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FOR NORTH AMERICA

Special Issue: NAD Year-End Meeting





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# Adventist Journey

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## My Journey

Leaving medicine wasn't a hard decision. I was being led to take care of my kids. But then, as my kids got older, I was led to teaching drama and high school music at an Adventist K-12 academy. After COVID hit, we had to pretty much shut down our music department. Eventually I applied for a job at Loma Linda University that I didn't think I'd get, but here I am.

Visit [nadadventist.org/ajjillgenobaga](https://nadadventist.org/ajjillgenobaga) for more of Genobaga's story.

**JILL GENOBAGA, M.D.,**  
*medical education learning specialist, Loma Linda University*



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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# The Core of Who We Are

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

*Each morning of the 2023 Year-End Meeting for the North American Division, delegates started their day with worship. A different speaker presented every day, and the group participated in worship through song as well. Below are summaries of each of these powerful devotionals.—Editors.*



Brigadier General Andrew Harewood, deputy chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army Reserve, gives the devotional on October 27, 2023, at the NAD Year-End Meeting.

## FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27 “Clear and Present Danger—Your Move”

“We’re living in a very critical time,” began Friday’s speaker, Brigadier General Andrew Harewood, deputy chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army Reserve, and director of Strategy, Plans, Policy, Resources and Soldier/Family Spiritual Readiness at the Office of the Chief of Chaplains for the Pentagon. “The world is a mess. We’re just a few conflicts from self-destruction, and our values are almost nonexistent.”

In his devotional entitled “Clear and Present Danger—Your Move,” Harewood pointed out that the delegates in the room with him were not called to manage, but to lead, and there is a distinct and important difference between the two.

“Why did you get up this morning?” he asked the room. “Why are you here? When you go to bed tired tonight, what would be the purpose of these hours of sweat? Whom will your efforts impact—globally or individually?”

Pulling from his military experience, Harewood explained that in his line of work, in strategic planning and systems analysis, faulty decisions based on emotions result in people dying.

“It’s all about the mission,” he said. “We as a church have forgotten we’re on a mission. . . . We were called to be a movement.”

## SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29 “Where Our Church Meets the World”

Richard Hart, president of Loma Linda University, spoke for Sunday’s worship. He began with a quick history of health care in Adventism, which goes back to 1863.

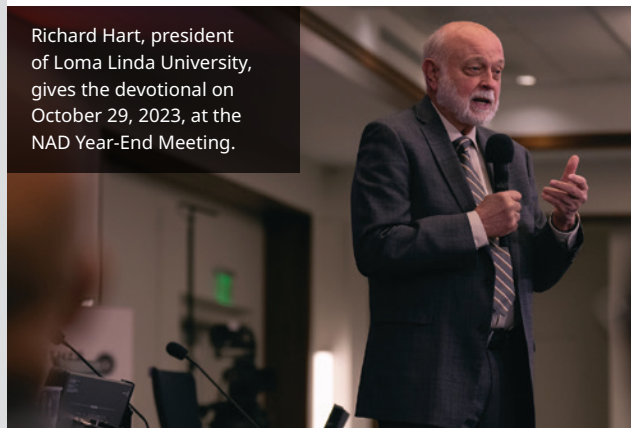
“At that time this country was engulfed in a terrible, bloody civil war with uncertain endings,” Hart said. “American medicine was a mess—doctors were not standardized, practices they followed were abysmal in many respects, and more people died from being taken care of than lived. It was within this context that Ellen White had a vision that became the hallmark of our church.”

He was speaking of the “eight simple remedies,” which have been assigned several acronyms and mnemonics, perhaps the most well known of which is CREATION: Choice, Rest, Environment, Activity, Trust in God, Interpersonal relationships, Outlook, Nutrition.

“Adventist health is more than institutions and hospitals,” Hart commented, adding that it includes Adventist health-care professionals in many different places, not just hospitals, clinics, and private practices.

“It’s also you,” he said, “Every member has a message to share about health. A loaf of bread or a kind word are both part of the Adventist health message. And with this message, we have the opportunity as a church to take all of God and make Him an integral part of our lives, our activities, and our institutions.”

