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# Adventist Journey

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## My Journey

I want our church to be a missional church, that we are producing missionaries who are walking forward in faith. . . . We need all of us working together. We're all much more successful when we're united, no matter how small we think we are. We all play a role in the success of our mission.

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

**THOMAS LUTTRELL,**  
*licensed marriage and family therapist,  
pastor of the Capital Chinese Seventh-day Adventist Church,  
Silver Spring, Maryland*

*Tom Luttrell*



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 (Justin Kim, editor), which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

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## ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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# “WORKING TOGETHER” THROUGH EDUCATION

Center of Influence to Create a Warm Welcome on Reserve in Alberta, Canada

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA,  
WITH REPORTING FROM LYNN MCDOWELL

In 2002, when Linda Calderbank sought a name for the Adventist Indigenous school relocating to Ponoka, 13 miles from the First Nations Cree reserve in Maskwacis, Alberta, Canada, she reached back to her Cree roots.

Calderbank, the principal who dedicated more than a decade of her career to the children of Maskwacis and would see the new school become the largest Native school in the North American Division (NAD), had witnessed firsthand the community’s ongoing trauma from the Canadian residential school system.<sup>1</sup>

As she pondered the impact that the name of the school’s first permanent property would have, Calderbank realized, “It was important that we as a church make [it] known we’re not a threat, and we need to work together.” She consulted a church member for the Cree term meaning “working together.”

The answer to her query was pitch-perfect: “Mamawi Atosketan.” Thus, the school became Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS).

Twenty years later the Alberta Conference decided to open a center of influence—i.e., a building serving as a worship space and community center—with a familiar name. The Mamawi Atosketan Center (MAC) groundbreaking ceremony, held October 20, 2023, united community leaders and members, MANS principals, teachers, and church leaders from the local to division levels to celebrate this milestone in the Alberta Conference’s Indigenous work.

Chief Randy Ermineskin of the Ermineskin Cree Nation *Trevor Boller*

Left: The original Adventist church school in Samson Cree Nation was a lean-to attached to a United Church.  
 Right: Church and community leaders attend the Oct. 20, 2023, MAC groundbreaking ceremony. *Trevor Boller*



↑ Rendering of MAC by von Maur design

During the ceremony Melissa Cooke, Alberta Conference executive secretary, expressed sentiments common to the visiting church entities. “It is our honor to partner with the Cree Nation. This building represents [our commitment] to reconciliation. We look forward to growing together, learning about each other, and serving our Creator.”

**A Community Place**

A driving force behind MAC is the local church’s need for its own home. Because of flooding, the Maskwacis Seventh-day Adventist congregation has met in the MANS gym since 2016. And given what, for many on reserve, is a 30-minute drive with limited transportation options, many visitors and members rely on the pastor and others for rides to and from church. Miraculously, the conference was able to purchase the only available piece of land in Maskwacis from a community member.

The center’s location will benefit the Native ministry on a broader scale because of Maskwacis’ earned leadership among Indigenous populations. Maskwacis took the world stage when Pope Francis selected its Ermineskin territory for his historic apology on July 25, 2022, to Canadian residential school survivors. However, Maskwacis was already recognized by other Native communities for its advocacy work. For instance, one of the reserve’s most significant contributions was preparing the initial draft, co-authoring, and funding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>2</sup>

**The Mamawi Atosketan Journey: Building Connections Over 40 Years**

The Mamawi Atosketan Center builds upon a solid foundation of trust between the church and community, tracing back to the first Adventist Native school in Alberta. This journey began in 1984, when Ed Dejarlais, a Cree convert who had attended Burman University in Lacombe, Alberta, in the 1960s, successfully lobbied for a school serving reserve children.

In 1990 Calderbank, a Cree Adventist educator, accepted the call to establish a school in Pigeon Lake, 41 miles from Maskwacis. She persevered despite numerous roadblocks, including damaged facilities, community and church opposition, a high staff turnover rate, and personal challenges, later asserting, “I always felt the hand of God.”

