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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

A really pivotal moment for me was when I first went to visit Tanzania the summer after I graduated college and before I went to medical school. I remember just asking the Lord to lead me where I should go. I googled orphanages around the world, and one came up in Tanzania. That experience changed my whole life trajectory.

Visit nadadventist.org/ajbrianagreene for more of Greene's story.

BRIANA GREENE,

pediatric resident physician at Loma Linda University Children's Hospital and founder of nonprofit From Hearts 2 Hands

Briana Greene



Cover photo by Art Brondo

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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Tackling Abuse One Advocate at a Time

Themed “Safeguarding Peace,” the North American Division’s enditnow Summit on Abuse featured testimonies, discussions, devotionals, and expert presentations.

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

Karen did not fit the stereotype of an abuse survivor. She was raised in a loving Seventh-day Adventist home with no history of abuse on either side. When she met her husband at an Adventist university, she never imagined she would become one of the 10 million Americans affected by domestic violence each year.

The mistreatment began with excessive criticism and intensified after the birth of their first child, a girl with Down syndrome, whom her husband pressured Karen into putting up for adoption. As their family expanded to include two boys, he subjected her to such horrific emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that she wanted to take her own life.

Themed “Safeguarding Peace,” the North American Division’s (NAD) enditnow Summit on Abuse,



Attendees came from across North America and Europe to the NAD’s 2023 enditnow Summit on Abuse to gain knowledge and resources to help eradicate abuse in their circles. Pictured: attendees, presenters, and NAD leaders DeeAnn Bragaw (front, far left), Women’s Ministries director, and Erica Jones Smith (back row, third from the right), Women’s Ministries assistant director, whose department hosted the initiative. *All photography by Dan Weber*

held November 12-13, 2023, at Andrews University, featured Karen's video testimony and follow-up discussions; thought-provoking devotionals; and presentations from advocates, church leaders, and educators. It ended with training on responding appropriately to abuse disclosures and creating a resource list for abuse survivors.

More than 100 church leaders, educators, seminary students, professional advocates, and volunteers across North America and Europe registered for the event, indicating their commitment to combating abuse. The two-day event concluded with an enditnow certification ceremony for attendees who demonstrated the ability to support abuse survivors through a skills assessment.

"The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America cares deeply about the topic, and we're taking a firm stand against it," asserted Erica Jones Smith, summit organizer and NAD Women's Ministries assistant director. She added, "We believe one of the most impactful things we can do is train local people to understand that this does happen in faith communities and to know how to appropriately respond when it does."

On day one Ken Denslow, Lake Union Conference president, offered a unique take on the parable of the good Samaritan. We are all the battered man, he said, representing "those who have been stripped of their dignity and sense of self-worth because of the mindless, careless actions of others." Jesus is the Good Samaritan, "the only one who can save," and we are called to be innkeepers, helping heal the wounds of the afflicted. "May Seventh-day Adventist churches truly be havens of refuge, where innkeepers are busy meeting the needs of others," he concluded.

"We don't want individuals to be invisible in churches, and we don't just want to have a heart [for helping abuse victim-survivors]. We want to put action and skill behind it."

Also on opening day, participants learned that a counselor, Nicole Parker, was available for support throughout the training. Parker, who teaches a course on biblical counseling and conflict resolution at Southern Adventist University and serves as an abuse advocate and therapist, emphasized the church's need to tackle abuse issues. "Many people think advocacy against abuse is a side issue that distracts us from taking the gospel to the world. But I find it's a central issue. Jesus said that how we treat the powerless is an index of where our hearts are."

Training topics at the summit included abuse awareness, prevention, and response; child abuse prevention and response; abuse statistics in and outside of the church; first response proficiency; NAD and other resources; and next steps. The diverse team of presenters included Mike Sloan, director of safeguarding at GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment); René Drumm, senior research professor of sociology at Andrews University; Tricia Lewis, clinical assistant professor of health sciences at Sacred Heart University; Tracey Ray, executive director of Safe Haven of Pender, a shelter and resource center for domestic abuse survivors; Douglas Tilstra, retired vice president for student life at Walla Walla University; and Ruben Muriente, program manager, Office of Community, Safety, and Gun Violence for the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Drumm, Lewis, and Ray also helped develop the *Safeguarding Peace* manual with information on abuse, resources, and appropriate responses to disclosure. It was introduced at the summit and will be soon available from AdventSource.