Richard Hart, president of Loma Linda University, gives the devotional on October 29, 2023, at the NAD Year-End Meeting.



Photography by Pieter Damsteeg



Paul Llewellyn, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, gives the devotional on October 30, 2023, at the NAD Year-End Meeting.

## MONDAY, OCTOBER 30 “The Day Is Near”

**D**uring his worship talk Paul Llewellyn, president of the Adventist Church in Canada, urged listeners to eliminate the things that are separating them as a church so they can support and encourage one another and together allow God to transform them. He quoted the story of Elisha visiting King Joash to encourage him. Predicting he would conquer the Aramaians, Elisha tells the king to take his arrows and strike the ground, which the king does three times.

“Elisha is angry with the king!” Llewellyn points out. “He tells the king he should have hit the ground five or six times, then he would have entirely destroyed Aram. Now he will be victorious only three times.”

Llewellyn brought out his own quiver of arrows and began tapping them on the podium.

“Today we have arrows in our hands, and God is asking us to strike the ground in faith,” he said, still tapping.

Then he began to pray, tapping throughout. “We’re not letting go of each other, and we won’t stop praying until you bless us, Lord. We are not letting go until You lead us, Lord. We’re not letting go until You pour out Your latter rain on Your people, Jesus. May we tap our arrows until we are lifted off the ground and joined to our Savior.”

## TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31 “The Price of Unity”

**W**hen I was in secondary school in England, I was part of a choir,” began Andrea Luxton, associate director of higher education for the NAD, and recently retired president of Andrews University. During a concert Luxton and her friend accompanied the choir, she on her clarinet and he on his violin.

While they were playing, a loud crack from her friend’s violin distracted them both. In the space of that brief moment, he skipped an entire line of music. They followed each other back and forth across their music until the director held the choir on a long note and they ended together.

Luxton pointed out that in John 17 Christ prays that His disciples become one, as they were bickering, arguing, vying for the best, and excluding others.

“This isn’t about agreeing on a committee,” Luxton said. “It’s about the unity that comes among a group of believers in a community with Christ at the center.”

She noted how often Paul comments on the importance of relationships. “They were establishing the early church, determining their theology and organizing, but the importance of community comes through every time,” she said.

Luxton outlined three ways to create an environment of unity and community: putting Christ at the center; valuing diversity; and leaving the judgment to God.

“We can have different opinions, but the community Christ has called us to is one of compassion and love,” she concluded. “That does not give room for discord, pulling against each other. Disagree, yes, but in the context of love, compassion, and forgiveness, as Christ is and continues to be at the core of who we are.”



Andrea Luxton, associate director of higher education for the NAD, gives the devotional on October 31, 2023, at the NAD Year-End Meeting.

*Becky St. Clair writes from Angwin, California.*



Photography by Pieter Damsteegt

NAD president G. Alexander Bryant preaches on Sabbath, October 28, 2023, during the North American Division Year-End Meeting worship service.

# NAD President Tells Church Leaders to Stay Engaged in the World

G. Alexander Bryant, in his Sabbath sermon, reminds those listening that as followers of Christ we must remain united, but that “oneness is not sameness.”

BY JULIO C. MUÑOZ

**D**uring the divine worship service on Sabbath, October 28, 2023, G. Alexander Bryant, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD), addressed church leaders directly, saying they are called to be relevant in our society as Jesus was in his ministry. “It was [God’s] intention for His church to be engaged in the world,” he said.

Bryant, preaching a sermon entitled “In the World, but Not of the World,” declared to the delegates, official invitees, and spouses attending the 2023 NAD Year-End Meeting (YEM) Sabbath program that God also asks us to be united and respect each other’s differences.

God calls us to service to advance the kingdom of God. God didn’t call us to service to do the safe things, Bryant continued, “Some might call that a social gospel. Whatever you may want to call it—Jesus ministered to the world’s disenfranchised and dejected groups.”