For four decades MANS has provided Indigenous children with a quality, Christ-centered education. One of its distinguishing features is a culturally sensitive approach, including the tepee elements in its design and the Ptarmigan Cree Cultural Center, where its nearly 240 students engage in cultural studies and Cree language classes. For a people who once experienced the erasure of their language and culture, these efforts are deeply meaningful. Regular field trips and on-site counseling also contribute to a wholistic education. Finally, per principal Michael Willing, the school encourages students to “talk about spirituality in an unconfined way” and pursue “a relationship with God in a way that makes sense to them.”

The school that started as a lean-to against a church building has come a long way, including extending from K to 9 to include grades 10 to 12, building a new junior and senior high school, and expanding its trades program. Furthermore, MANS has fostered deep, long-lasting relationships between the school and the community that continue to thrive.

MANS’ secret sauce is teachers who go the distance. For instance, Willing, a former tradesman, taught himself welding from YouTube to teach his students. Reflecting on 12 years at MANS, three as principal, he says he soon realized “there was a usefulness to what I was doing in the classroom that wasn’t as [evident in] other schools.” This unique sense of purpose is a motivator for him and other educators.

Another draw: the students. “It’s exciting to see how kids’ lives can be changed by coming to the school . . . and [developing relationships] with teachers, classmates, and others. The people you see in kindergarten are not the same people you get in grade 12,” he said.

The bond between Willing and the school community extends to parents such as Corey and Sabrina Buffalo, who have been involved with the school for 12 years. Sabrina’s older children were the first in the blended family to attend MANS after she removed them from being bullied at public school.

Photos by Trevor Boller



Corey and Sabrina Buffalo,  
MANS parents/community members



Bella Potts attends the  
Maskwacis Seventh-day  
Adventist congregation.



Michael Willing,  
MANS principal

MANS has fostered deep, long-lasting relationships between the school and the community that continue to thrive.

They now have a son in grade 10 and daughters in grades 3 and 5 at MANS.

The Buffalos speak highly of all the MANS staff. “They’re highly involved with us. We could talk to any staff member as if they’re a great family friend. They encourage our children to do better, to be the best they can be,” said Corey.

Willing and the MANS community also supported them when Sabrina’s nephew, Ethan, whom they had raised for six years, was killed in 2017 before his grade 12 graduation. Corey and Sabrina are emotional when speaking of Ethan, whom Corey described as a “beautiful soul.” But they smile remembering his relationship with Willing, a “surrogate father” who took him hunting, helped him get his learner’s permit, and encouraged him to finish high school.

Sabrina highlighted the stark difference between her children’s experiences at MANS and public school as this: “Before, I’d have a hard time. They’d say, ‘No, please don’t send me to school.’ But when I’d wake them up [to go to Mamawi], they’d all get up.”

### Faith in Action: The Maskwacis Seventh-day Adventist Congregation

MANS was many parents’ first contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. At the MAC groundbreaking, one such parent, Chief Vernon Saddleback of Samson Cree Nation, thanked past principal and teacher Gail Wilton and others for “helping to raise [his] son,” Joshua, who attended from grades 5 to 9. Saddleback is now one of MANS’ most ardent supporters.

Tsholofelo Sebetlela, known affectionately as “Pastor Tsholo,” represents a critical link between the church and school. He pastors the Maskwacis Seventh-day Adventist congregation and serves as the MANS chaplain. Tsholo engages with students through class visitations, his “Inspire Mamawi” leadership

program, and playing sports. On Sabbath the Maskwacis congregation hosts programs for visitors of all ages, attracting several students.

Tsholo began volunteering with the Maskwacis congregation in 2014 while studying theology at Burman University. Taking the helm in 2020, he continued the community work initiated by the previous pastor, Peter Ford. Tsholo quickly connected with Indigenous community leaders and expanded Ford’s Summer Youth Team (SYT) outreach program catering to children ages 5 to 15. SYT participants participate in such activities as soccer camps, gardening, and volunteering. Many eventually join the church, with some enrolling at MANS.