Demystifying the Different Types of Abuse

In the opening presentation Ray gave an overview of intimate partner violence (IPV), i.e., emotional, physical, spiritual, and sexual abuse, definitions, statistics, and case studies. Ray introduced terms such as victim-survivor, acknowledging the strength they show in overcoming abuse, and a person acting abusively rather than abuser to signify that the person is still a child of God. Among the most shocking statistics she shared was that in the U.S., nearly three women are killed every day by an intimate partner.

"We don't want individuals to be invisible in churches, and we don't just want to have a heart [for helping abuse victim-survivors]. We want to put action and skill behind it," she said, expressing the impetus for the summit.



"Faith communities can be a powerful part of the solution [to abuse issues]," asserts Mike Sloan, director of safeguarding at GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) during the NAD's 2023 editnow Summit on Abuse.

Church Too: Abuse Issues in Congregations

Lewis spoke on the prevalence of abuse, sharing that in the U.S., one third of women and men report emotional or psychological IPV. In Canada 44 percent of women and 36 percent of men experience IPV, emotional violence being most prevalent at 40 percent for both, and physical IPV coming in second, at 23 percent of women and 17 percent of men.

The most eye-opening revelation was the prevalence of IPV in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, based on surveys submitted by 1,400 members. More than 60 percent of the sample had experienced some form of emotional or psychological abuse. Also, 30 percent of women and 20 percent of men reported physical violence.

Lewis stated, "The numbers indicate that intimate partner violence is just as common in the church as it is outside of the church in North America. This may be shocking for many who think the denomination or church is a sacred place for men and women. Unfortunately, we're not doing any better, as far as preventing abuse, [than] the rest of the world."

Drumm uncovered results from an in-depth follow-up study of 42 Adventist abuse victim-survivors, revealing that 90 percent of the abusers were Seventh-day Adventist church members. Several held church offices and/or denominational positions, such as pastors, elders, deacons, professors, hospital administrators, and conference officers. The underlying message, Drumm said, was: "[An abuser] can be anyone."

In a session on barriers preventing victim-survivors from leaving, Muriente noted that, for many, "the fear of leaving is greater than the fear of staying." Reasons for staying include fear of greater physical harm, losing custody of their children, not being believed, feelings of guilt and shame, or hope for positive change. Lewis added that women often stay, even in cases of severe abuse, because of financial dependence on that person. Attendees also learned that, on average, victim-survivors leave six to eight times before leaving permanently.

Other issues, Muriente underscored, are endemic in churches. In Karen's case her husband was a deacon and friend of the pastor. Muriente said, "Sometimes our religious expectations need to be checked when it comes to abuse." The misconception that abuse is less prevalent within the church and the lack of intentionality around these issues can inadvertently perpetuate a culture of abuse.

Prevention and Response

Subsequently, Lewis shared different tiers of prevention. Tertiary prevention mitigates the long-term consequences of violence for victim-survivors seeking healing. Examples in the church include counseling (referral as needed), support groups, and financial and in-kind support for victim-survivors and families. Secondary prevention encompasses early detection and immediate

intervention. Examples include making IPV resources available and having an editnow advocate receive confidential disclosures. Finally, primary prevention involves system-wide efforts to prevent new cases of a condition or victimization. Examples include sermons condemning abuse, editnow emphasis day, and seminars on healthy relationships.

Sloan covered child abuse prevention and response on both days. He cited common instances of child abuse as physical discipline leading to physical injuries and emotional neglect, during which a child does not feel safe or loved. He noted that more than 90 percent of victims know their abuser, and most abuse occurs in the home by a biological or nonbiological parent or partner. Finally, many child abuse victim-survivors never disclose.

He asserted that while religious affiliation does not automatically reduce child abuse issues, "faith communities can be a powerful part of the solution." He called for



On day two of the NAD's 2023 editnow Summit on Abuse, attendees who had passed a skills assessment are certified as editnow advocates.

the education of kids on protecting themselves and the education of congregations on types of child abuse, red flags, boundaries, and resources. “The safest community is an educated community,” he said.

Becoming an enditnow Advocate

Day two offered attendees ample opportunities to practice their advocacy skills. First, they role-played being a victim and an advocate, using different scenarios and scripts for guidance. They learned three keys to receiving a disclosure—believe the individual is telling the truth, grieve or acknowledge the individual’s pain, and relieve the situation by offering resources and support. They also began building resource guides for victim-survivors in region-based groups. Finally, they learned to conduct a safety check with victims based on a scale of one to three: (1) I feel safe but cautious to (3) I am afraid for my life. In all instances, they would

offer to connect the person to a domestic violence team or resources and for a response of two or three to emergency shelter services and local law enforcement.