However, Bryant cautioned that when the church seeks to reach the marginalized with innovative methods, there can be criticism from the least-expected place. “Have you noticed?” Bryant asked, “That some of your greatest ‘haters’ . . . you know what that is?” Bryant paused to lightheartedly say that if delegates don’t have any haters, he invited, “Come join me, because I got a few I can share with you.” He concluded his thought by saying that some of our greatest haters don’t come from without, but rather from within.

To carry out this special ministry in the world, we must remain united. We must be one body, like the disciples. Oneness is what we should strive

for. It is what Jesus prayed to His Father before His death (see John 17). But like the followers of Christ, Bryant cautioned, we must also respect our individuality.

“Oneness is not sameness. Oneness is not uniformity. And what Jesus is saying here in this prayer is *I’m praying that [the disciples] will be one as you and I are one*. Oneness is my ability to like and appreciate you and love you just as you are, without trying to make you like me.”

## Warm Welcome

Before Bryant began, Kyoshin Ahn, NAD executive secretary, gave a warm welcome to the delegates and the livestream audience. He said, “How wonderful it is to know that when God’s children get together, in His name, He’s in our midst. He’s here.”

Ahn concluded by saying, “We are here to worship our worship the God who created us, who loves us, and who serves us. We are here to sing His praises, to fellowship with one another, and to hear the preaching of the Word of God.”

In addition to Ahn, many NAD staff members participated in the program, including Judy Glass, NAD treasurer/CFO; Evelyn Sullivan, Adventist Education associate director; Kimberly Maran, NAD communication director; Edwin Romero, Adventist Retirement administrator/CEO; Michael Harpe, Stewardship Ministries director; and Adam Fenner, newly appointed vice president of digital media. Ministry through music was also brought to the Sabbath worship by Anika Anderson, assistant director for NAD event management; Art Brondo, media producer for communication, and Karen Miranda, social media specialist for professional services.

The special music was provided by the vocal ensemble The Watchmen Acapella. The Andrews

University (Berrien Springs, Michigan)-based group performed several emotionally charged gospel selections during the divine worship hour.

### Engaged

Bryant's sermon expanded on the theme the NAD Year-End Meeting, "Together in Mission: I Will Go." Bryant reminded the audience that God calls us to follow His example and engage in our world. "Jesus was actively engaged in the world and His community," Bryant said. "When there are injustices, we are in the world, and we must be moved to action."

While we as followers of Christ must engage in seeking love in a world filled with injustice, what we do will not always be popular, and we'll be open to criticism—from within our own church, Bryant reminded the audience. But as Christ trained His disciples, we too must persist in loving the marginalized.

Bryant explained that when Christ prayed to His Father, He said, "I have trained these disciples. That's why the world hates them. I've trained them to act like and think like Me. I trained them, to love [their] enemies, to bless them that curse [them], to do good to them who despitefully use [them]. I trained them to be countercultural. And because they're countercultural, the world will hate them."

As Christians and Seventh-day Adventists, it is clear, Bryant continued, that we are here to continue Jesus' ministry of love and compassion.

"We should be concerned about the plight of the world. We should be concerned about the senseless mass murders in our country. We should be concerned about humanity's cruelty to humanity. We should be concerned about the injustice of our society, we should be concerned about the plight of the homeless, we should be concerned about the impact of the climate [on] fires and earthquakes and floods, we should be concerned about police brutality and child abuse. We should be concerned about the disenfranchised because we are Jesus in the world."

Bryant again emphasized that it's a challenge to remain in the world. "In the world, but not of the world' calls for a constant assessment and evaluation of our standing and condition in the world. It's living in a dichotomy—in [the world] but not of it."

But despite the challenges and ongoing criticisms we encounter, we are called to remain in a world full of division and hate. Jesus died so that we could have the opportunity to be in the world, but not of this sinful world, Bryant again reminded the audience.

God calls us to follow His example and engage in our world. To be in the world, but not of this sinful world.

