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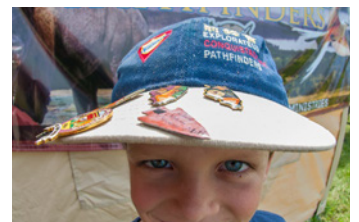
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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

A pivotal moment on my journey occurred when I questioned being an Adventist. I wondered, *Am I trying too hard? Am I not enough? How should I define myself?* My [cousin], who is not an Adventist, told me that I belonged here, in the Adventist Church. That I was like Moses, who needed to be trained outside of his community in order to play a different part in his community.

Visit nadadventist.org/ajnatasharichardson for more of Richardson’s story.

NATASHA RICHARDSON,
*licensed practical nurse, seminary student
at Andrews University*

Natasha Richardson



Cover photo by Dan Weber

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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Providing Encouragement, Assessing Needs, and Fellowshiping Together

NAD Administrators Affirm Work and Assess Needs During Visit to the Guam-Micronesia Mission

BY CHRISTELLE AGBOKA

For some in the traveling group, this was a new experience. Relatively new to their positions, they weren't sure what to expect when they landed on the islands of the Guam-Micronesia Mission territory, as it had been years since such a varied group of leaders from the North American Division (NAD) had visited the far reaches of the division.* But as each person emerged from the airport terminals, they were greeted with flowers, smiles, and heartfelt welcomes. Those serving in this territory were looking forward to the team's visit.

Beginning January 4, 2024, an NAD administrative team visited several islands within the Guam-Micronesia Mission for two weeks. "We wanted to provide encouragement and do an assessment of needs and see how we could better support the work there," said NAD president G. Alexander Bryant.

Oversight of the Guam-Micronesia Mission, an administrative region of the Seventh-day Adventist Church comprised of islands in the western Pacific Ocean, shifted from the Southern Asia-Pacific Division to the NAD in 2011. This shift acknowledged that many of the region's government regulations are U.S.-oriented, and a significant number of individuals employed in the region come from North America. Today the region is home to roughly 5,850 Adventists.



At the Seventh-day Adventist Mission School on Yap, Jorge A. Ramirez, NAD undersecretary, takes a selfie with the students.



Some of the NAD administrative team, while visiting the Guam-Micronesia Mission (GMM) in early 2024, pose with students and faculty. *Jorge A. Ramirez*

NAD leaders visit the region for specific purposes, such as year-end executive committee meetings, school accreditation, or special events. And while it has been close to 10 years since the entire team visited, the division aims to have the leadership visit every five years.

Island Connections

This past January NAD administrators split into three small groups to cover the islands where the Adventist Church has a presence, including Majuro, Ebeye, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap, and Saipan. The groups then converged in Guam and Palau. Matthew Kirk, president of the Guam-Micronesia Mission (GMM), met them in Guam and accompanied them to Palau.

While on their GMM tour, they visited medical and dental clinics, schools, churches, the AWR Guam and JOY FM radio stations, and the mission headquarters in Guam. Much of their time was dedicated to fellowshiping with pastors, principals, teachers, church members, and missionaries, including sharing meals and hearing their stories. Finally, NAD leaders preached at local churches and schools, sharing messages of hope and wholeness.

Calvin Watkins, NAD vice president for evangelism, emphasized their desire “to show [the people of GMM] that no matter how far away they are from mainland America and the church headquarters, they are still part of the North American Division family.”

“It’s easy when you’re on an island, and there’s a limited population, small churches, to feel isolated,” added Rick Remmers, assistant to the president. Thus, NAD leaders wanted to “let [the GMM] know they are not a forgotten part of the world church or the North American Division, and we care about the ministry they’re involved in.”

Visiting NAD administrators included Bryant; Kyoshin Ahn, executive secretary; Judy R. Glass, treasurer and CFO; Remmers; Jorge A. Ramirez, undersecretary; Carolyn Forrest, associate secretary and director of human relations; and vice presidents Adam Fenner (digital media), Watkins, and Ivan Williams, Sr. (strategy and leadership).

