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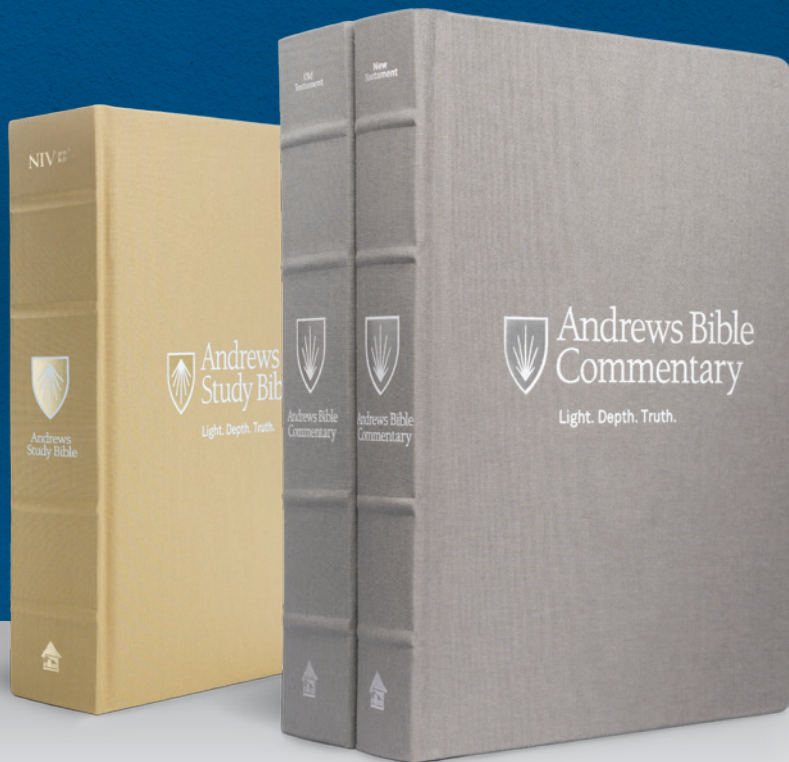






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# Adventist Journey

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## My Journey

I've committed to making sure that our young people feel empowered. That means sometimes getting out of my bed early in the morning to drive them just to hang out and make sure they have a good Christian influence when they're hanging out with each other. I believe that when God calls, I can't say no.

Visit [nadadventist.org/ajakehiljohnson](http://nadadventist.org/ajakehiljohnson) for more of Johnson's story.

**AKEHIL JOHNSON,**  
*lay coordinator for Adventist Christian Fellowship in the Ontario Conference, and teacher at Ottawa Adventist School, Ontario, Canada*

Akehil Johnson



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!

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## ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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# Where Do I Belong?

Collegiates Discuss Finding Their Place in the Church

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

I love being a Seventh-day Adventist. And I believe we need to create a culture where more young people love being Seventh-day Adventists,” said Daniel Fukuda, copresident for Andrews University’s Student Seminary Forum (SSF), during a recent Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD) student leaders’ advisory.

Earlier this year an engaged group of 27 undergraduate and graduate student leaders, union-level youth directors, and NAD leaders met via Zoom to discuss what young people need to feel part of church life and leadership and how the NAD can better support them.



Earlier this year an engaged group of 27 undergraduate and graduate student leaders, union-level youth directors, and Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD) leaders met via Zoom to discuss what young people need to feel part of church life and leadership and how the NAD can better support them. Screenshot from the advisory meeting with NAD leaders and young adults



This meeting had an open agenda, which was intentional. “We want to empower and equip students, [so] it’s more important for us to hear from them what’s going on in their lives than to download on them what’s going on with us,” said Tracy Wood, NAD Youth and Young Adult Ministries director.

G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, concurred. “I really prize the opportunity to engage with them in conversation, but most of all to listen.”

Significant themes arising from the 90-minute dialogue included mentorship for young people who felt called to church administration and spiritual support for collegiate students.

Prepandemic, young adults served on the NAD executive committee and attended the NAD’s annual year-end meeting (NADYEM) to participate in discussions about the church’s mission. In 2021 the NAD executive committee was downsized, and the university student positions, along with those of NAD associate directors, were not retained. The NAD did not want to lose the university student leaders’ perspectives, however, so Wood, Bryant, and Wendy Eberhardt, NAD vice president for ministries, developed the university student leaders’ advisory. This advisory offers the students more than a one-time annual gathering; it has now expanded to three online meetings a year. Moreover, it includes more student leaders and offers participants direct interaction with the NAD president, vice president for ministries, and Youth and Young Adult Ministries directors.