“We want to ensure that people are really equipped to return to their local communities and address issues,” explained Smith.

Those who attended both days, almost half of the registrants, were evaluated and received a certificate indicating they were now an enditnow advocate. Their advocacy responsibilities included but were not limited to:

- volunteering as an anti-abuse advocate to be the primary contact to receive and disseminate abuse prevention information.
- connecting with local or state domestic violence providers for training.
- following up with enditnow organizers.
- helping ensure their local church holds an enditnow emphasis day in August.

Sharing Hope and Healing

Karen’s story was interspersed throughout the summit and offered hope for victim-survivors and advocates alike. She was about to drive into a sinkhole when the song “Choose Life That You Might Live” began playing on the radio, growing increasingly louder. She cried out to God for help that day, which came after a friend observed her rubbing her wrist and urged her to seek counseling.

In response to the summit, Beth Grissom, Women’s Ministries and Prayer Ministries director of the Carolina Conference, said, “I am very thankful they brought in professionals. I’m incredibly proud of the North American Division for the quality of the information presented.”

Paula Ferreira-Lopez, Women’s Ministries director from the Ontario Conference, concurred. “This is an important and valuable part of what we should do in ministry. [The certificate] is not just a piece of paper. We’re creating a movement.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Find more free resources for creating safe churches at enditnownorthamerica.org and on the AdventSource enditnow page.

Sessions from the 2023 enditnow summit will soon be available on the enditnow page of the Adventist Learning Community website as part of an online course.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America also offers a silent whistle program that allows users to send anonymous reports of abuse: enditnownorthamerica.org/silent-whistle.

Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the North American Division.



NAD NEWS BRIEFS



← The North American Division headquarters in Columbia, Maryland. *Pieter Damsteegt*

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION APPOINTS SEVERAL NEW LEADERS

On Friday, October 27, 2023, the North American Division (NAD) executive committee received names for new appointments recommended by the North American Division's standing committee with an overwhelming majority vote.

Ivan Williams, Sr., most recently the NAD ministerial director, was elected as the NAD vice president of strategic planning and leadership; Adam Fenner, director of Adventist Learning Community (ALC), was elected to assume an additional role as NAD vice president for digital media; and Chad Grundy, Carolina Conference undertreasurer, was elected NAD undertreasurer.

Williams, who served as the director of the NAD Ministerial Association for 12 years, replaces Paul Brantley, who retired in 2021. "[He] will lead the division office in its strategic plans and innovation as we move forward. He will assist in greater collaboration and cross-fertilization of our departments," said G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president.

Fenner will serve in a new role that aligns with the media branch of the NAD's strategic focus—multiply, media, and mentorship—voted in 2021. He will carry out this assignment alongside his present position as director of the Adventist Learning Community (ALC), which provides professional development online courses for church professionals and volunteers, ministry resources, and uniquely Adventist content for all audiences.

Bryant expressed, "He has distinguished himself in his current role, he's a millennial, and he has given tremendous leadership in the area of digital media in the development of the Adventist Learning Community and other digital media assets."

Chad Grundy was named NAD undertreasurer, succeeding Judy Glass, who was elected treasurer and CFO in June 2023. In this role Grundy will oversee the accounting functions of the treasury department and be the budget director. He has served as undertreasurer for the Carolina Conference for the past 16 years.

In December 2023 the NAD administration also announced that Rohann Wellington and Brent Hardinge were appointed to serve as assistant vice presidents for digital media. Both Wellington and Hardinge will continue in their roles as director of professional services and Adventist Information Ministries (AIM), respectively, and will carry additional responsibilities moving forward in 2024.

"We are happy to add to our digital media focus the names of Brent Hardinge and Rohann Wellington," said Bryant. "This alliance with our new vice president for digital media is to facilitate a more lasered and strategic focus for the digital assets of the NAD."

Hardinge, as AIM director, has been reshaping that ministry to have a greater focus in the digital space, which primarily engages with the division's external audience. Wellington, as director of the NAD professional services department, provides support to the division's departments and primarily serves and engages with the internal audience, i.e., church departments and members.

"Both of them bring incredible skills and expertise to this task. They are also totally committed to the mission God has given this church. We are delighted to welcome them to these added responsibilities," added Bryant.