Modern-Day Missionaries

NAD leaders shared that they were struck by the beauty of the islands and the warmth of the people, as well as the abject poverty in certain areas. They also found a hotbed of mission activity, particularly in the schools. For example, Guam Adventist Academy is renowned for providing a top-tier Christian curriculum in English and offering students unique extracurricular

How to Help

The Guam-Micronesia Mission urgently needs missionaries. Search postings at hesaidgo.org/en or vividfaith.com. Visit gmmgsda.org/clinics to learn more about the clinics.

Donate via gmmgsda.org/projects, which details specific projects, or AdventistGiving. Per NAD vice president Calvin Watkins: “If you want to see your dollars have a positive effect, give to Guam. You’re not shooting an arrow up in the air. If you shoot an arrow up in Guam, it will hit a need.”

Pray. You might not be called to be a missionary pastor, teacher, or doctor, but you can support those who are with your prayers.

ular activities such as a choir and handbell choir, which performs around Guam at Christmas on demand, and free golf, courtesy of the owner of the golf course across the street.

“I saw our schools being centers of influence,” said Watkins. “I’ve never been to a place where our schools are embraced like they’re embraced there.” Speaking to the primarily non-Adventist student population, he asserted, “[The schools] are the frontrunner of the gospel. Even the public school teachers put their kids in our school.”

Medical clinics also play a critical role in outreach. Saipan has a dental clinic staffed by dentists and dental hygienists. The comprehensive, reputable clinic in Guam offers on-site and mobile medical, dental, and optical services, including visiting smaller islands by boat. Forrest stated, “If you say Seventh-day Adventist, everybody knows the clinic.”

Another standout experience for NAD administrators was attending a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new five-story administrative building on Palau’s elementary campus. The president of Palau, Surangel Whipps, a Seventh-day Adventist who chairs the Palau Mission Academy board, and Palauan dignitaries attended this ceremony. Courtesy of Whipps, the NAD group could tour the capitol, including visiting his office.

Later the team visited the Palau Adventist Academy in the mountains. Whipps also took them to the home where, in 2003, three members of a missionary family were murdered, with the sole survivor being Melissa DePaiva Gibson, then age 10. Her survival story is the subject of the film *Return to Palau*.

Administrators expressed their admiration for GMM’s missionaries, who serve sacrificially. Watkins said, “The spirit of the missionaries renewed my faith in our young people and the importance of sending missionaries. I told them they are modern-day Pauls and Silases.”

Moreover, witnessing the needs of the islands firsthand made them



In January 2024, families gather during the Sabbath worship service for the children’s story at the Happy Family church on Guam. *Jorge A. Ramirez*

NAD leaders shared that they were struck by the beauty of the islands and the warmth of the people, . . . They also found a hotbed of mission activity.

more palpable. NAD administrators spent time in their small groups, then in the larger group, developing a list of needed resources and ways the NAD could assist. These included:

Providing schools with necessary supplies, such as computers, supplies, textbooks, playground equipment, and even riding lawn mowers or bicycles.

Helping to revitalize the student missionary program, which took a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic and negatively impacted school staffing, as the schools are largely staffed by missionaries from NAD territory. Notably, in Yap the scarcity of student missionaries led to the closure of the secondary school program.

Assisting with human resources and funds to renovate or construct church and school buildings, many of which are run-down.

Despite these challenges, Remmers noted, “Whether they have limited or more significant resources, [within the Guam-Micronesia Mission] are committed, trained workers who are serving well and making a difference.”

Bryant concurred. “We were amazed and inspired with what God is doing [there] through the work of dedicated pastors, teachers, and student missionaries. The impact on the communities they serve and the lives they touch is simply incredible.”

“Yet they labor in such challenging circumstances,” he stated, adding, “We must find a way to provide greater assistance to them.”

Upon reflection after the trip, Forrest spoke to the urgency of supporting this mission. “Time is winding down, and the Lord will return sooner than we think,” she said. “There are still so many people who do not know Jesus. And there are thousands and thousands and thousands of them in the Guam territory.”