At the October 1, 2022, meeting, the first advisory that served as a precursor to NADYEM, students previewed questions the NADYEM executive committee would discuss on education, online churches, and better use of eAdventist data.

For all the meetings thus far, Wood has invited leaders from five networks: Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF) Student Association officers; student workers in campus ministries departments; Student Association presidents from Adventist universities; seminary student forum (SSF) officers; and student officers from universities with separate graduate student associations. Union directors in youth and young adult ministries and campus ministries were also invited. NAD representatives in January included Wood, Bryant, and Gordon Bietz, who, though retired, has been serving part-time as associate director for higher education.

The following is a summary of the major topics student leaders presented in the first meeting in 2023.

### **Mentorship of Future Leaders**

Several student leaders, most from the Gen Z and millennial generations, indicated their generations’ interest in helping shape the church’s future and desire

for mentorship that would equip them to step into administration and other leadership roles. They offered several ideas for division-wide mentorship, including:

- a program in which administrators at every conference and union and at the division have interns from different generations—high school, college, 20s, 30s, or 40s;
- regular dialogue between elected officers and students via Zoom if in-person shadowing and mentoring isn’t possible;
- a system of shadowing and mentoring like that at AdventHealth University (AHU) for nursing students, in which students initially shadow the nurse, then progress to the nurse shadowing the student, building competence and confidence; and
- mentorship for students who want to work for the church in diverse fields.

David Springer, president of the Andrews University Graduate Student Association, offered another angle. “We need to feel connected to the current and future crop of administrators. If not, many will continue to feel as though the church does not have a space for them.”

NAD leaders affirmed these recommendations, noting that while an intensive, formal mentorship program with administrators would be logistically challenging, mentorship in some form is essential for the longevity of the church; this is particularly true, as more than 50 percent of Adventist pastors and 65 percent of administrators at all levels are eligible or will soon be eligible for retirement, as reported by the NAD at year-end meeting. Bryant also spoke to mentorship as a strategic focus of the NAD, with plans to create more structure around it.

Greg Taylor, Southern Union Youth and Young Adult director, recounted struggling to answer an undergraduate student asking how to become a conference youth director. “I appreciate this conversation because it’s been on my mind as well. I think we can do better in paving the way for those who recognize [their administrative gifts].”

### **Spiritual Support for Students**

Support of students’ spiritual development was another central issue. Attendees spoke on a lack of spiritual nourishment in the classroom and local church. For instance, while students appreciate when prayer is offered to start class, they are seeking a stronger integration of faith and learning in the classroom.

Student leaders also expressed that at the local church level, they and their peers craved deeper spiritual connections and cohesion in the biblical teachings presented. One said, “[Many] are feeding the youth and young adults baby food . . . but we need solids now.”

Participants also noted that local churches must be more unified in their support of students. “Young peo-



ple, especially international students or people away from home, need community, a place they can worship God and not [feel] alone,” a leader expressed.

These comments sparked lively discussion on how churches can better cater to young people’s spiritual and social needs. Chris Langston, SSF’s coacademic coordinator, also a local pastor, encouraged the student leaders expressing these concerns to help build the church they longed for. “When it comes to theological consistency, unity in the work we do as a church, in and around our communities, . . . I don’t think there’s a pastor in the NAD who wouldn’t shout ‘Praise God’ that young people like you want to see that happen. But they can’t do it alone. I want to encourage you to step up. The local church needs people exactly like you.”

Israel Ramos, representative of public campus ministry for the Lake Union, advised, “Every member makes up the church. So become a member of your local church, become part of the board, show that you’re trustworthy. And little by little you’ll be able to make an impact, using your voice—as you have today—and your influence.”

During a Zoom meeting of 27 undergraduate and graduate student leaders, union-level youth directors, and NAD leaders, Kearabetswa (KB) Mokoene, an ACF leader, was one of the student leaders offering insights on how the church can be more welcoming to young people.



As the discussion unfolded, student leaders from across the NAD commiserated with the complexity of the issues others had raised. Henry McNeily III, a former SSF officer, countered that not all churches are welcoming and open to input from young people. He stated, “Why would I want to be part of a church that has no interest in listening to what I have to say, where I can’t relate to them, or they’re not even welcoming? [Let’s find] additional ways to bridge that gap.” Kearabetswa (KB) Mokoene, an ACF leader, added that not all young people are bold enough to walk into a church and offer their services; thus, churches need training and preparation in welcoming and integrating them.

