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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

There's nothing too hard for God, and He will do it in His timing. It took 34 years for me to find my brother. This [experience] has given me an opportunity to share with others and give them hope; and as long as God wants me to share this testimony to inspire others and glorify God, I will share it and share it.

Visit nadadventist.org/ajpershawnmattison for more of Mattison's story.

PERSHAWN MATTISON,
*Southern Union Conference Ministerial Association
administrative assistant, from Atlanta, Georgia*

Pershawn Mattison



Cover photo by Art Brando

Dear Reader: The publication in your hands represents the collaborative efforts of the North American Division and *Adventist World* magazine, which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

Adventist Journey (ISSN 1557-5519) is the journal of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The Northern Asia-Pacific Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the publisher. It is printed monthly by the Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Copyright © 2023. Send address changes to your local conference membership clerk. Contact information should be available through your local church.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A. Vol. 6, No. 5. May 2023. **Adventist Journey Publication Board** G. Alexander Bryant (chair), Kimberly Luste Maran (secretary), Kyoshin Ahn, Curtis Randolph Robinson, Wendy Eberhardt, Minner Labrador, Arne Nielsen, Calvin Watkins Sr., Rick Remmers, Julio Muñoz, Karnik Doukmetzian, legal advisor **Scripture References** Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are taken from the *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

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ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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FINDING WAYS TO HELP RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FLOURISH

An interview with editor
Bettina Krause about *Liberty* magazine.

Liberty is published by the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists and printed at Pacific Press Publishing Association. *Liberty* is one of several sharing magazines; it is geared toward members and others interested in religious freedom subscribing and sharing with their family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. *Liberty* magazine, the fourth to be featured in our series, is available for subscription at libertymagazine.org. It is also available at adventistbookcenter.com.

What is *Liberty* magazine, and what is its mission?

Liberty magazine exists to reach a very specific and often-overlooked “mission field”—people of influence in society. More than a century ago Ellen White urged the church not to neglect society’s “men of influence.”¹ And so, for the past 120 years *Liberty* magazine has reached out to law-makers at the federal and state levels, members of the judiciary, city officials, county administrators, academics, leaders of other faith groups, and many others who help shape our country’s public discourse. *Liberty* shares with them a unique Seventh-day Adventist perspective—a biblical and prophetic perspective—on contemporary issues in culture and law, especially those related to religious freedom.

This is an exciting area of mission! Today *Liberty* is the oldest continuously published journal of religious liberty. It’s published bimonthly, with a national print circulation of around 180,000. We’ve also launched a weekly podcast called *Liberty Matters*. You can find each issue on our website, where there’s also a searchable archive stretching back 25 years.

How did *Liberty* magazine get started?

Liberty was first published during a time when a powerful advocacy group in America—the National Reform Association—was pushing for Sunday closing laws at the state and national levels. These Sunday “blue laws” proved a tremendous challenge for many Adventist Church members throughout



the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Adventist farmers were arrested for tending their fields on Sunday. A pastor was arrested for spending a couple of hours painting the side of his church on Sunday. As late as 1931, in Maryland, a church member was denounced to the authorities by his neighbor for doing repair work on his house on Sunday and served time in jail.

These experiences, along with the guidance of Ellen White, have helped shape a distinctive Adventist understanding of church-state relations—and this continues to direct the work of *Liberty* magazine today.

It's an approach that recognizes religious liberty as a universal God-given right: that our Creator has given freedom to every person, regardless of who they are, where they live, or what they choose to believe.

Second, it's an approach that points to history and says, "If we want to avoid the persecutions and religious wars of the past, and if we want religious freedom to flourish, then it's clearly best when church and state occupy separate spaces in society."

As students of prophecy, also, our Adventist pioneers realized

Our Adventist pioneers realized we couldn't take religious liberty for granted so, *Liberty* magazine was founded against this specific historical and theological backdrop.