Originally from Botswana, Tsholo focuses on the similarities rather than differences between his culture and the Maskwacis community. “I believe we are all related. In Maskwacis they have a term, *wahkohtowin*. That’s kinship. That means we belong together. We are family. When one of us is struggling, we all struggle. [And] it’s important for us to go out of our way to help each other so we are all doing well, as per God’s plan,” he asserted.

Bella Potts, age 19, is one of the Indigenous young people assisting Tsholo with outreach. Although she did not attend MANS, she said, “Growing up, my *kôhkom* [grandmother] was on the same street as the church, and she would always take me. It was a very close community, which I really liked.”

Involved with SYT since age 12, she now organizes SYT soccer camps and Vacation Bible School and assists with the congregation’s children’s program. “I love how willing [Pastor Tsholo and the members] are to help. They motivate me to do more,” she said.

Although transitions in her home life temporarily hindered her church attendance, Potts and her sister Aiyanna were baptized last summer. “After I got baptized, [I] was like, this is my family. This is where I belong,” Potts affirmed.



← Left to Right: Chief Vernon Saddleback, Samson Cree Nation; Chief Randy Ermineskin, Ermineskin Cree Nation; Wayne Williams, Alberta Conference pastor; Tsholo Sebetlela, Maskwacis pastor and MANS chaplain; and Werner Brouwer, Eagle Builders celebrate the groundbreaking of the new MANS center. *Nwamiko Madden*

Potts and her father, Les, are among the members eagerly awaiting the new building. At the MAC groundbreaking Les shared, “I’ve been a member of this church for 20 years. We’ve been waiting for this [building] for as long as that, maybe even longer. And now it’s finally coming up. There will be a sign for people to come, be together, and love one another—just to feel safe, have somewhere to come and pray, and [visit] whenever they need help. It’s finally here.”

### Building Bridges Through Friendship

Another strong community connection is Chief Randy Ermineskin, the recently retired Ermineskin Cree Nation leader. For decades Ermineskin served his community as a pastor, chief, and advocate. He also played a pivotal role as the hosting chief during the pope’s 2022 visit.

Ermineskin and Tsholo met in 2020 when the Adventist pastor began showing up at Ermineskin’s church to help distribute sandwiches. A close friendship and sense of joint mission soon developed. “Tsholo really became part of our community, and we often talk about what we need to do to help each other [make] an impact in the Maskwacis community,” said the chief.

The friends frequently collaborate, with Ermineskin inviting Tsholo to meetings with community leaders and Tsholo inviting Ermineskin to speak to MANS students. Notably, at the 2022 Alberta camp meeting, Ermineskin’s poignant account of his experiences as a residential school survivor kick-started MAC’s fundraiser, “The Community Bridge Campaign.”

Later, as the guest speaker for the 2023 Truth and Reconciliation Day Sabbath at College Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church on the Burman University campus, Ermineskin offered this endorsement: “I believe your church is on the right track.”

### Expanding the Church’s Role in Reconciliation

The abuses of the residential school system run by the Catholic and other churches are well documented as having caused intergenerational trauma. The Mamawi Atosketan Center represents an advancement in the church’s efforts toward reconciliation—defined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” between Indigenous people and “settlers.”

While the response to the pope’s visit was mixed, for Ermineskin “it was an honor and privilege.”

“But also,” he continued, “I haven’t quite gotten over it. Because there’s still a lot of work to be done.”

“They’re rebuilding the culture, and they see us as allies. We can’t make everything better. But we can walk with them,” said Lynn McDowell, Alberta Conference director of planned giving and chair of the MAC steering committee.

As the center will be built on Saddleback’s domain, Alberta Conference officers and steering committee members met with him to determine his community’s needs. Saddleback cited his top priorities as his people’s physical and spiritual health. Then he asked, “When can you start? Can you build tomorrow?”

Near the end of the groundbreaking ceremony, Rick Remmers, NAD assistant to the president, suggested that MAC would be a model for other Indigenous communities in North America. “It’s been wonderful to see the various church entities, community, and tribe come together to create this community center,” he affirmed.