Kayla Goodman, SSF cosecretary, concluded from her experience as a pastor and young person in the church, “[These issues] are not going to change overnight. But it’s that process of continuing to be heard as young adults and showing up even if the conference or local church doesn’t see us there.”

### A Step Forward

Other issues arising were the need for more resourcing for public campus ministries, under the ACF umbrella; financial education for future or present pastors and other church workers; and how the NAD will tackle the K-12 teacher shortage.

It was an honest meeting, with students, youth directors, and NAD leaders acknowledging, as Bryant said, that “our church is not perfect.”

Yet McNeily expressed common sentiments when he said that despite the shortcomings, “I love the church, and I am not going anywhere.”

The many thank-yous from student leaders in the chat indicated that the discussion was well received. And NAD leaders felt they gained valuable insight into the challenges young adults, particularly those who want to lead the church, face—a necessary step toward positive change.

### What’s Next?

As the meeting ended, Wood said, “What you shared with us tonight is massive for us as leaders and administrators. Your ideas and thoughts [will go] far and wide in our circles of influence. Thank you so much for your time today.”

To date, Wood and Bryant have shared information from January 25 at meetings with new union presidents, all conference presidents, and youth and young adult leaders across the division. It will also be distributed via NAD publications.

The next meeting will cover how student leaders are transitioning out at the end of the school year and how NAD leaders can stay connected with them.

At the early 2023 advisory Wood concluded, “Today [we’ve talked] about the longing to find a place where you fit as a young person, a church family that is deeply spiritual and empowering. We all carry that longing inside of us, . . . at every age. We hear you, and we understand that. We also know we’re a broken people and a broken church. Yet God calls us to rise above, strengthen each other, and be powerful influences by the overflow of the Spirit. We’re brothers and sisters endeavoring to strengthen the administrators across North America and across the street. We’re in this together.”

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



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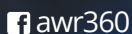
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# MEDICAL MISSION TAKES OFF AGAIN

Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic visits Palau and Rota

BY ELENA TANEVA

Now that all the islands in the Guam-Micronesia Mission region have reopened to visitors, they are also welcoming back medical missionaries. Before the pandemic, the last mission trip by a medical team of the Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic was in November 2019. At that time they traveled to Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia to provide primary care.

The return to missions began in November 2022 when the clinic's eye-care team went to the Republic of Palau, followed by a medical and dental trip to Rota in the U.S. territory of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) in January 2023.

## Shipwrecks and Health Recovery

The trips included various missionary activities. During the trip to Palau, I was asked to conduct a weeklong evening seminar addressing topics relevant to the Palauan population's health needs. During the seminar, entitled "Shipwrecks and Health Recovery: Are We Wrecking Our Health or Are We Rebuilding Our Ships?" we navigated through health topics using the stories of prominent Palauan shipwrecks and what led to their destiny. The famous Jake Seaplane wreck, for example, occurred because the seaplane's engine stopped prematurely. We were able to compare this to one's health. If a person does not take care

All photos provided by Elena Taneva



Dr. Jeffrey Ing, part of a medical team of the Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic, examines a patient's eyes during a recent medical mission trip to Palau.



Elena Taneva, nurse practitioner, presents at a nightly series at Palau's Koror Seventh-day Adventist Church during a recent mission trip as part of a medical team from the Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic.



of their heart, they can experience premature heart failure.

We were able to take the comparisons and lessons even further. The same applies to the spiritual life. The steering wheel of the famous *Teshio Maru* fleet oiler of the Imperial Japanese Navy was damaged during the Desacre 1 World War II attack, and the ship was made unnavigable. It was taken by the currents until crushed by the Rael Edeng Reef. It is vital to place the steering wheel in the hands of the Master Captain of our life and relinquish control to enjoy good spiritual health.

### Medical Treatment and Health Tips

Much-needed health care was provided on the mission trips. In Palau the eye team performed numerous eye surgeries. In Rota dental treatment and medical checkups were provided. Patients were equipped to improve their health through health screening for blood sugar and blood pressure, along with medical, nutritional, and lifestyle consultations.

The trip to Rota was especially encouraging to the two Adventist

Much-needed health care was provided on the mission trips. Everyone who came for optical, dental, medical, and lifestyle counseling received care.

church members on the island, as the team helped support them in reaching people with the gospel. The goal was to invite patients from the dental and medical clinics to the evening health and evangelistic presentations.