* Each year the North American Division Adventist Education visiting team for accreditation visits the islands on a rotating basis, spending time with students and faculty at the nine schools in the Guam-Micronesia Mission.

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

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UNIVERSITY STUDENT LEADERS CONTINUE DIALOGUE WITH NAD LEADERSHIP

North American Division leadership meets virtually for first time in 2024 with college/university Adventist students in continuing advisory panel.

BY JOHN SIMON

On January 24, 2024, the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD) conducted a university student leaders advisory. The virtual event was cohosted by G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, Wendy Eberhardt, NAD vice president for ministries (which includes children's, family, disabilities, and many other ministries), and Tracy Wood, NAD youth and young adult ministries director.

Nearly two dozen student leaders joined the multigenerational discussion. They represented several Adventist universities, including Andrews, Southern, Southwestern, Oakwood, La Sierra, and Burman, as well as some Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF) student groups on public universities.

After brief introductions, the group proceeded with the conversation proper. Bryant highlighted the deliberations at the division's recent year-end meeting regarding the administration's desire to encourage young people to fill ministry positions and other vital denominational roles. He indicated that significant shortages currently exist in pastoralship and education.

It was acknowledged that the aforementioned fields are not the most lucrative. Additionally, as college graduates and young professionals consider the prospect of carrying their

Attendees dialogue during the first university student advisory of the year with NAD leadership in January 2024. Screenshot of online meeting



other skill sets, whether executive, technical, creative, or otherwise, into church employment, the reality is that equivalent positions in the public sector will typically tender bigger paychecks.

Bryant invited the student leaders to provide their honest feedback on the extent to which remuneration is a deterrent to them and their peers filling these roles. One of the representatives from the Andrews University Theological Seminary confirmed it is indeed a deterrent, sharing an account of someone who had to go into debt to cover the expenses associated with transitioning from school to filling a pastoral position, such as travel, house hunting, etc. The good news was that the employing conference delivered reimbursement afterward.

Though finance was the main focus of this talking point, another student leader mentioned that there are other barriers to entering ministry. In particular, social stigmas have proved to be a burden on many young pastors. Other worthwhile insights pertaining to this discussion included the need to support international students as they wrestle with the documentation red tape so they can stay in the U.S. and work for the church long-term, as well as the benefits of creating more short-term (two to six months, give or take) internship opportunities.

Employment Opportunities

One of the student leaders initially broached the internship topic, expressing concerns over the present limitations of options, especially at the conference and union levels. She shared her positive experience with an opportunity she found and filled in the Adventist health system while reiterating the need to augment the availability of options across the range of professions throughout denominational employment (social work was raised as a prime example by multiple student leaders).

The NAD directors were especially receptive to the potential for establishing more short-term internships. Bryant stated his intention to share the idea with the proper committee to get the wheels in motion from concept to reality. Eberhardt conveyed her passion for internships and underlined the open avenues through summer camps and at the division level.

As the remuneration segment drew to a close, a common sentiment was that there is room for improvement in creating awareness of opportunities in ministry and denominational employment. One student leader said, "I think students like me and others are very willing to get more involved with the church, but . . . there needs to be some structure and just information in your face. . . . If it's in your face, students will tap in."

The other primary talking point was digital discipleship: how many student leaders are currently involved

and the value of offering training. Bryant admitted the church can be more active in leveraging social media and other technological advances to spread the gospel. Many of the student leaders detailed how they're using various digital tools to connect with those within their spheres of influence and make a spiritual impact.

One of the student leaders posited an important caveat: "If we don't have the people at the personal level to connect [discipleship through social media], you can go through social media and never see the intended [information]. . . . I love digital discipleship, but if we don't have intentionality behind it . . . people connecting people to this, people are going to scroll by."

We Need You

Toward the end of the meeting, Wood conducted a chat-based survey on church attendance preferences. Many students appreciate the advantages of online services and their more extensive reach. Nevertheless, it is clear that direct fellowship remains an indispensable component of the Christian experience.

In closing, Bryant thanked the student leaders for their energy and passion and emphatically exclaimed how much they mean to the fabric of the church: "We need you! We need you! We need you!" Eberhardt also thanked them for sacrificing some of their valuable time and being transparent in articulating their perspectives.