—Christelle Agboka, NAD Office of Communication

AdventHealth to Lead \$11 Million National Study on Exercise and Brain Health

The AdventHealth Neuroscience Institute will lead first-of-its-kind research on exercise and brain health as part of a national, multisite effort funded with \$11 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the largest source of medical research funding worldwide.

Known as Follow-up Longitudinal Analysis of Moderate-intensity Exercise (FLAME), this new effort will test the long-term effects of a previously conducted randomized exercise clinical trial initiated in 2016 called “Investigating Gains in Neurocognition in an Intervention Trial of Exercise (IGNITE),” which examined the effects of exercise on cognitive and brain health in cognitively normal older adults.

For the first time, FLAME will examine whether participating in a moderate-intensity exercise intervention influences the rate of cognitive performance changes and risk for Alzheimer’s disease pathology five years later. The FLAME study will also examine the extent to which participants maintained the exercise routines they started in the IGNITE study and determine whether there are any factors predicting long-term adherence to exercise behaviors. In short, the study could help establish evidence for long-term engagement in physical exercise as a leading approach to reduce the risk for age-related cognitive decline and dementia.

“With the number of new Alzheimer’s disease cases expected to grow exponentially, we are interested in how we can continue to capitalize on and leverage the natural properties of the brain to maintain and improve brain



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function,” said lead researcher Kirk Erickson, Ph.D., director of translational neuroscience at the AdventHealth Neuroscience Institute. “While many believe that our brain simply deteriorates, atrophies, and declines inevitably, we are finding that there are things we can do about it and that the brain retains its capacity for modification—even late into life.”

In combination with the results from IGNITE, the results of FLAME are expected to be transformative. Also funded by NIH, the IGNITE randomized clinical trial tested a diverse sample of 648 adults between the ages of 65 and 80. The FLAME study will commence with recontacting IGNITE participants in early 2024. The goal of the study will be to reexamine brain function and reevaluate cognition as well as recharacterize aspects of exercise

behaviors, health, and physical function among participants.

“This is the first time we are able to take a large, randomized clinical trial of aerobic exercise along with the rich data we gained through IGNITE to examine whether physical activity altered the trajectory of accumulated Alzheimer’s disease pathology,” added Erickson, who is also a professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh.

AdventHealth, the University of Pittsburgh, Northeastern University, and the University of Kansas Medical Center will serve as the sites for this NIH-funded research. In addition to Erickson, study investigators include Drs. Jeffery Burns, Eric Vidoni, Chaeryon Kang, Anna Marsland, Dan Forman, Thomas Karikari, Arthur Kramer, Charles Hillman, and Edward McAuley.

—Megan Paquin, AdventHealth



NAD leadership summit hosts Debbie Rivera and John Rengifo address those gathered on November 12, 2023. *Pieter Damsteegt*

Church Leaders Attend “Developing Effective Teams” Inaugural Summit at Division Headquarters

The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD) held the 2023 Leadership Summit at its headquarters in Columbia, Maryland, on November 12. The theme of the daylong event was “Developing Effective Teams.”

Debbie Rivera, associate pastor of the Elliott City Seventh-day Adventist Church in Maryland, and John Rengifo, Ministerial Association director for the Chesapeake Conference, served as cohosts for the summit. In establishing the essence of the event, Rengifo said, “The North American Division has as its mission to reach North America and the world with the Christ-centered, distinctive Seventh-day Adventist message of hope and wholeness, and part of that is . . . growing people’s leadership [skills].” He and Rivera indicated that people from more than 80 nations, spanning practically every continent, registered for the hybrid program.

To extend the reference to the global scope of the summit, Paulo Macena, director for leadership for the NAD, shared that about 200 people attended in person, while about 700 attended virtually. More than 1,500 viewers have since watched the event on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.

Though this year marks the inauguration of the leadership summit at

the division level, at the start of the event Macena gave a brief history of its local beginnings in 2013, when he served as Youth Ministries director for the New Jersey Conference. Said Macena, “Attending a leadership summit is crucial for leaders to learn, network, and gain inspiration. These events provide valuable insights, connections, and motivation to enhance leadership skills and drive positive change.” Macena also highlighted the upcoming NAD Leadership Certification Program, set to launch in 2024.

G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, followed Macena with a presentation entitled “The Right Use of Power in Team Building.” Bryant stressed the cruciality of following Christ’s example, citing Mark 10:42-45: the Lord’s countercultural template for servant-leadership. Bryant articulated the backbone of his presentation: “The leader is to be the greatest servant on the team. . . . The leader doesn’t accumulate power but gives it away.”