While cautiously hopeful about MAC, Ermineskin concluded that the only way forward is in the spirit of *Mamawi Atosketan*. “If we want to make an impact, let’s do it together. There’s an African proverb. If you want to get far, go alone. But if you want to have success, go it together.”

*To learn more about the Mamawi Atosketan Center, visit [albertaadventist.ca/thebridge](http://albertaadventist.ca/thebridge); or call 587-815-8785.*

<sup>1</sup> National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: University of Manitoba, “Residential School History,” <https://nctr.ca/education/teaching-resources/residential-school-history/>, accessed Feb. 14, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf), accessed Feb. 14, 2024.

*Christelle Agboka is news writer/news producer for the North American Division; Lynn McDowell, Alberta Conference director of planned giving and chair of the Mamawi Atosketan Center steering committee.*

# NAD NEWS BRIEFS



John McVay, Walla Walla University president, announces plans to retire.  
*Walla Walla University*

## WALLA WALLA UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT JOHN MCVAY ANNOUNCES PLANS TO RETIRE

**W**alla Walla University president John McVay announced on January 11, 2024, that he will retire at the end of this academic year, after completing 44 years of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Eighteen of those years were spent at WWU. “To serve Walla Walla University as its president for an extended period of time has been the great honor of my career, which has blessed—and stretched—me in a whole host of ways,” said McVay.

“Successive senior leadership teams have been wonderful, supportive companions along the way. Faculty, staff, and students have offered both superb examples of dedication to the ideals of Seventh-day Adventist higher education and genuine friendship. Pam and I have found fulfillment and joy at WWU,” he continued.

When McVay became the university’s twenty-third president in 2006, his first task was supervising the institution’s name change from

Walla Walla College to Walla Walla University. He led the university’s strategic planning efforts, earning a commendation from accrediting organizations, and instituted a long-range budget planning process that improved the university’s overall Composite Financial Index rating and ensured critical working capital for the unprecedented circumstances introduced by the 2020 pandemic.

Throughout his presidency McVay championed the university’s

commitment to faith and discovery. He established a robust spiritual master planning process, and he added the university's chaplain and Walla Walla University church's senior pastor to the president's cabinet to enhance strategies to nurture faith and discipleship. He supported curriculum improvements in academic departments, enhancements to the student evaluation process, reorganization of the university's general studies program, and the establishment of the university's first doctoral program, the Doctor of Social Work degree.

McVay also guided WWU's Our Commitment to Diversity initiative, and he supported the founding of such academic centers as the Center for Media Ministry, the Center for Health Professions, the Center for Educational Equity and Diversity, and the Donald Blake Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture. He also established the Center for Humanitarian Engagement to integrate learning with a lifestyle of service and to better connect WWU resources and talent with community needs.

In 2012 McVay announced his intention to step away from his role as WWU president to teach for the university's School of Theology. He resumed the presidency just five months later, a term affectionately known as "John 2.0," in January 2013. McVay and N. Clifford Sorenson are the only two WWU presidents to have served two terms, and upon his retirement McVay will have been the longest serving president of Walla Walla University, surpassing George W. Bowers' 17 years (1938-1955).

McVay and his wife, Pam, have partnered to graciously welcome thousands of guests to the campuses of WWU, and are well known for their active roles in public events such as the president's welcome, family weekend, the 2011 North Pacific Union Conference Northwest Adventist Leadership Convention, and the 2018 North American Division's "Is This Thing On?" live event. The couple has two adult children, both WWU alums, and three grandchildren.

"Pam and I look forward to a slower pace of life, allowing for more time with family, expanded 'generosity in service,' and traveling to places old and new. There are significant scholarly projects I look forward to tackling. We sense God's call to this new pilgrimage, into which we will carry passionate loyalty to the people and mission of Walla Walla University," said McVay.

—Walla Walla University Relations

## El Centinela Debuts Evangelistic Bible Guides for Spanish Speakers

**S**ígueme, un llamado a vivir en Jesús (*Follow Me—a call to live in Jesus*) is the latest Spanish resource from Pacific Press and *El Centinela*—and the first set of evangelistic Bible guides from *El Centinela*. It is designed



to guide readers to make a conscious decision for Jesus and commit to following Him.