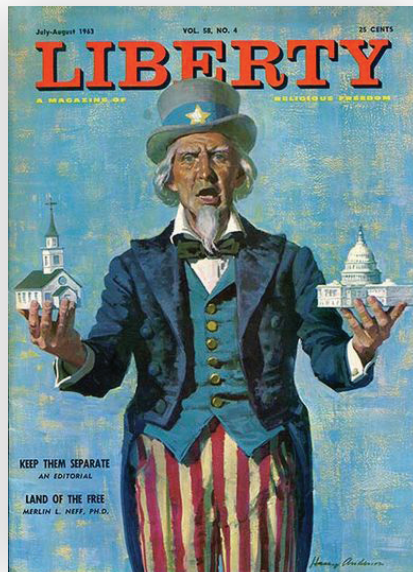
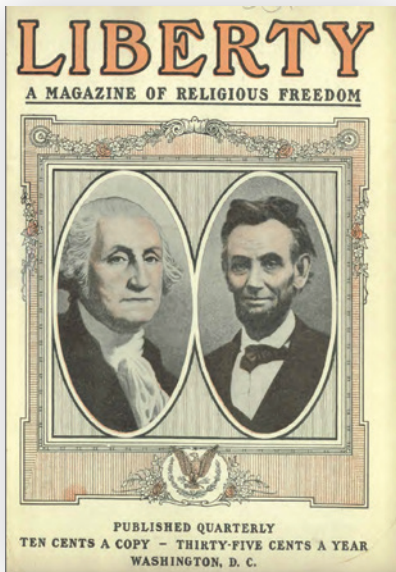
we couldn't take religious liberty for granted—even in the United States, with its wonderful ideals of freedom. So *Liberty* magazine was founded against this specific historical and theological backdrop.

It seems, though, that religious liberty has become a divisive topic lately—especially as it relates to issues around LGBTQ+ rights. Has this made the mission of *Liberty* magazine more complicated in recent years?

Complicated is an understatement! When I first worked in Wash-

ington, D.C., back in 1999, lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle were happy to rally around legislation protecting religious liberty. It was a bipartisan issue.

Since that time, however, there's been a seismic shift in how religious freedom is seen, in large part because of changing attitudes toward sexual orientation, gender identity, and marriage. Religious freedom has gone from being a politically unifying ideal to a lightning rod for extreme rhetoric. Its reputation has been tarnished, and it's often labeled as merely "code for bigotry"



But there's another trend shaping attitudes to religious freedom we shouldn't ignore—the waning influence of faith in the everyday lives of Americans. In 1999, 70 percent of Americans reported that they belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque. Last year it was 47 percent.²

A few years back University of Chicago law professor Brian Leiter wrote a book that created a stir in the academic world. It was called *Why Tolerate Religion?* and in it he argued forcefully that there's nothing inherently special about religion. So, he concluded, it is morally wrong and legally incoherent to single out religious liberty for special legal protections in America. These ideas sound outrageous, yet they reflect the views of a growing number today.

It's not surprising, then, that laws and regulations at the municipal, state, and even federal level are gradually making it more difficult for us to administer our schools and institutions according to our biblical convictions. And so, year by year, the legal and cultural "real estate" we occupy seems to be shrinking. If ever we needed *Liberty* magazine, it's now.

Clearly, topics you're dealing with in the pages of *Liberty* magazine in 2023 are vastly different from those 1906. Do you think the early editors of *Liberty* would recognize it as the same ministry they began all those years ago?

Yes, absolutely. Society may have changed, cultural and legal norms may have changed, and the issues we're talking about have certainly changed, but there remains an unbroken thread of biblical principle that has guided the magazine from its beginning.

On the first page of the first issue of *Liberty* magazine that



Bettina Krause, editor of *Liberty* magazine *Maria Bryk/Newseum*

rolled off the press in 1906, the editor, L. A. Smith, explained the philosophy of this new magazine: "No power but that of love can rightfully compel the [human] conscience." That principle was important 120 years ago, and it's a principle that's just as vital in today's cultural and legal battles surrounding religious freedom. With every issue, *Liberty* seeks to reflect the character of a God who *does* want to transform society—not through laws, court rulings, or political power, but through the loving service and witness of His followers.

How can church members get involved in the ministry of *Liberty* magazine?

Liberty magazine is a wonderful relationship-building tool. I hear from pastors and church members who subscribe to *Liberty* on behalf of different leaders in their communities. And more than that, they're visiting these individuals—whether it's the mayor, the school board chair, the fire chief, or a pastor from another denomination—and they're sharing who Adventists are and how we can be a resource on religious freedom issues.

