviewed by Victor Kindo, a student who is assistant director of operations for the Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

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► Adventist church named “Church of the Year”

Denver, Colorado, United States—Dr. **Robert L. Davis**, pastor of the Denver Park Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, and his wife, **Denise Davis**, accepted the 2017 Church of the Year award from the Colorado Gospel Music Academy Hall of Fame in recognition of the church’s sustained, distinguished community service and spiritual contribution to Colorado. The award was presented at the 47th Annual Colorado Gospel Music Academy Hall of Fame Awards Celebration at New Hope Baptist Church.

The Colorado Gospel Music Academy Hall of Fame was founded to recognize accomplishments and contributions of individuals and organizations that have been true soldiers and faithful community servants in Colorado. The following ministries and accomplishments of the Denver Park Hill church in 2017, under the leadership of Dr. Davis, factored into the committee’s selection:

- Back-to-school tutorial preparation boot camp for middle schoolers and tutoring hosted by children’s ministry
- Hosting a Martin Luther King Jr. Day interfaith celebration
- Barbershop health screenings for African American men and families
- Community discussions regarding biased policing and the Denver

Police Department use-of-force policy

- Supporting initiatives for reform in the Denver Police Department, including data collection and jail overcrowding
- Organizing and hosting the first ever Park Hill Interfaith Community Fest, uniting Christian, Islamic, and Jewish faiths to promote community unity, economic empowerment, and wholistic health
- Weekly food and clothing distribution for low-income families

- Activating two Safe Haven initiatives that provided spiritual and emotional support for Park Hill after two tragic gun violence episodes
- Domestic violence awareness vigils at the city and county buildings
- Joining as members and providing leadership for the Youth Violence Prevention Center-Denver Key Leader Advisory Board
- Addressing the effects of Denver’s gentrification and other activities to improve the Park Hill community [Brittany Winkfield, *Outlook*]



Photo: Central States Conference

► United States pastor recognized for “dedication to the city”

Brighton, Colorado, United States—“Pastor **Rex Bell** has made the city of Brighton a better place to live,” said US Congressman **Mike Coffman** at a ceremony in Brighton, Colorado, on May 1, 2018. The Adventist pastor was recognized for “many years of extraordinary work and dedication to the City of Brighton” throughout the two terms he served as city councilman.

At the city hall, Bell was also presented with a Congressional Record plaque, signed by Representative Coffman, that read, “Councilmember Bell has served his community for 23 years as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in the City of Brighton. Councilmember Bell has, without a doubt, enhanced the quality of life for every citizen in the City of Brighton throughout his tenure as a

city councilmember and as a resident of the City of Brighton.”

“I’m humbled, grateful, and kind of empty because it’s the passing of a part of my life that has been very important to me,” said Bell while surrounded by family and members of the city council.

Bell’s road to city council began with newly forged friendships with people at the city hall who would later

ask him to serve on the city's planning and zoning committee. He ran for city council when an opening emerged. When the term ended, he was reelected to continue his service to Brighton.

With every stage of public service, Bell was mindful of how he incorporated his faith into his work. "I [did] not want to take my religion to the city, but I [wanted] to take my faith. There's a difference. And I [wanted] to take Christ to the community, and that's what we attempted to do. We got involved, and one thing led to another," Bell said.

The contribution of Pastor Bell's time and effort as a pastor and community leader "has been a major contributing factor in helping the Brighton Seventh-day Adventist Church be recognized as a church of significance to Brighton and its people," stated **Eric Nelson**, Rocky Mountain Conference vice president for administration. [Rajmund Dabrowski, Rocky Mountain Conference]



Rocky Mountain Conference

► Cameroon pastor honored for his contributions to social peace

Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire—Jean Pourrat Ameting, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and church leader in the Central African nation of Cameroon, was recently awarded the Order of Merit of Cameroon for his contributions to social peace through his preaching and example.