The 12 carefully crafted lessons in this resource invite participants to delve into the magnificence of God, the centrality of Jesus and His teachings, the importance of prayer, the essence of salvation, the meaning of baptism, and living in God's saving grace. It aims to provide an overall understanding of biblical truths and encourage and foster a personal commitment to making these truths a part of daily life.

A unique feature of *Sígueme* is the inclusion of a QR code that provides the reader access to exclusive commentaries on each lesson by such well-known pastors as Arnaldo Cruz and Roger Hernández.

There are many ways to use these lessons as you work to fulfill the gospel commission: in small groups; in individual study; with Bible study interests; in conjunction with public evangelism; in preparation for evangelistic meetings; in prebaptismal classes.

This latest Spanish resource from Pacific Press continues its commitment to sharing materials and spiritual nurture.

Available at your Adventist Book Center: 1-800-765-6955; and online at [adventist-bookcenter.com/sigueme-un-llamado-a-vivir-en-jesus-edicion-especial-de-el-centinela-spanish.html](http://adventist-bookcenter.com/sigueme-un-llamado-a-vivir-en-jesus-edicion-especial-de-el-centinela-spanish.html).

—Pacific Press Publishing Association



## Southwestern Union Announces Initiatives to Support Southwestern Adventist University Theology and Education Majors

**I**n a bold step toward fostering the next generation of church leaders, the Southwestern Union, under the leadership of president Carlos Craig, and in collaboration with Southwestern Adventist University (SWAU), has announced two groundbreaking initiatives to support students following a call to ministry through the study of theology and education. The strategies provide financial incentives, up to \$15,000 per student, in response to the increasing need to recruit and retain teachers and pastors who choose to serve the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Southwestern Union.

The Southwestern Union established a steering committee led by

John Page, Southwestern Union treasurer, that included Craig, Southwestern Union vice president for church ministries Tony Anobile, Southwestern Union vice president for education Carol Campbell, Texas Conference president Elton DeMoraes, Southwest Region Conference president Carlton Byrd, SWAU president Ana Patterson, AdventHealth CFO (Florida division) Todd Goodman, and First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Tulsa pastor Samson Sembeba. Together the group analyzed employment and retention trends for pastors and teachers and created a proposal to improve collaborative recruiting and financial incentives to better support students who major in the-

← A group of 22 Southwestern Adventist University theology students pose with their professors, members of the university administration, and the Southwestern Union administration. *Southwestern Adventist University*

ology or education at Southwestern Adventist University.

The plan will go into effect during the spring of 2024 and will support theology students through a scholarship program and education graduates through a three-year loan forgiveness incentive.

In addition to providing financial assistance, there are plans in place to begin visiting the Adventist academies in the Southwestern Union territory to inspire future pastors and teachers to listen to God's call in their lives.

SWAU president Ana Patterson shared, "It was a privilege to be a part of the steering committee and witness the commitment of my colleagues to support future pastors and teachers in a tangible way. Our students are eager to pursue their education and live out their faith through a life of service. These initiatives are not only financial support but a vote of confidence from the union and conferences."

"Investing in our students at Southwestern Adventist University is investing in the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," said Craig. "We're honored and blessed to be able to provide financial support and incentives for students who are pursuing careers that will further the gospel in our territory. . . . We are grateful for the work of the steering committee and for the gift from the Rex Callicott estate that, along with funds from the Southwestern Union, has allowed us to pursue these initiatives."

—Coby Federowski, *Southwestern Adventist University*

BY TERRI SAELEE

# Divine Appointments: Hiding in Plain Sight?

**W**hom do you feel called to reach with the love of God? Your cousin? Your neighbor? Your friend at school or work?

According to Ellen G. White, “it is acquaintance that awakens sympathy, and sympathy is the spring of effective ministry.”<sup>1</sup>

This quote reminds us that the better we know someone, the more motivated we are to care about their needs, and the more effective we can be in reaching them with the love of God.