The university student leaders advisory was established to build bridges between undergraduates and graduates and the seasoned veterans in Adventist Church administration throughout the North American Division. Executives and directors have become increasingly dedicated to entrusting young people with the "microphone" so they can candidly express their concerns, which then initiates a joint effort to find solutions and move the church and its mission forward.

Meetings have been conducted periodically since the advisory's inception in 2022, and numerous topics and issues have been addressed, including membership statistics, tithe, and church governance. The January 24 meeting continued the trend of being marked by healthy, productive dialogue. There was as much listening as there was talking. The division leaders did well in effectively fostering an environment of open ears and open minds. The next meeting is set for early spring, and student leaders will be notified when the specific date is determined.

Though the participants occupy different age ranges and life stages, they share a mutual goal: partnering together to fulfill the Adventist Church's mission—and prepare as many people as possible for the soon return of Jesus Christ.

John Simon writes from Michigan.

NAD NEWS BRIEFS



La Sierra University Assistant Professor First Adventist to Win Prestigious Hispanic Theological Initiative Prize for Recent Book

For Marlene Ferreras, assistant professor of practical theology at La Sierra University, the goal of her research trip to Yucatán, Mexico, in November 2016 was straightforward—to collect data utilizing scientific research methods to shed light on the struggles of female Mayan workers at multinational maquila manufacturing plants. But through a three-month immersion into the daily life of a welcoming village family and numerous conversations with the community’s mexicana assembly line seamstresses, the scope of her analysis deepened to ultimately offer a reshaping of the paradigm of how pastoral care can support marginalized peoples who are suffering.

The eye-opening and often disturbing stories of the 11 working-class mexicanas Ferreras interviewed and their resistance through maternal and matriarchal identities in the face of exploitation, injury, and abuse begged to be told to a broader audience. When Ferreras discovered the factory seamstresses’ remote community through a series of open and closed doors, she found that many of these women wanted their voices to be heard. In interviews held

over three months, they described their subjugation to the maquila’s rules and demands for irrational quota-based production speeds, long hours, little pay, constant surveillance, abuses and numerous injuries, and the weakening of communal life in their 456-member hometown.

Her research journey morphed into a book, which then served as her dissertation for a doctorate in practical theology earned from the Claremont School of Theology in 2019. A native of Redlands, California, she wove into the book her identity and experiences as the American-born eldest daughter of a struggling single mother whose family arrived as refugees from Cuba during the early 1970s. Her mother’s sisters all worked for multinational corporations following the suicide of their father, Ferreras’ grandfather, three months after arriving in the U.S.

In October 2022 Lexington Books published her work titled *Insurrectionist Wisdoms: Toward a North American Indigenized Pastoral Theology*. On November 18, 2023, the book won the Hispanic Theological Initiative Prize during the

← Marlene Ferreras, practical theology assistant professor in La Sierra University’s H.M.S. Richards Divinity School, poses in front of La Sierra Hall with her book *Insurrectionist Wisdoms: Toward a North American Indigenized Pastoral Theology*. La Sierra University

annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature. The prize includes a monetary award and an invitation to lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary in June 2024. Ferreras, who is a 2003 alumna of La Sierra University and an assistant professor in its H.M.S. Richards Divinity School, is the first Seventh-day Adventist scholar to win the prestigious recognition. The prize has been offered by the Hispanic Theological Initiative since 2002. The organization supports the development and promotion of Latino and Hispanic religion scholars and leaders.

“I wrote the book to equip pastoral theologians with more adequate forms of care that are informed by working-class Latinx women’s experiences,” said Ferreras. “Some pastoral theologians tend to increase the power dynamic by making the pastoral caregiver the agent of hope. What I’m attempting to do in my book is to say [that] the divinity of spiritual care is relational. I want to equip the next generation of caregivers and pastors to journey with people through their suffering and find the surprising ways God lives among and between us.”

—Darla Martin Tucker,
La Sierra University

Correction: On page 8 of the March 2024 *Adventist Journey*, the correct new title for both Rohann Wellington and Brent Hardinge is assistant to the vice president for digital media.