Every second Sabbath in January is Religious Liberty Sabbath, and the offering collected that day not only supports the ministry of *Liberty* magazine, but also the work of defending religious freedom in the courts, providing legal support to members facing discrimination in the workplace, and advocating directly with lawmakers at the state and national levels.

I'm sometimes asked whether *Liberty* magazine is making a difference and my answer is a resounding "Yes!" I often hear from elected representatives, attorneys, and members of the judiciary. Recently the mayor of a large city sent me a handwritten note of appreciation for *Liberty's* guidance on challenging policy issues. "Please rest assured," he wrote, "there are politicians and other decision-makers who consistently read and are influenced by your hard work."

So, yes, we are making inroads into this unique "mission-field." But the support and involvement of church members in the ministry of *Liberty* magazine is needed now more than ever.

¹ Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 25, 1890.

² Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup, Mar. 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>, accessed on Mar. 16, 2023.

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EHUDDLE OFFERS INNOVATIVE METHODS FOR SHARING CHRIST

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

When Nitza Salazar became Washington Conference’s Children’s Ministry director in October 2018, a church member asked, “Can you do a Christmas program so my son can be Joseph?”

Dumbfounded, Salazar, who recently moved to Idaho Conference, asked for clarification. “You want me to make a Christmas program . . . so your son can be Joseph?”

“Correct. My son has Down syndrome. He’s been asking me to be Joseph and hasn’t had the chance.” Deeply moved, Salazar launched Special Stars, a Christmas pageant featuring Adventist and non-Adventist children with disabilities.

From February 13 to 15, 2023, at the eighth annual eHuddle, a visioning and leadership conference hosted in Gladstone, Oregon, by the North American Division’s (NAD) Ministerial Department, attendees learned of several initiatives, like Salazar’s, uniting the church and community. More than 150 pastors, conference- and union-level evangelism directors, administrators, elders, and other leaders gathered for the first in-person eHuddle since 2020, with thousands more watching via Facebook and YouTube.



At the eighth annual eHuddle, several presenters speak on reaching people through online ministry, including YouTuber and church consultant Justin Khoe (speaking on a panel here). *Nick Wolfer*

“If you want to take the gospel commission seriously, meet people where they are—online.”

Referencing the February 12 Super Bowl, Jose Cortes, Jr., eHuddle organizer and NAD Ministerial Department associate director, said, “This week we’re going to huddle for a few moments, see the good plays across North America, then go back into the playing field to make sure we win. And what is winning? It’s reaching, reclaiming, and retaining people for Jesus in His name!”

The event uncovered best practices within eHuddle’s six actions of evangelism: love, serve, baptize, equip, plant, and revitalize. The mix of short presentations by practitioners, questions and answers, roundtable discussions, and take-away tips was a hit.

“As a first-time attendee, I walked away with creative ideas and practical tools that will enhance my ministry. And the best part was mingling with like-minded disciples,” said Christian Martin, pastor, Living Hope Seventh-day Adventist Community Church in Haymarket, Virginia.

Defining Our Reality

On the first day, Ivan Williams, NAD Ministerial Department director, revealed there are more than 370 million people within the division, but 1.2 million Adventist Church members. Presently the NAD has only 4,386 licensed and ordained ministers.

Nonetheless, Williams said, “God specializes in the majority being reached by the minority.”

The eHuddle also presented volunteer lay pastors (VLPs), who support pastors in the gospel work, as critical to the NAD’s goal of planting one church per 25,000 people.

Kyoshin Ahn, NAD executive secretary, shared the results of a major survey the NAD commissioned from Gallup USA in 2021 on how Americans view the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The poll revealed that 32 percent of those polled were familiar with the church, and of the 42 percent willing to give an opinion on it, only 8 percent had a favorable opinion versus 34 percent unfavorable.

However, Ahn noted Sabbath and Saturday were the words most frequently associated with the church, a positive since, in modern society, “the Sabbath is becoming more meaningful [for] many Americans.” Ahn added, “We’re happy to see two [other] words most associated with us are Christ and Jesus. It means we’ve made significant progress in the public perception of our church over the years.” He suggested focusing on Jesus and the Sabbath to reach more people.

“We need to find creative, better, and wiser ways to maximize our strengths, bringing our message of hope and wholeness closer to millions in North America,” he said.