But it also holds a less-obvious insight: It points to the possibility that there are people, or even people groups, God wants us to reach, but we do not yet feel His call to reach them just because we don’t happen to be acquainted with them, their language, their culture, and their needs.

## Sidewalk Conversation

According to the Joshua Project, a research initiative seeking to highlight the people groups of the world with the fewest followers of Christ, 42 percent of the world’s people groups are unreached by the gospel.<sup>2</sup> And many of the refugees and asylum seekers in North America are from these unreached or least-reached people groups.

After sharing this in a small church, I made an appeal for everyone to pray that God would lead them to someone God had brought here from another country to learn more about Him. Everyone stood, including the pastor’s wife.

She stood for the appeal, but in her heart she was having a conversation with God that went something like this: “Lord, You know this is not my thing. You know I’m not good at talking to people I don’t know, much less people from different backgrounds. That’s just not my gift. So if You want me to reach out to someone from another country, You’re going to have to bring them to me.”

To her surprise, not long after that, on her morning walk, she noticed for the first time a woman out in her yard. Remembering her prayer, she greeted the woman. That led to a neighborly conversation. She learned that the woman was from one of the largest,

least-reached countries in the world. Almost without thinking, the pastor’s wife invited her to church.

That Sabbath, when she brought her new friend to church, a member from the same country arrived at church at the same time. They met on the sidewalk and became instant friends! The neighbor is now learning more about God.

## Faith Links and Leaders

We now have a network of nearly 180 refugee church plants among 17 language groups in the North American Division, with church planting consultants who can help you reach refugees and grow faith communities among these refugee language groups in the North American Division.

And if God leads you to a refugee or immigrant from a completely unreached language group, for which we do not have a church planting consultant, and you introduce them to the Savior, perhaps that person will become the faith leader in their community, and churches will be planted and the work will grow, and you will have had the historic privilege of being the otherwise missing link in the chain of events God used to reach that people group.

Would you be willing to pray that prayer? If so, please find a quiet time and place to ask God to lead you to the person, or the group, He wants you to reach with His love. Or pray it now in your heart. Nothing can drown the soul’s desire.

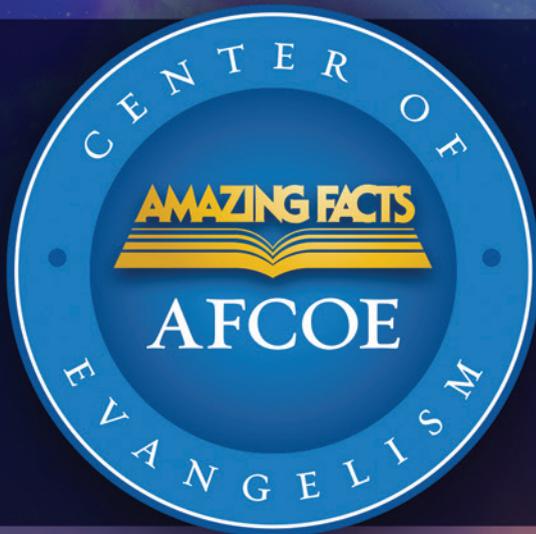
For more information or help reaching a specific language group, or to contact a church planting consultant, visit the website [www.refugeeministries.org](http://www.refugeeministries.org).

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 269. The meaning of the word “sympathy,” at the time this quote was written, would probably be better expressed now by the term “empathy.”

<sup>2</sup> See [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/facts](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/facts).

Find a quiet time and place to ask God to lead you to the person, or the group, He wants you to reach with His love.