The appointment to the Order of Merit of Cameroon can be made only after a minimum of 12 years of outstanding and proven service to the

nation. Meting is director of the Sabbath School and Personal Ministries department of the Yaoundé-based Cameroon Union Mission, which oversees the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church across the country. "I've been preaching for years on behalf of social peace, the fight against corruption, the promotion of decentralized development, and fraternal love," he said. "All of these are topics of interest for the



Photo: West-Central Africa Division

government of Cameroon." [Abraham Bakari, West-Central Africa News and *Adventist Review*]

► Jamaican pastors receive Governor-General's Achievement Awards

St. Ann, Jamaica—Two Seventh-day Adventist church pastors were among more than 15 Jamaicans from throughout the nation who were recipients of the annual Governor-General's Achievement Awards, presented by

Sir **Patrick Allen**, Governor-General of Jamaica.

Through his office as youth ministries director for the church in the North East Jamaica Conference, in the parish of St. Mary, Pastor **Gordon Lindsay**

has built a strong relationship with numerous communities and groups, impacting many lives outside of the pew. He is a volunteer chaplain of the Jamaica Constabulary Force and has coordinated community feeding programs and the



Photo: Charal Lewis

construction of a house for a homeless man. He currently coordinates the Pringle Children’s Home Development Initiative and Impact Annotto Bay, which provide counseling and empowerment sessions for young people, aimed at reducing crime and violence.


Pastor **Omar Oliphant**, district pastor in the parish of St. Ann, engaged hundreds of youth in rallies, youth debate series, drama productions, and musical talent shows. The parish also benefited from his brainchild, The Save-A-Youth Foundation, through the purchase of more than eight nebulizers for the St. Ann’s Bay Hospital. Oliphant made history in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jamaica by becoming the first ordained minister to become an attorney-at-law. He was admitted to the Jamaican Bar Association on December 7, 2017. [Nigel Coke, Jamaica Union/IAD Staff]



▶ Canadian pastors and chaplains offer comfort in the city

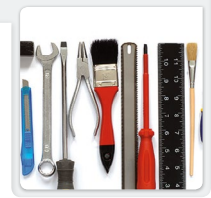
Toronto, Canada—The nation of Canada was recently shocked and saddened by a mass shooting in which 29-year-old Faisal Hussain shot at random into several eateries on Toronto’s Danforth Avenue. The victims included Julianna Kozis, 10, and Reese Fallon, 18, both deceased, and Danielle Kane, 31, who may never walk again. This tragedy came almost three months after a fatal van attack on Yonge Street in Toronto killed 10 people.

Organized by Ontario Conference’s director for Prayer Ministries, **Maria McClean**, Seventh-day Adventist pastors and Ontario Conference representatives stood in solidarity with the thousands attending a vigil at Alexander the Great Parkette on Danforth Avenue. Throughout the week they also offered a listening ear to passersby drawn to the smocks identifying them as chaplains.

Chaplains met with relatives and close friends of victims, a few witnesses, Danforth residents, people who grew up there, and individuals who came to pay their respects, as well as tourists. They walked alongside people and offered spiritual and emotional support. Several people exclaimed, “I’m happy you’re here.” Ontario Conference President, Dr. **Mansfield Edwards**, who provided chaplaincy services during the Yonge Street crisis, stated, “If the church is the body of Christ, the church must continue His works. We must ask ourselves, what would Jesus do? Where would Jesus be? In the New Testament, He’s always present where He’s needed most. We have to be there for people.” [Ontario Conference News] 



Errol Nembhard, EMBA, elder and cofounder of Metro Mission, Sandton City, South Africa.



Urban ministry in Africa's richest mile

Sandton City is the most important business and financial district in South Africa and one of the most affluent areas in Johannesburg.¹ The area surrounding Sandton City is home to roughly 300,000 residents and 10,000 businesses, including investment banks and financial consultants.²

No Seventh-day Adventist church had ventured into this affluent area until 2015 when eight families set off in faith to plant a life hope center in Africa's richest square mile. A small group of dedicated believers approached an affluent business park with a bold proposition: to rent 1,000 square meters (about 10,764 square feet) of space. They proposed to use the space for a state-of-the-art conference facility, vegetarian café, naturopathic health center, counseling services, and a boutique-styled worship area, accommodating no more than 300 persons.

God rewarded their faith. Against all odds, the business plan was approved. Within 16 weeks and blessed by a faith-driven investment of \$140,000 from two families, the center was renovated, and Metro Mission was born.

Metro Mission is not church as usual. It was established for the benefit of the community. Our research told us that affluence in the community surrounding the center was high—but so were levels of depression, anxiety, marital problems, and loneliness. It is designed to be a center of influence and excellence, presenting the gospel in wholistic, relevant, modern, and contemporary ways to the Sandton area.