Christian Record Services for the Blind Marks 125 Years of Transformative Service

In the heart of compassion and dedication, Christian Record Services (CRS) stands tall as it celebrates a milestone—125 years of unwavering commitment to serving individuals worldwide who are blind and visually impaired. Since its inception in 1899, CRS has been a beacon of hope, breaking down barriers and providing life-changing services to individuals facing vision challenges.

Founded on the principles of love and Christian values, CRS strives to meet the changing needs of its members. For more than a century the organization has been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at empowering individuals who are blind or visually impaired, fostering inclusivity and enabling independence.

The 125th anniversary is not just a celebration of longevity; it is also a testament to the enduring impact CRS has had and continues to have on the lives of countless individuals.

“The organization’s founder, Austin O. Wilson,* dreamed of more Christian braille resources for people like him to learn more about God’s love for them. Reach-

ing this monumental milestone demonstrates how his vision was fulfilled with the expanding services and programs offered through the years. We look forward to continued growth and meaningful service,” stated Diane Thurber, president.

As CRS commemorates 125 years of service, it stands as a shining example of love, resilience, and the transformative power of dedicated service as it continues to illuminate the path toward a more inclusive, accessible world for the blind and visually impaired community.

* In 1899 Austin O. Wilson, a legally blind young man in his early 20s, was concerned about the lack of Christian reading material available for the blind. Taking a clothes wringer, he modified it to accommodate two metal plates with a sheet of heavy paper between them. As the plates were squeezed through the wringer, the raised dots on the plates made an impression on the paper, producing one page of a braille magazine he entitled the *Christian Record*. More than 100 years later the *Christian Record* is still being published, along with eight other periodicals.

—Christian Record Services, Inc.



← Photo of Austin O. Wilson, Christian Record Services founder. *Christian Record Services*

WASHINGTON ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY MARKS 120 YEARS OF SERVICE, EMBARKS ON A YEARLONG CELEBRATION

Washington Adventist University (WAU)* is celebrating 120 years of dedicated service to education, faith, and community. Founded in 1904 in Takoma Park, Maryland, WAU has been a beacon of higher learning and spiritual growth. To kick off this yearlong celebration, WAU president Weymouth Spence initiated a special daily prayer initiative this past January 11, at 1:20 p.m. ET, uniting the WAU community in faith and reflection.

The university’s rich history is steeped in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, rooted in the values of compassion, service, and academic excellence. For

120 years WAU has been a place for countless students, faculty, and staff who have come together to pursue knowledge, spirituality, and personal growth.

To mark the occasion, a series of events and activities have been planned throughout 2024, allowing the WAU community to come together and celebrate the university’s legacy of service, leadership, and faith. These events include an open convocation (held on January 11, 2024), prayer initiative, alumni celebration, and more.

* Washington Adventist University was formerly named Columbia Union College (1961 to 2009), Washington Missionary College (1914 to 1961), Washington Foreign Mission Seminary (1907 to 1914), and Washington Training College (1904 to 1907).