Alan Parker, a religion professor at Southern Adventist University, offered further insights, including an October 2022 Barna study showing that “65 percent of teenagers in the United States identify as Christian, and 60 percent are motivated to learn more about Jesus.” Parker added, “Gen Z may be the most open generation in several generations to religious faith and learning about Jesus,” and urged attendees to reach Gen Z while they could.

Christ’s Method in 2023

Throughout eHuddle several presenters cited Christ’s method of meeting felt needs, then ministering to people, as their inspiration.

Tandi Perkins, director of development for the Alaska Conference’s Arctic Mission Adventure (AMA), shared that in one of the 11 villages they serve, Gambell, located 40 nautical miles from Russia, the Russia-Ukraine conflict elicited fear. When the AMA’s native leader asked them to do a workshop on how to manage fear, they partnered with the local pastor and others to speak to 75 children in schools, and other community members, about fear. This initiative and others contributed to 12 baptisms in Gambell, with 12 more lined up in AMA’s other villages.

Church planters also told stories of soul-winning through community work. For Dustin Serns, pastor of Life Bridge church in University Place, Washington, during COVID-19 a free dental clinic opened doors. They’ve now hosted eight free health clinics with 900 patients and \$400,000 worth of health care. They’ve also planted a 50-member church, including patients.

The ministry vehicle for Michael Lewis, senior pastor at South Park Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was home renovations. Working with a developer and contractor, the church bought and renovated houses seized by Birmingham for taxes. During renovations, they mingled with people, discussed community needs, and spoke about Jesus. Once someone accepted Christ, the church put them in a house. Today, the ministry has renovated four homes and birthed a church plant of over 76 people.

Investing in Children and Youth

Another common thread at the eHuddle was investing in children and youth. Presenter Daniel Hall, pastor of Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church in tiny Marion, South Carolina, revived a church of only six members (average age 69) by engaging in a child-focused compassion project. The church merged community service with a nightly evangelistic series, with promotional flyers stipulating that visitors who stayed for the program would receive the night's giveaway.

The project included backpacks filled with school supplies, diapers, and a community baby blessing. This model yielded 51 baptisms, with 20 more people baptized by year-end, 90 percent under age 50. Hall explained their strategy for reaching millennials and Gen Zs through their children. “[People] love their kids and want to invest in their spiritual journey. And if you win the kids, eventually you’ll win their parents.”

Others spoke of initiatives, including transitioning community children from a church-run soccer club to Adventurers; starting Sabbath children’s programs that drew kids, then their families, to church; and creating spaces where teens felt safe discussing taboo topics.

Casting a Wide (Inter)net

Presenter Justin Khoe, YouTuber and church consultant, challenged attendees to turn their weekly sermons into one piece of daily gospel content for different platforms.

Colby Maier, pastor of Bloom church in Portland, Oregon, who reached 247,000 followers on Instagram, 321,000 on TikTok, and 1.1 million on YouTube in one year, read a message from a 14-year-old who was contemplating suicide and begged God for a sign. They wrote: “I went onto YouTube shorts, and the first video I scrolled was . . . of you praying for whoever’s on the other side of that screen. I started sobbing. That video saved my life.”

Plugging his church in his videos’ comments section has also brought 50-100 people to the church in the past few months.

“If you want to take the gospel commission seriously, meet people where they are—online,” Maier stated.

The Case for Baptism

Presenters also made a case for baptism, as people’s decisions for Christ can be met with hesitation and barriers. “Baptism should be treated like enrollment, not graduation,” said Debleaire Snell, Breath of Life speaker/director and Oakwood University church pastor.

Elizabeth Talbot, speaker/director for Jesus 101, argued that rather than insisting people know everything before baptism, the Bible supports baptizing individuals who understand the gospel, then continuing their learning in community.

This segment sparked a lively debate online and offline. Regardless, most tended to agree that discipleship and instruction should not end at baptism, and relationships fuel retention.



↑ At the eighth annual eHuddle, hosted Feb. 13-15 in Gladstone, Oregon, by the NAD Ministerial team, presenter Nitza Salazar, now in the Idaho Conference, shares her story of starting “Special Stars,” a Christmas pageant for children with disabilities when she was Children’s Ministries director at Washington Conference. *Luis Sanchez*

What Is a Disciple?