The Metro Locus Conference Centre, located on the Metro Mission facility, is “a world-class events facility, with high standards of service excellence, modern technologies, and impeccable cuisine.”³




Our research told us that affluence in the community surrounding the center was high—but so were levels of depression, anxiety, marital problems, and loneliness.

Metro Locus is the perfect location for creating opportunities for the church to launch community programs. Currently, the centre runs the following programs:

- *Business women's prayer circle.* Monthly prayer gathering for women from the central business district.
- *“Worth Fighting For.”* Monthly marriage seminars.
- *Professional Counseling Services.* Daily counseling services at the counseling center.
- *Mustard Seed.* Monthly food service feeding up to two hundred homeless persons.

The vision is to purchase four other buildings in the business block

to create a state-of-the-art Christian school (grades 0–12) and an online university for the community.

Metro is comprised of 95 percent upwardly mobile professional millennials who have a bold vision and are unafraid to take risks. They have taken strong ownership of the mission, vision, and strategy. Since being officially organized in 2017, Metro Mission has won 35 persons to the Lord. 

- 1 Sun International, “The History of Africa's Richest Square Mile,” Sun International, Oct. 26, 2014, suninternational.com/maslow/stories/travel/masl-the-history-of-africas-richest-square-mile/.
- 2 “Sandton and Sandton City,” Eyes on Africa, eyesonafrica.net/south-african-safari/sandton.htm.
- 3 Metro Locus Conference and Events Venue, www.myvenues.co.za/venue-details/Johannesburg/.

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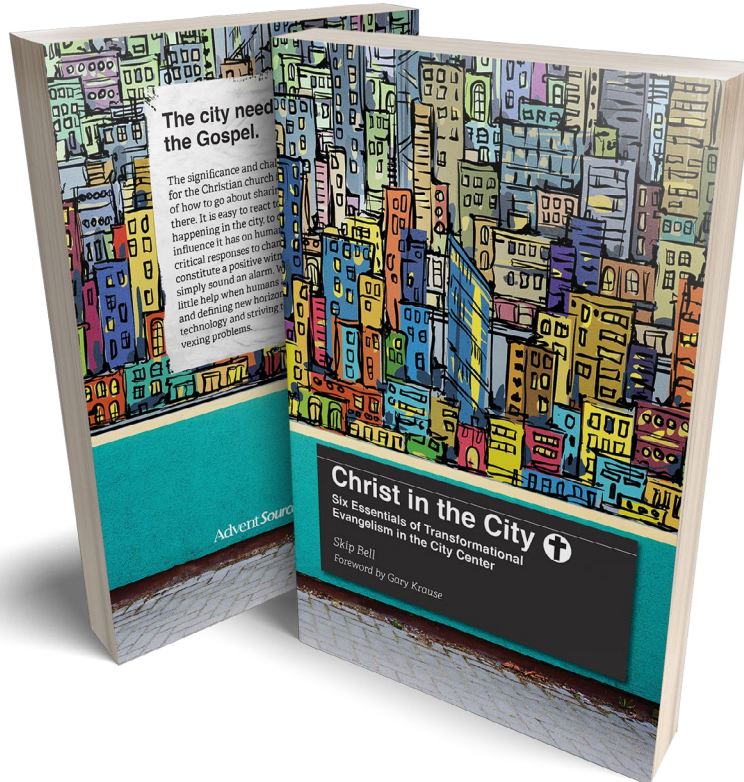
Christ in the City

Six Essentials of Transformational Evangelism in the City Center

By Skip Bell

Foreword by Gary Krause

Christ in the City outlines essential characteristics that help us understand transformational mission and evangelism in the city. This book explores the biblical call to incarnational mission within today's cities, provides case studies that model the presence of Christ in cities, and calls for the church to faithfully witness for Christ in urban centers. Author Skip Bell, professor of church leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, shows how our challenge to engage with the culture of the city can be rewarding and fruitful.



"I'm so glad Skip captures the mandate of Jesus to serve people with compassion and relativity. This is exactly what is needed in mission in the context of our great cities today! I recommend this book to everyone who wants real, practical solutions."

— Roger Hernandez

Director of Ministerial and Evangelism
Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Churches



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