### Be Faithful

Bryant said it is Jesus' prayer to His Father that "I pray not that you take them out of the world of criticism, or out of the world of social media blasts. I pray not that you take them out of the middle of the COVID vaccination debate. I pray not that you take them out of the LGBTQ discussions. I pray not that you take them out of the Israel-Hamas war discussions. I pray not that you take them out of the homeless fight [*sic*]. I pray not that you take them out of the senseless shooting discussion. I pray not that you take them out of the abortion discussion. I pray not that you take them out of the sexual abuse debate. I pray not that you take them out of the religious liberty discussion. Because God says, 'I need them in the world.'"

Bryant concluded by reminding everyone that Jesus is coming back. And the unique message that God gave the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to let the world know He's on his way back. "So be faithful," Bryant encouraged. "Hang in there. Keep fighting the fight. Keep fighting the battle, because soon Jesus will come and take us home."

*Julio C. Muñoz is executive director of Sonscreen and an associate director for communication at the North American Division.*



The musical group The Watchmen Acapella sing during the October 28, 2023, NAD Year-End Meeting worship service.

# COMING TOGETHER IN MISSION

Officers share their annual reports at the 2023 North American Division Year-End Meeting.

**BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA  
AND KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN**

**A**t the North American Division (NAD) headquarters in Columbia, Maryland, the 2023 NAD Year-End Meeting started at 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 26. This annual business meeting, an in-person event, with livestreaming on the NAD website, Facebook and YouTube, provided the opportunity for close to 300 executive committee members to receive reports, amend policies, strategize, and fellowship with church leaders who have dedicated themselves to sharing with others Christ and the Adventist faith.

## **Everyone Can Do Something**

“God had called us to lead, and our assignment is to serve in a very interesting time in history,” said G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, as he began his 2023 report on October 27—his words a continuing thread from his “Built for This Moment” report in 2022. “With the backdrop of what is happening in the world, I ask, ‘What is God calling us to do in this moment?’”

Bryant reminded those gathered that the group voted the theme “Together in Mission” in 2021 in order to find ways to better and more effectively collaborate together. The hope is that the church in North America continues to explore the intersecting points of what we do so we are more effective,

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G. Alexander Bryant gives his president's report on October 27, 2023, at the North American Division Year-End Meeting.



Photography by Pieter Damsteegt

more powerful, and more impactful in our ministry when we do them together, instead of doing them in silos. Those key intersections, said Bryant, are the focus points of media, multiply, and mentorship.

“The question is: Can we look at ways that we can better collaborate together and move the mission of God forward in a more effective way and a more impactful way within these three areas? That’s what we’ve been trying to do over the past two years,” Bryant said, diving into the first focus of media through a short introduction before welcoming Adam Fenner, Adventist Learning Community (ALC) director and newly elected vice president for digital media, to participate in the report.

Fenner described ALC’s three new curricula designed to help our church members be intentional about digital ministry: Faith Made Social; Discipulos Digitales; and Empty Pews to a Million Views Master Class. The hope is that this training will help members become digital disciples.

Other highlights included the mention of a partnership in the works with the General Conference to provide content and follow up on the interest that Adventist.org generates geared toward the many North Americans who visit the site. “What an opportunity! They are coming to us to find out what we believe, what our values are, and the truths that we share.”

The focus of mentorship was next in Bryant’s report. He shared the startling statistics that since January 2021, at the division, two of three of the NAD’s officers are new, five of six vice presidents are new, and nine department directors are new. At the union level, five of nine presidents are new, and seven executive secretaries are new. Looking at the conference level: 42 of 59 conferences have new presidents; 43 new executive secretaries; and 18 new treasurers. “One of the most significant areas we have addressed is leadership development,” he said, and he introduced Paulo Macena, NAD director of leadership development, to share a portion of the report.

Macena explained that both a new mentorship guidebook was published and a mentorship program was started in the past year. Macena reported that there are about 35 conference presidents enrolled in the mentorship program, with four mentors. Plans are to expand this to conference secretaries, treasurers, and other department leaders.

Bryant talked about several key areas that can help grow the church exponentially through a myriad of ministries that include building relationships, praying, educating, and healing. He first mentioned church planting; second was centers of influence in urban areas; and third was public evangelism. The latter two are

aspects of the Antioch initiative, which centers on the engagement of all church members, and the leveraging of resources especially in places where the population is high. The goal is to add 50,000 disciples in our cities to serve in churches, in schools, with indigenous Americans, with immigrant groups, in centers of influence, as student missionaries in metropolitan areas, in community service, and more. It is finding out what the needs are and aggregating “our resources to come in and help in particular projects,” said Bryant.