Other morning presenters included Barry Black, chaplain of the United States Senate, who discussed “The Importance of Team Building,” and Novella Smith, pastor of the Beacon Light Seventh-day Adventist Church in Annapolis, Maryland, who talked about “Mobilizing Teams for Service—Cultivating a Service-oriented Culture.”

Rivera and Rengifo welcomed the attendees back to the afternoon session after intermission. Moments later Alayne Thorpe, dean of the College of Education and International Services at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, spoke on “Common Causes and Strategies for Resolving Conflict.”

Other afternoon presenters included Mike Speegle, senior pastor of the New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland, who discussed “Building Team Trust,” and Celeste Ryan Blyden, executive secretary of the Columbia Union, who discussed “How Effective Teams Deal With Crisis.”

The content that set the foundation for the summit, described by viewers as “substantive and relevant,” was enhanced by periods of message reflection and small group discussions, which offered an opportunity for networking and fostered a sense of fellowship for those in attendance. The event was also flavored by music woven throughout the program. Additionally, icebreakers kicked off both the morning and afternoon sessions that further promoted connectivity among the attendees.

Prospective attendees can circle November 17, 2024, on their calendars for the next summit.

—John Simon, freelance writer

BY ADAM FENNER

A Call to Digital Discipleship

We live in a digital age. Some studies indicate we check our smartphones up to 144 times a day. When we lose our phones, we are filled with fear, anxiety, and dread; there's a medical term for this called "nomophobia." There's hardly a part of our lives that hasn't been impacted by digital technology. From buying food to paying bills, and from work to entertainment, we are increasingly connected to the Internet. The first thing 89 percent of us in the U.S. do upon waking is check our cell phones.¹ Almost one third of us report being online almost constantly when awake, and most Americans average seven hours a day online.²

People are spending their lives online. To reach them with the gospel, we need to take the good news to them. This means taking digital evangelism seriously, and not just as a church but also as individuals. We are familiar with the command to go unto "all nations" to proclaim Jesus' message of salvation (Matt. 28:19, 20), but most of us forget that the worldwide mission field doesn't have to be a physical location at all.

Ellen G. White wrote, "New methods must be introduced. God's people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living."³ In other words, as the rhythms of our lives change on this planet, we must remain relevant in how we witness.

One of the excuses I often hear for not actively evangelizing is that people don't have a recognizable or traditional evangelistic platform. Not everyone can be a pastor or educator, or hold a local church office. However, as Christians we are *all* called to be Christ's "ambassadors." In fact, we're told in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that Christ makes His "appeal through us."

Each of us has a part to play in the Great Commission, and the best part is that almost everyone has a digital platform we can intentionally use for Christ. Every interaction we have, whether in the physical world or the digital world, gives us all an opportunity to share the gospel far and wide. All we must do is ask the Spirit to guide us and be intentional with our words and actions to be involved in sharing the good news.

There are approximately 375 million people in the North American Division, and if just 10 percent of Adventists in our territory decided to take online evangelism seriously, they would have to reach only 3,750 people each to saturate our entire region with the gospel. In terms of online interaction, 3,750

people is an easily achievable number of souls. God has given us the technological tools to participate in hastening the Second Coming!

Everyone's voice matters. There's someone that needs to hear what you have to say about your experience with the Divine.

By sharing our own unique perspectives and personal brand of creativity, we make our faith relatable to a wider audience and become better stewards of our God-given talents (see Matt. 25:14-30). The benefits and blessings of bringing others to Christ are difficult to explain, but once experienced, they are joyously life-altering.

If we allow the Spirit to speak through us, blessings to others are inevitable! We needn't worry about what to say, because we are also told that when we prayerfully appeal to Christ and the Holy Spirit for guidance, God will give us the words to reach others (see Isa. 51; Matt. 10; and Luke 12).

Being a digital disciple can be as simple as sending a text message to someone who you know could use an encouraging word or spiritual connection; and it can be as deliberate and encompassing as a podcast or a YouTube channel.

Whatever the approach to digital missions might be, with Christ we cannot fail, because He is ultimately the one doing the transforming ministry.

Every interaction we have gives us all an opportunity to share the gospel far and wide.

¹ <https://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction/>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/03/26/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-say-they-are-almost-constantly-online/>; and <https://www.allconnect.com/blog/data-report-how-americans-use-the-internet#:~:text=Key%20findings,minutes%20of%20screen%20time%20daily>.

³ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 70.