The team visited the primary school, and the sophomore, junior, and senior classes at the Sinapalo and Songsong schools to teach the NEWSTART health principles. The medical team also visited a senior center. There, the visitors played a "Health Bingo" game, in which, instead of numbers, the names of illnesses and health tips were called out. Everyone seemed to enjoy it!

Everyone who came for optical, dental, medical, and lifestyle counseling received care. We also

went looking for those who would benefit from our services. We even reached out to the Muslim population in Rota.

One strategy we implemented was to take some dog food with us. We were warned not to walk along the streets since the dogs could be quite vicious, but this did not deter our team. We fed many dogs, allowing us to go door to door to help their owners with health care.

With the success of these recent trips, the clinic looks forward to continuing the ministry of healing with trips to the islands of Saipan and Tinian this spring.

*Elena Taneva is a nurse practitioner at the Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic in Tamuning, Guam.*



The medical and pastoral team visiting Rota during a recent mission trip organized by the Guam Seventh-day Adventist Clinic.



Medical team members provide health consultations to members of the community.

# NAD NEWS BRIEFS



← A baptism is celebrated at the Oakwood University "Revive" evangelistic event culmination on February 25, 2023. *Provided by Isaac Ibarra/Oakwood University*

## Oakwood University Hosts Historic Evangelism Event in Collaboration With Southern Union, Gulf States Conference, and South Central Conference

**I** conduct around 14 evangelism meetings every year; however, I'll remember this one," said Roger Hernandez, Ministerial and Evangelism director for the Southern Union Conference. Hernandez was talking about the "Revive" evangelism meeting that took place on the Oakwood University campus February 17-25, 2023, an event sponsored and directed by Hernandez.

It was the first time that the Southern Union, Oakwood University, and the Gulf States and South Central conferences came together with one mission on the university campus: saving souls for the kingdom.

Julio Chazarreta, Hispanic coordinator for Southern Union, began the meetings as speaker from February 17 to 21, followed by Hernandez from February 22 to 25.

Pastors with their churches in proximity of Oakwood University gathered at C. T. Richards Moseley Complex to hear God's Word. As the result, more than 100 people joined the church through baptism and profession of faith, including several of Oakwood's Latino students.

Enoc Balbuena, pastor of Oakwood Latino church, hosted the event, making sure that the experience on the campus was successful. Balbuena and Isaac Ibarra, special assistant to the Oakwood president for diversity and inclusion, prepared a meal to feed 700 people who attended the Sabbath service at the Oakwood Adventist Academy. Oakwood president Leslie Pollard, and Calvin Watkins, North American Division vice president, visited and witnessed the "Revive" event. The culmination of the event took place at the Oakwood University church with a mini concert and baptism celebration.

—Oakwood University News

## ADVENTIST CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA RELEASES NEW SHORT FILM *THOSE WERE THE GOOD DAYS*

**T**he North American Division and Sonscreen Film Festival have announced the release of a new short film entitled *Those Were the Good Days*. Produced by Sonscreen Films and Pacific Union College, the film explores themes of joy and parenting as it follows a father and daughter on a trip to the park.

"This film started out as the answer to the question 'What does happiness look like?' and morphed into something a little more personal," said Rachel Scribner, writer and director. Scribner added that the film ended up touching on deeper topics of family and connection that have led to conversations with parents who watched the film.

*Those Were the Good Days*, screened in Loma Linda, California, on April 14, 2023, at the Sonscreen Film Festival (the North American Division's film festival for young Christian filmmakers), was conceived as part of the larger



Happiness Project, a global collaboration led by the Trans-European and Inter-European divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Happiness Project is a cross-media network project about the values related to happiness and its meaning for today's society. The project includes a series of intercultural documentaries, short films, clips, and written content about happiness. All the resources and materials are the result of teamwork, produced by several media centers and media entities of the Seventh-day Adven-

tist Church worldwide.

Those Were the Good Days is also available for viewing at [happinessproject.media](http://happinessproject.media).

"We're excited to showcase this beautiful film that explores the complexities of human emotion," said Julio Muñoz, NAD Office of Communication associate director and executive director of Sonscreen Film Festival. "Rachel has done a fantastic job of capturing the essence of happiness and family in a way that is both moving and thought-provoking."