After quoting Joel 2:28, Bryant finished his report, “The world church calls it TMI—total member involvement—global TMI. Let’s challenge every member to get involved in the mission Jesus has called us to. Everyone can do something.”

### God Brings the Church Together

On October 29, NAD executive secretary Kyoshin Ahn and his team built upon president Bryant’s opening presentation by casting a vision for disciple-making in North America via the secretariat.

Ahn and leaders from secretariat ministries, including the Office of Volunteer Ministries; Human Relations; eAdventist Membership Services; Office of Human Resources; Archives, Statistics and Research; and Professional Services, offered a wide-ranging view of the church in North America. There was also a report from Andrews University representative on 2023 General Conference Global Church Member Survey.

After thanking his team, Ahn shared that as of the second quarter of 2023, the NAD had 1,243,206 members worshipping in 5,719 churches and 910 companies.



On October 29, 2023, Kyoshin Ahn, NAD executive secretary, delivers his report to the executive committee gathered for Year-End Meeting at the division headquarters in Columbia, Maryland.

Ahn noted a significant membership decline in 2022, leading to a net membership change of -37,245. “Let me share the good news—we didn’t lose most of these people,” he said, explaining that the losses were the result of a systematic, 18-year membership audit completed in 2022, which resulted in four conferences removing 52,193 names from their books.

He commended the conferences for taking this step toward statistical integrity. “We [now] have much better membership data than before,” he affirmed.

Ahn highlighted the division’s 23,869 baptisms in 2022. He noted encouraging trends—i.e., baptisms for the first two quarters of 2023 nearly matched the prepandemic total, and by the end of 2022 the number of professions of faith “fully rebounded from the pandemic.”

Regarding demographics, 47 percent of NAD members are aged 30-59, with 32 percent over 60. Ages 19-29 represent 15 percent, ages 13-18 5 percent, and the 0-12 age category only 1 percent of members, excluding unbaptized children. The gender breakdown is 53 percent female, 41 percent male, and 6 percent unstated.

In 2022, 9,100 members died, 1,000 fewer than in 2021 but higher than pre-COVID-19 numbers. Ahn projected a return to prepandemic levels of 8,000 by December 2023.

Also in 2022, 9,000 members were missing, and 3,000 were removed from church records. To address this ongoing concern, Ahn introduced a report from Bonita J. Shields, associate secretary, who leads retention and nurture initiatives.

Shields first referenced Jesus’ prayer in John 17:11, 12: to keep those whom the Father had given Him. “As spiritual leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, our mission is not only to reach people

for God’s kingdom but to keep them as well,” she said.

She then shared the secretariat’s objectives and activities for nurture and retention, which included partnering with conference executive secretaries and clerks to expand the role of church clerks in nurturing and retaining members; as well as an interconnected, three-part cycle for nurture and retention, encompassing nurture, discipleship, and reclamation.

Ahn shared research comparing NAD churches to U.S. churches of all denominations, showing that NAD churches have twice as many immigrants, 26 percent, as the average U.S. church. They also have more immigrants than the populations of the U.S. (13 percent) and Canada (22 percent). “We are a worldwide church whose work began in North America. [Thus], many of our members outside North America are prepared to have an immediate sense of belonging when they step into a congregation here. This is where our growth is happening,” explained Ahn.

Ahn compared the state of our congregations to the broader Christian church in the U.S. using three data sources: (1) the 2020 Hartford Institute’s Faith Communities Today Survey, in which 11,000 U.S. Christian congregations took part; (2) supplementary Adventist data from the same survey, including 320 Adventist churches; and (3) eAdventist membership data.

Key comparisons included congregational size, congregational growth, congregational characteristics, and pastoral characteristics. In regard to the pastoral characteristics, Ahn shared that the median age for U.S. pastors is 57. Excluding administrators and departmental directors, the average age of NAD clergy is 49. Including administrators and departmental directors,



the median age is 58. Ahn also noted that clergy and congregations are aging across denominations.