A critical aspect of eHuddle is vetting definitions and initiatives related to evangelism and church planting, and this year eHuddle examined the definition of a disciple. If accepted by eHuddle attendees, the following definition will be adopted for future eHuddles: “A disciple is someone who loves Jesus, lives by His teachings, and leads others to Him.”

This year’s event showed that churches with clarity on what “disciple” means thrive. For instance, at West Palm Beach Spanish church, led by Pastor Herbert Lopez, members are asked to attend worship services, join a small group, and serve in a ministry. Since 2016 the church has expanded to include an English group and, through a VLP, planted a church.

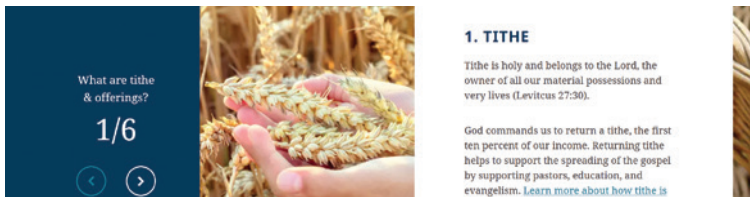
West Palm Beach English pastor Giovanni Esposito, who with copastors Lopez and VLP Magdiel Gonzalez, presented at eHuddle, left energized. “It was inspiring to hear stories of leaders who did not give up. We need to be bold for Jesus. God calls you and me for such a time as now!”

Salazar later shared that a VLP from Australia came to her after her eHuddle presentation, tears in his eyes, and said, “Now I know why I am here.” Her presentation encouraged him to start a Special Stars in Australia, including his son with autism.

She concluded, “My heart rejoices seeing how God works and how getting together for such events recharges and motivates us.”

Christelle Agboka is assistant director of communication for the North American Division.

NAD NEWS BRIEFS



↑ The new AdventistGiving website includes an educational component on tithes, offerings, and stewardship, including a carousel of popular questions and their answers (first of six questions pictured here from the refreshed site).

Refreshed and Improved AdventistGiving Website Launches This Spring

When church buildings in the North American Division (NAD) closed in 2020 because of COVID-19, ministry did not end but successfully pivoted online. And thanks to God's blessings and church members' generosity—and the AdventistGiving platform—giving across the division did not decline, as expected. Rather, tithes and offerings have *increased* over the past few years of instability and uncertainty.

In 2023 online giving is still going strong, and the NAD's treasury department is pleased to announce that a new and improved version of AdventistGiving is coming later this month to adventistgiving.org.

The upgraded site features a more modern design, including color photos representing different aspects of stewardship, and is more user-friendly. For instance, the sign-in/create account section is central, whereas the previous version first prompted users to select their church via a search bar. As with the current site, it offers English, French, and Spanish language options. Finally, the new site is mobile-friendly and works equally well on computers and mobile devices.

Content-wise, the new AdventistGiving has added a comprehensive yet straightforward educational section on tithes, offerings, and stewardship in general. There users will find answers to such questions as: What are tithes and offerings? Why give (with biblical examples)? How much should we give? Where does the money go?

The new site also informs users of the offering of the week and notes the three areas the NAD focuses on for offerings—local offerings, conference/union offerings, and world offerings.

"AdventistGiving was a godsend throughout the pandemic, a way to continue acknowledging that God provides everything we have through our giving," said NAD treasurer Randy Robinson. "The updated version of the site makes it even simpler to give tithes and offerings online. We're so blessed with this mechanism that God helped us establish even before we knew how much we would need it. Thank you to the NAD's amazing information and technology services (ITS) team for making a great tool even better!"

For more information or assistance, email Help@AdventistGiving.org.
—Christelle Agboka, NAD Office of Communication

Grant Received by Christian Record Services Will Increase Braille Access Worldwide

Christian Record Services (CRS) has received \$597,000 from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to increase its braille production capacity. Funding will enable the ministry to expand production space at its headquarters, purchase additional braille embossing equipment, and hire one staff member to meet the increase in production. It is anticipated that the expansion will be completed by late summer 2023. After a three-year period, CRS expects to cover ongoing costs within its operating budget, which is supported primarily by faithful donors of the ministry.