—NAD Office of Communication



## New Andrews University President Elected

On March 7, 2023, the executive session of the *Andrews University Board of Trustees* elected John Wesley Taylor V to serve as the seventh president of Andrews University (and twenty-fifth president overall since Andrews Uni-

← John Wesley Taylor V has been elected to serve as Andrews University president. *Provided by Andrews University*

versity first began as Battle Creek College in 1874).

As president, Taylor will continue to fulfill the "Legacy of Leadership" that is a hallmark of the university and is the inscription on the J. N. Andrews sculpture in front of Pioneer Memorial church on the Berrien Springs campus.

Taylor will replace Andrea Luxton, who is retiring on July 1 after serving for seven years as president of Andrews University and as the university provost for six years before that.

Prior to becoming president-elect, Taylor has served as associate director of the Department of Education at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists since 2010 and as executive secretary of the Adventist Accrediting Association. He's also served as a professor and dean of the School of Education and Psychology at Southern Adventist University and

a professor, associate dean, and director of doctoral programs at the School of Graduate Studies at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines. Taylor additionally served as a professor and founding dean of the Division of Graduate Studies at Montemorelos University in Mexico.

Taylor holds both Ph.D. and master's degrees from Andrews University, an Ed.D. from the University of Virginia, and a master's degree from University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

"By God's grace I endeavor to lead with empathy and compassion, with a clear sense of purpose, and with moral and ethical integrity. Throughout our university I will seek to advance the biblical worldview and to promote strategies that nurture faith," said Taylor.

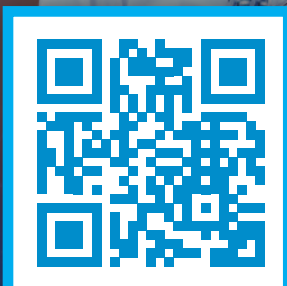
—Andrews University Office of University Communication



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BY RUDY SALAZAR

# The Best Small Group Ministry in the Local Church

**A**s a pastor, I have noticed over the years that one of the main reasons people stop going to church is the lack of friends and meaningful relationships in the church. Loneliness and church *should* be an oxymoron.

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church is losing members at an alarming rate. Even though the evangelism in our churches is winning people, we lose about 49 of every 100 baptized,” writes Kirk Thomas.\* We are losing many members because of the lack of meaningful connections in church.

Recently a friend who will soon retire and move away went to visit a church in which no one made eye contact with him. The next Sabbath he went to a different church. The people were friendly. A man asked if he had plans for lunch and told him *not* to make other plans, because he was coming with his family to eat. I call that a warm welcome!

Our present postpandemic culture is making it harder to develop meaningful personal relationships. The shopping mall is Amazon. The movie theater is Netflix. The office is Zoom. And the church service is on the Internet.

## Church as a Social Club

Some say that we go to church to meet God, and it should not be used as a social club. I disagree. Acts 2:42 says: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (KJV).

The social aspect in our churches is bigger and deeper than we realize. In fact, this verse says that as important as doctrine is, it is not the only thing the early Christians were committed to. They steadfastly had *koinonia* (Greek for “fellowship”).

Acts 2:46, 47 continues: “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

People should join the church because of the doctrines (or the truth), but they should stay because of the friends they have in church.

After the pandemic, people are more disconnected than ever before, and some of them are not coming back. But for those that do, there should be a small-group ministry they can be immediately connected to—not only for Bible study but also to socialize and have fun.

This small group should be established for more than studying theology—it should also develop deep friendships.

## Sabbath School Classes as Small Group Ministry

Several years ago my wife, Janet, and I had just moved to Columbia, Maryland, and were looking for a church to call home. After visiting several churches, we found the one we were looking for—all because of the Sabbath School class. They gave us a warm welcome at their class. We join their potlucks; we go on Sabbath afternoon walks. We play table games on Saturday night; we go camping together and celebrate special occasions together. Our Sabbath School class goes beyond the Sabbath morning time, because there is *koinonia*.

If every Sabbath School class were as engaging, many of our churches would need to have a couple of services. Why? People are looking for meaningful Christian friends that go beyond Sabbath morning. It should be a requirement for the local church to plug every newly baptized member into an active Sabbath School class.

During the month of January this year, Maryland went through a wave of COVID-19 Omicron variant illness, and my wife and I got sick.

Our Sabbath School class showed their care for us by bringing us food. The best medicine against the loneliness of COVID is an active Sabbath School class that is watching out for each other.

And for us, going to Sabbath School is not a duty but a delight.

\*Kirk Thomas. “Nurture, Retention, Reclamation: Can You Hear Their Cry?” *Ministry*, April 2019, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2019/04/Nurture-retention-reclamation>.