As the secretary’s report ended, Ahn asked, “What image of our members was emerging in your mind as you listened to this report?” He continued, “I see people coming together from very different backgrounds, cultures, races, ethnicities, generations, and languages, clustering around one common denominator—the Adventist Christian faith. The conviction that Christ purchased the church with His blood and ministers on our behalf [brings] our members and churches together. No human institution, no red book [working policy], no human institution, no agent, can do it. This is the doing of God.”

He concluded with a prayer based on Psalm 17:8: O God, “keep [us] as the church as the apple of your eye; hide [us] in the shadow of your wings.”

### Partnering With God

On Monday, October 30, delegates applauded as treasurer and chief financial officer Judy R. Glass, the first woman elected to the role, took the stage for her inaugural report. Glass began with a heartfelt testimony. “When I started this position 91 days ago, there were times I felt like I was thrown into the deep end of the pool. [What] helped me on this journey was the reminder that I



Judy Glass, NAD treasurer, presents her report on October 30, 2023, at the NAD Year-End Meeting.

“Let’s challenge every member to get involved in the mission Jesus has called us to.”

The past two years have shown significant gains over five years. “In 2021 we still weren’t traveling a lot, and in 2022 we had significant tithe growth,” Glass explained.

Glass and others subsequently presented several reports, including reports from the NAD audit review committee; General Conference Auditing Service; and Adventist Retirement. The NAD YEM executive committee voted to approve each report.

Transitioning to year-to-date (YTD) unaudited financial statements, Glass shared that comparative tithe was up by 8.36 percent year over year through August 2023. Moreover, while all nine unions demonstrated growth, “Lake Union led the way, with 11.67 percent.”

Among several gains, the NAD’s income exceeded the budgeted amount by nearly \$9.9 million, net tithe was \$10 million greater than the budget, and expenses were under budget by roughly \$5.3 million.

She turned to the August YTD expense summary. “We’re ahead of or better than budget in all but a few categories.” Also, while income per day was less than expenses per day in 2020, the reverse was true in 2021. Among cost-cutting measures will be encouraging departments to engage in more collaborative initiatives. Overall the NAD’s financial profile is favorable, exceeding 2022 figures, with strong tithes expected in September.

Glass asserted that by God’s grace, the division is in a position “to weather some challenges . . . and provide support for our churches, unions, and conferences.” She shared the 2024 proposed budget; and then addressed how the NAD will use the budgeted \$1.2 billion gross tithe. Glass gave the following breakdown: the NAD will keep 13.9 percent, much of which provides services for the field, and the rest, 86.1 percent, will be retained by the conferences. She also shared a video on tithe allocations that summarized an earlier report by Randy Robinson, former NAD treasurer, emphasizing the reallocation of NAD and GC funds back to the conferences. “God is faithful,” she added. “And as long as we’re partnering with Him, we know He will walk with us on this journey.”

In her conclusion Glass thanked the treasury team, including the newly added AdventistGiving personnel, and former boss Robinson. She stated, “God is amazing in what He does. . . . I am humbled and honored to serve as your treasurer. It’s not something I ever imagined or dreamed about. But it’s amazing the journey God takes you on when you trust Him and follow His path for your life.”

*Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the NAD; Kimberly Luste Maran is editor of Adventist Journey and communication director for the NAD.*

have a Friend. And my Friend walks on water,” she said.

“This year has just been amazing,” she continued. “Through September we have a tithe gain of 9.65 percent. That’s with every union reporting gains and only one of our 59 conferences showing a loss. God is blessing us as we look forward.”

Glass shared that the surplus enabled the NAD to allocate funds to its strategic focus areas—media, mentorship, and multiply (three M’s), as well as the Antioch initiative, which aims to resource and create centers of influence in major U.S. cities. She challenged delegates to submit proposals for the Antioch project, emphasizing using God’s resources for mission.

Next, Glass presented highlights from the 2022 audited financial statement. She underscored that the NAD’s net assets are “all on an upward trend,” while liabilities have remained consistent over the past several years.