—Washington Adventist University

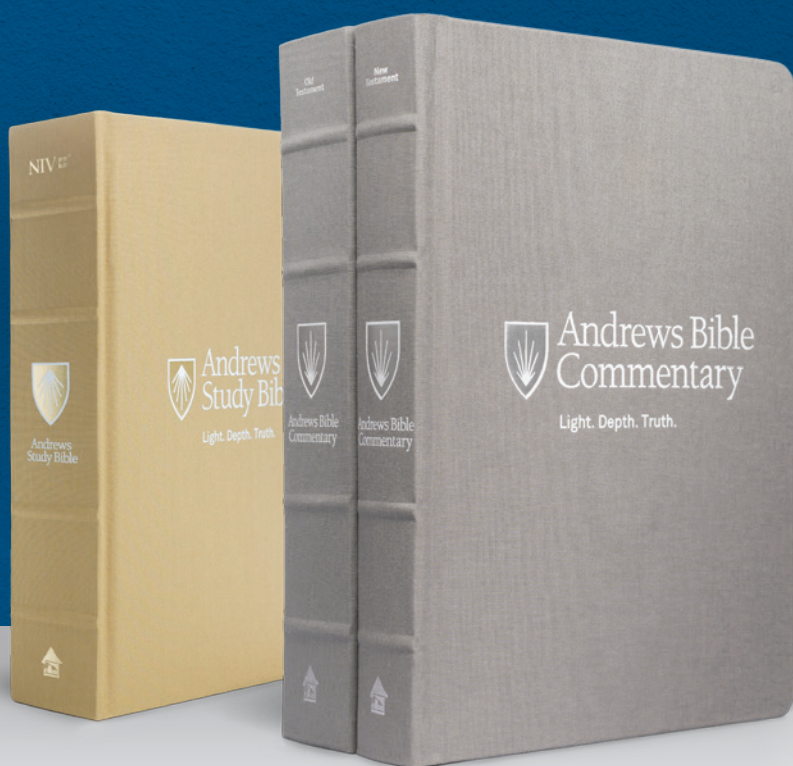


↑ During the celebratory convocation on January 11, 2024, Washington Adventist University provost, Cheryl Kisunzu, speaks about the significance of this yearlong celebration as the university celebrates 120 years. *Washington Adventist University.*



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BY W. DERRICK LEA

When We Answer the Call to Help “the Least of These”

I was recently in conversation with a friend who spoke about how blessed I was to be able to help people and communities all around the world. I responded that I was simply trying to adhere to Jesus’ command to help the least of these. As we continued the conversation, my description of help was something my friend neither could relate to nor felt he could achieve. Though a believer, my friend felt that he had only enough energy, time, and resources to get through each day, keeping his children in school and ensuring that his young family had all their needs met. Later, upon reflection, I realized how condescending my response may have come across given the vantage point and life experiences from which my comment had been generated.

The conversation got me to thinking: Who are the least of these? And who is called to serve; and what does that service look like when perhaps there are other life situations that make it challenging to help?

Adventist Community Services is in neighborhoods all across the United States, Canada, Bermuda, Guam, and the Micronesian islands. ACS serves as a humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We’re doing wonderful work in each of these areas; however, sometimes we get pigeonholed in how we help. This was why my friend felt he couldn’t respond to the command of helping the least. He feels he’s barely able to help himself.

In addition, we have traditionally not provided many entry points through which the majority can insert themselves. For example, our food pantries are typically open when people work during the week. So we’re asking people not only to help but also to miss work or school, and maybe even give up a part of their income while helping within their community.

There are many varied circumstances that people are dealing with, but again, aren’t we all commanded to help the least of these? I ask the question again: What should helping the least of these look like? And can our church serve as a conduit for understanding what help looks like and how everyone can be involved?

These are questions we are asking within Adventist Community Services. While our traditional avenues for providing help will continue—operating food pantries, providing clothing to those who need it, and running community gardens, to name a few—we are also looking to expand the ways we define help, as well as the type of help we provide in the communities we serve.

Some of the new initiatives we’re exploring include ways we can tackle the health and nutritional challenges many of our communities are facing. Some have expressed concerns of being taken advantage of by businesses and organizations in their community, which has led us to offering legal clinics that provide free advice from lawyers. And we’re also helping the unhoused find consistent lodging by purchasing and renovating vacant homes, creating tiny home communities, and using our church parking lots to provide safe places for single parents and their children to park and sleep until more permanent shelter can be obtained.

This new direction might prove to be a challenging pivot point for many, but it is my prayer that the excitement will be contagious. ACS will continue looking for ways to engage with our communities, and our desire is to have our members join us in this effort.

I encourage you to connect with your local Adventist Community Services director at your church or local conference. Discuss with them your thoughts about how we might address the challenges you see. It’s through these types of discussions that we’ll be better able to truly help the least of these!

W. Derrick Lea is the director of Adventist Community Services for the North American Division; read the rest of the story by visiting nadadventist.org/news/when-we-answer-call-help-least-these.

What should helping the least of these look like?

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