Rudy Salazar is associate director of stewardship for the North American Division.

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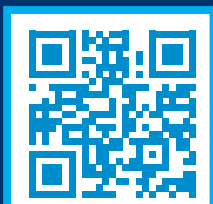
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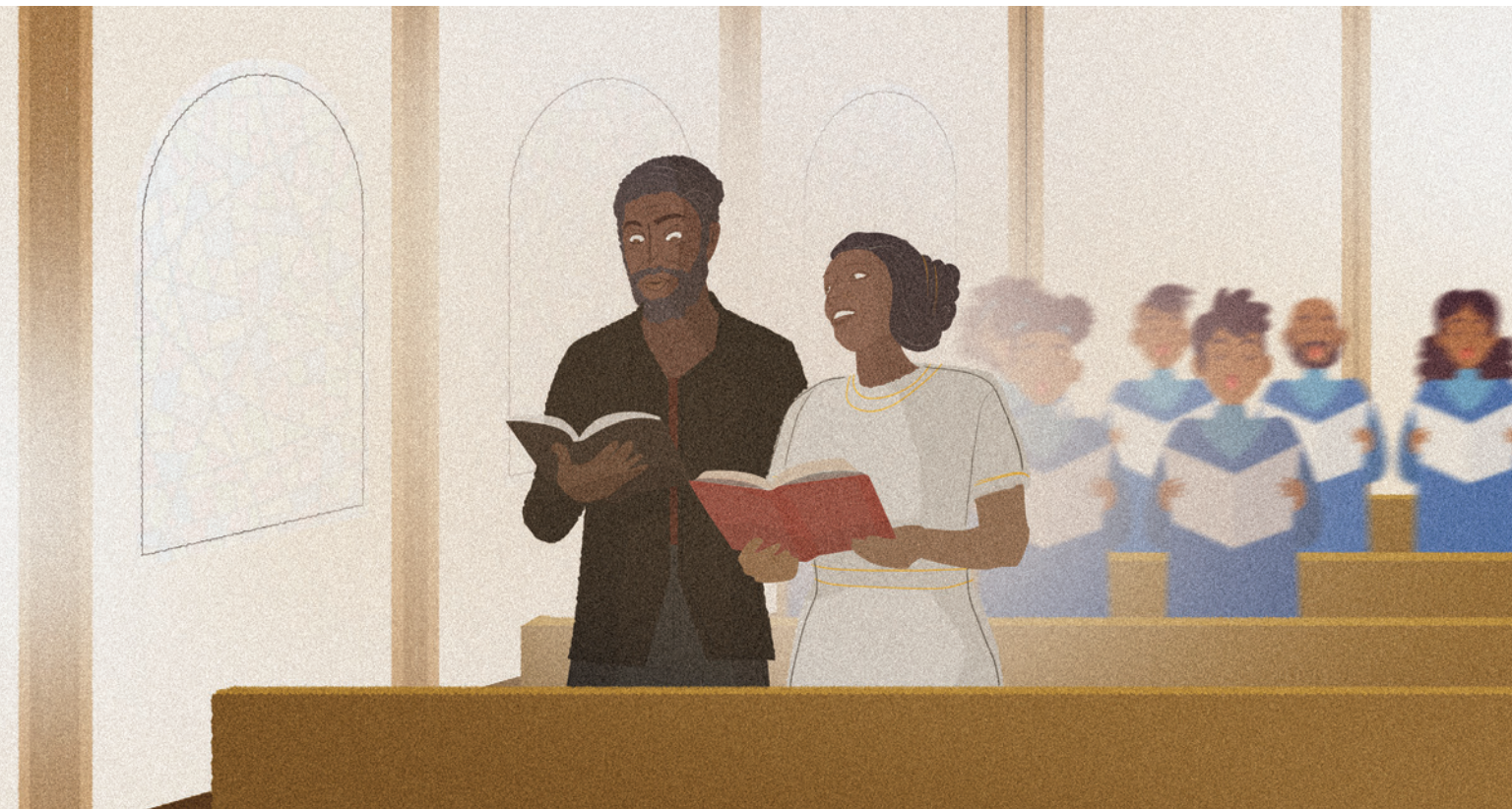
# Sherry and Gary

are ready to retire next year.

They need some advice on tax implications and ways to navigate this next stage in life. They are prepared to get more involved at church but want to ensure their bills are taken care of before they retire and give a significant donation to the children's programs.



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