*Terri Saelee is coordinator of the Adventist Refugee and Immigrant Ministries in North America.*



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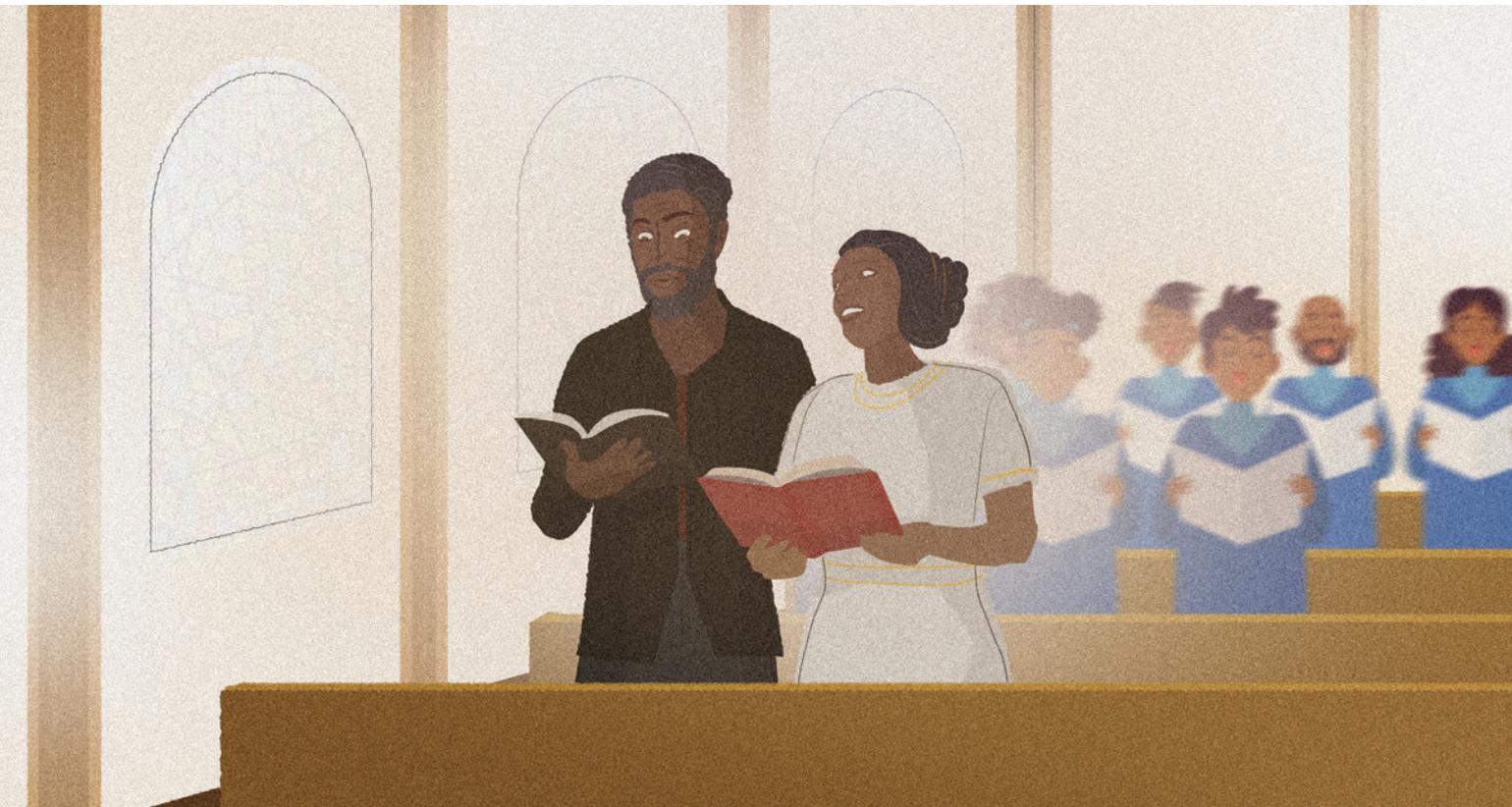
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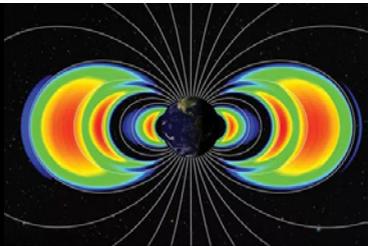
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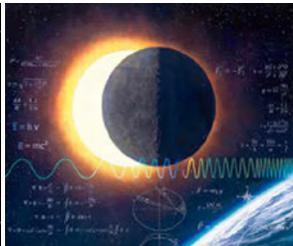