Glass then addressed the NAD’s working capital, i.e., the assets available for its day-to-day operations. With a working capital of 9.06 months in 2022, the NAD has exceeded the six months recommended by the working policy. “Those extra months benefit us, especially when we get into [emergencies] like COVID-19 in 2020.” This cushion helps the NAD “be a backstop for [its] organizations.”

### IN DEPTH ON YEAR-END MEETING

To read these reports in full, and access links to other news reports and videos of each YEM session, visit [nadadventist.org/news/2023-nad-year-end-meeting-video-and-news-coverage](https://nadadventist.org/news/2023-nad-year-end-meeting-video-and-news-coverage).

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BY ANGELINE D. BRAUER

# Mingling With a Purpose

It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18, KJV). This was the first thing declared to be “not good” after the many “it is good”s found in Genesis 1. In the perfection of the Eden home, though Adam spoke face to face with God and angels, he was, to some extent, alone.

The *Amplified Bible* adds a parenthetical explanation: “It is not good (beneficial) for the man to be alone.” The Hebrew word *tôwb*, translated “good,” can also mean “best, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, glad, joyful, loving, merry, pleasure, precious,” and other wonderful expressions. In other words, God wanted Adam to have another level of pleasure and joy that comes from being with someone who was “a helper [one who balances him—a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him” (verse 18, Amplified).<sup>1</sup>

In May 2023 the U.S. Surgeon General called attention to the epidemic of loneliness. His advisory states that “socially connected people live longer” with a 50 percent increase in the odds of survival.<sup>2</sup> Social isolation, however, is as dangerous as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and more dangerous than drinking six alcoholic drinks a day, physical inactivity, and obesity. Additionally, the WHO issued a call for experts to serve in a technical advisory group on social connection.<sup>3</sup>

Although the COVID-19 pandemic magnified the situation, social isolation in our population had already been festering. Published in 2018, a national survey of more than 55,000 people across England found that 16- to 24-year-olds experienced the highest rates of loneliness, both in frequency and intensity, and that those who feel lonely tend to have more “online only” friends.<sup>4</sup> The AARP, looking at ages 45+ in the U.S., found that 35 percent are lonely, amounting to about 47.8 million people.<sup>5</sup>

What God declared “not good” at the beginning of time seems to have only gotten worse. What about your neighbor? a family member or coworker? Are they unrecognized victims of isolation?

Let’s consider the first part of what’s often considered Christ’s five-step formula for ministry: “Christ’s method alone will give

true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”<sup>6</sup>

“The Savior mingled.” Christ was not using an app, but He was aiming to connect. Christ, who spoke creation (John 1:1-3), was now living on the fallen earth, Himself subject to the “not good” condition of loneliness, yet taking it as a mission to mingle and unite with the beings He came to redeem.

Interestingly, researchers who looked at loneliness and self-centeredness found that one predicted higher levels of the other, in “a reciprocal relationship that could potentially contribute to the maintenance of loneliness.”<sup>7</sup>

But Christ gave us a formula to prevent and reduce loneliness: it starts by mingling with a purpose. And in turn, not only does our prospects for a healthy life improve, so does that of those to whom we draw close.

Where are you on the spectrum of loneliness? Take a quiz to find out at [www.NADhealth.org/assessments](http://www.NADhealth.org/assessments), then find simple ways to mingle and seek the good of others.

Christ gave us a formula to prevent and reduce loneliness.

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations credited to Amplified are taken from *Amplified Bible*, copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987, 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community,” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK595227/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Call for Experts—Technical Advisory Group on Social Connection,” <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/call-for-experts-tag-sc>.

<sup>4</sup> “The BBC Loneliness Experiment,” <https://www.seed.manchester.ac.uk/education/research/impact/bbc-loneliness-experiment/>.

<sup>5</sup> “Loneliness and Social Connections: A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older,” <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/life/info-2018/loneliness-social-connections/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> J. T. Cacioppo et al., “Reciprocal Influences Between Loneliness and Self-centeredness,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43, no. 8 (2017): 1125-1135.

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