Adam Fenner is director of the Adventist Learning Community and NAD vice president for digital media. Use this QR code to learn more about being a digital disciple.



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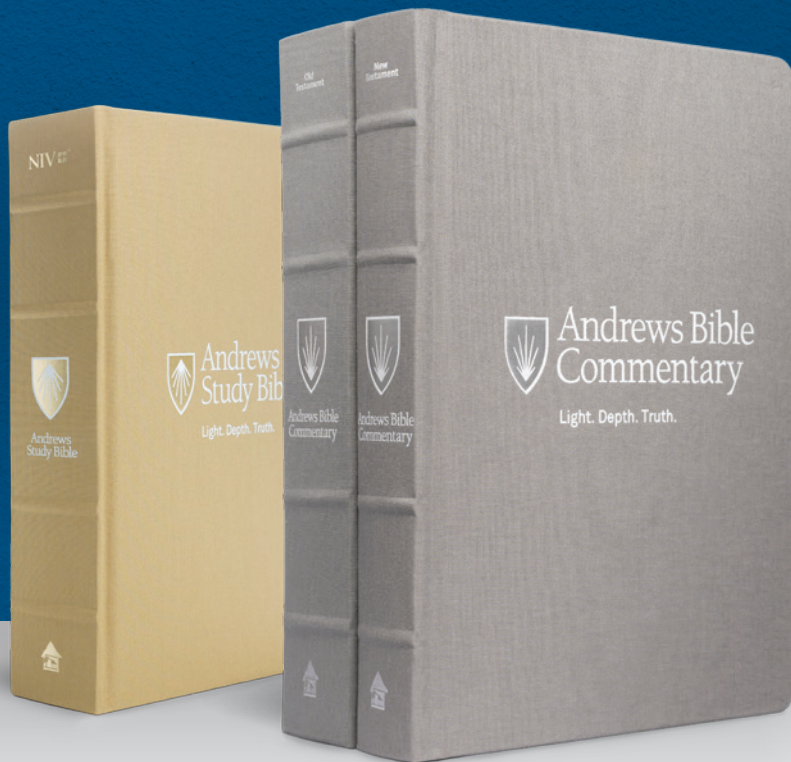


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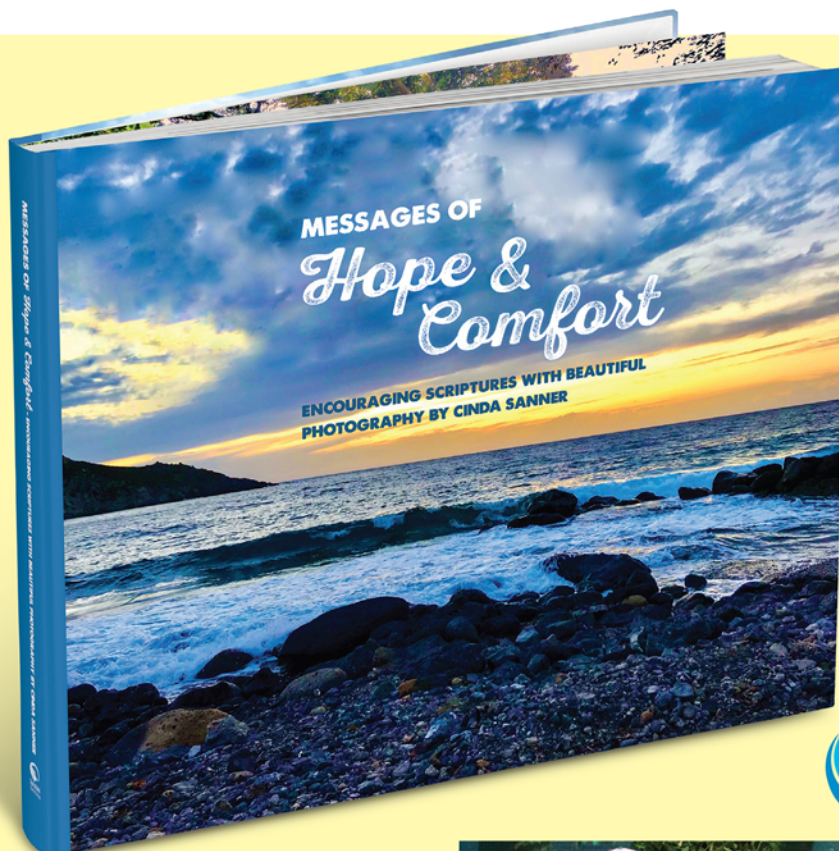
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