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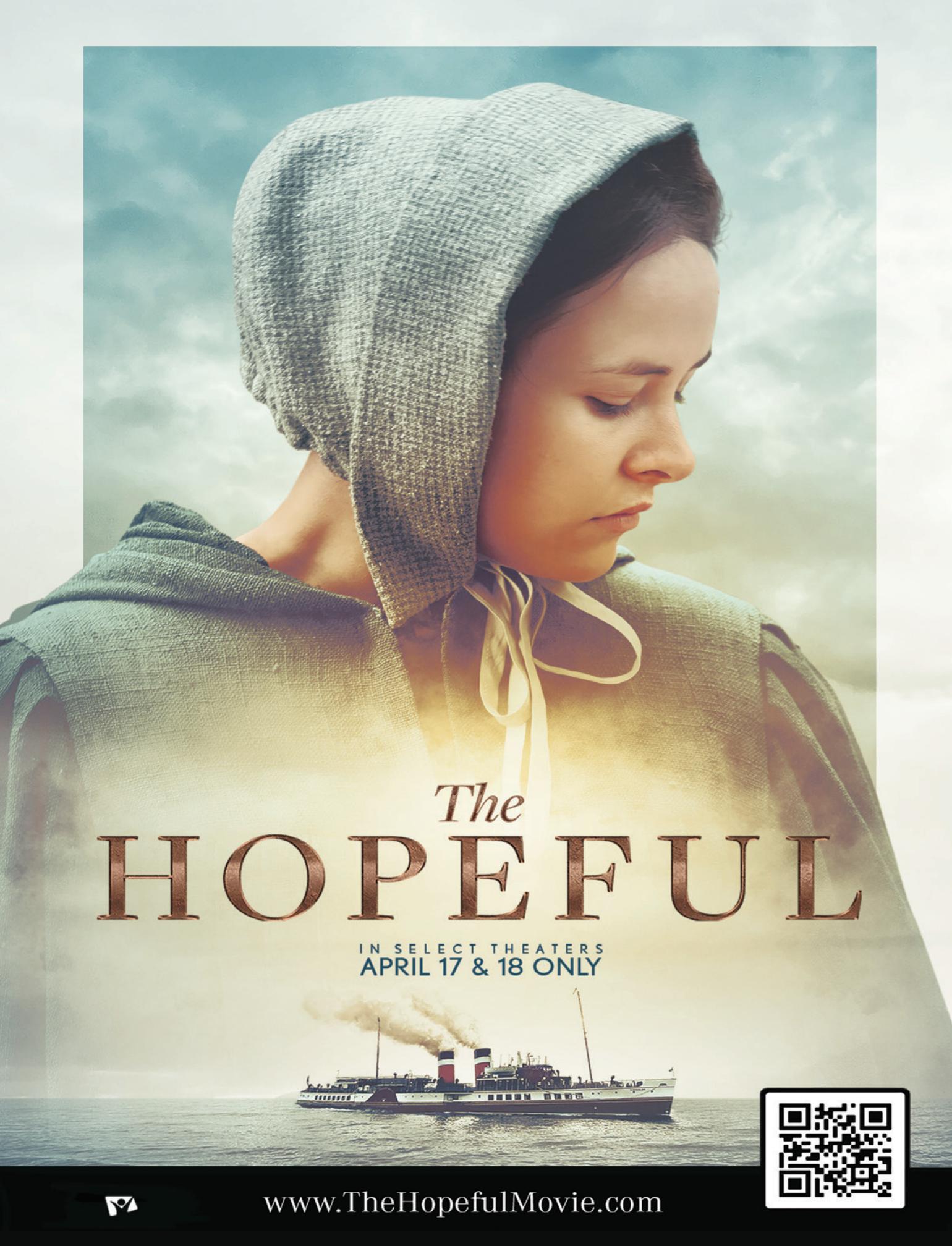
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Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them”; and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.

—Genesis 1:11, 12

**HAPPY #EARTHDAY**

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