Randy Robinson, treasurer for North American Division and member of the CRS board of directors, said, "Christian Record Services applied for funding available to all divisions for ministry, and was awarded the funding, which will be a blessing to the ministry and the people it serves."

Diane Thurber, president of CRS, said, "We are incredibly grateful to be the recipient of these funds and are excited about the opportunity to expand our production capacity. Resources in braille are not only important to members of the Adventist Church who are blind, but can also be an important tool for local churches to expand their ministry within their communities, large or small, to people who are blind or experiencing vision loss. With this expansion we will contribute to braille literacy and address the book famine that currently exists, with less than 10 percent of published works available in accessible formats in developed countries and less than 1 percent in undeveloped countries."

For more information about the ministry, visit www.christianrecord.org.
—Christian Record Services

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BY MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

Westward Mission: From California to Hawaii

The stories we tell matter. Whether it is my parents showing me a picture of a cabin my grandfather built in British Columbia, Canada, with an admonition to be industrious and to work hard to earn an education, to more recently, when I took my own children to the site of the World Trade Center in New York, where my father barely escaped with his life on September 11, 2001, such stories pertain to our identity.

Perhaps my favorite stories in our Adventist past pertain to how Adventism spread to new places. While the traditional narrative focuses on M. B. Czechowski, who was sponsored by another denomination, to J. N. Andrews and his children, Mary and Charles, who left as the denomination's first official overseas missionaries, these stories remind us about incredible sacrifice and commitment.

Yet in telling those stories, we should not overlook how Adventism spread across what is today the North American Division. There are powerful examples of how our early Adventist pioneers risked their lives to spread their convictions. The intrepid Merritt G. Kellogg first traveled by covered wagon across the country in 1859. In 1861 he gave a series of Bible lectures that led to the conversion of 14 people. He returned east in 1867, to study at Troll's Hygieo-Therapeutic College. Yet it was those early believers who sent \$133 in gold to church leaders, asking them to please send a missionary. In response the 1868 General Conference Session sent J. N. Loughborough and Daniel T. Bourdeau as the denomination's first "missionaries" to the far-off land of California. The next year a state organization with about 75 members was organized, with Bourdeau as the mission president. While California might not seem like a foreign mission field, when most of the denomination was based in New England, in many ways it could be argued that it was the church's first missionary endeavor.

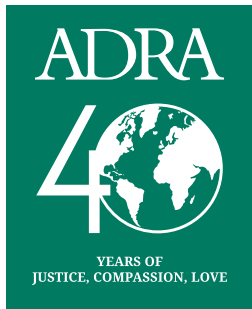
Such missionary work inspires further missions. As the denomination developed an increasingly worldwide mission, as Adventist mission took a foothold in Europe, it would be in the wake of the California Conference that the Adventist message would expand westward across the Pacific. The earliest Adventist overseas mission to move westward was in the Sandwich Islands, or what

was then the Kingdom of Hawaii. At a "special meeting" held April 18-28, 1884, in Oakland, California, church leaders reported that members from California would sponsor "two laborers" who "will commence work" that May. On August 13, 1884, Loron Allen Scott and Abram La Rue left on the ship *W. H. Dimond* for Honolulu. This date deserves to be recognized as just as important as when Andrews left a decade earlier as one of the most significant dates in Adventist mission history. Upon their arrival they established "a free reading-room and [book] depository" at 189 Nuuanu Avenue. They held temperance lectures at the nearby YMCA, and soon a small group of believers was established. They hoped, with the many Chinese immigrants, that this island would help them learn how to do missionary work in China—a dream that La Rue would later fulfill by going as the denomination's first self-supporting missionary to Asia based in Hong Kong. The believers in Honolulu would form a nucleus hosting the first group of Adventist missionaries who traveled to Australia and who stopped by briefly on May 18, 1885. During their brief stayover, they met the missionaries, gave them some tropical fruit and a brief tour, and although still only barely established, with 13 converts, they sent these missionaries headed "down under" off with an offering to help support them.

What is amazing is that Adventist missions inspire missions. It's contagious. And we need to tell these many varied stories about how Adventism spread, including to such "foreign" places as California and Hawaii.

Michael W. Campbell is director of North American Division Archives, Statistics & Research.

Adventist missions
inspire missions.
It's contagious.



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