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## Adventist Journey

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### My Journey

Christianity is founded on love, and Christianity gives us a reason to be forgiving, compassionate, and understanding. It's really healing to be able to not keep the hurt and say, *I'm not going to fight your anger with my own. I'm going to just breathe and pray and accept that God loves you and He loves me, and so I love you, even if you don't love me.*

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

**HEIDI BURKE,**  
college student in  
Collegedale, Tennessee



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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# An Adventist Church in Louisiana Sets a Template for Participation in Pentecost 2025 Initiative

BY JOHN SIMON

As the calendar turned the page from 2024 to 2025, the light has effectively turned green for Pentecost 2025, a comprehensive, all-hands-on-deck revival and evangelism initiative of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (NAD).

G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president, has emphasized the objective and mission of this initiative: “At its core, Pentecost 2025 is an acknowledgment of our need for the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. It is a commitment to pray earnestly for the outpouring of this latter rain . . . to engage in the compassionate ministry of Jesus through community activities; . . . to harvest the interests of those who are open to knowing Jesus; to proclaim the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ; . . . to engage in discipling new members. And finally, to start the cycle all over again.”

One of the tangible goals of Pentecost 2025 is to collectively conduct at least 3,000 proclamation initiatives across the division within the year. A firstfruit of this goal was scheduled for March 9-29 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Winston Taylor, pastor of the Cedar Grove Seventh-day Adventist Church, with a core team of

about 15 members, has already established significant connections with the community through multiple outreach efforts. On March 9, for example, the church hosted a health and job fair and fun day in the community that kicked off their “Let’s Grow Together Following Jesus” evangelistic series. And on that first night those gathered celebrated a baptism!

## Busy Believers

Taylor initially gained awareness of Pentecost 2025 from his conference president, Carlton Byrd (Southwest Region). Taylor says Byrd’s coaching and counsel have been of inestimable value.

Cedar Grove began planning for the March meetings in October 2024, understanding the need for active groundwork and soil cultivation in order to experience a rich harvest. One of the church’s acts of service was a Christmas party in December. A local benefactor partnered with the team to effect a toy distribution for children who would have otherwise experienced a scant holiday season.

More than 400 people attended the party, and more than 100 expressed interest in Bible studies, including

In March 2025, on the opening night of the Cedar Grove church’s Pentecost 2025 evangelistic campaign, “Let’s Grow Together Following Jesus,” a community member becomes church family as she is baptized by Pastor Winston Taylor. Photo used from the Cedar Grove Seventh-day Adventist Church Facebook page

Florinda Clark. She and Taylor have been steadily progressing through the *Message* magazine Bible Study course.

Taylor shared that another service event occurred on Sunday, January 19. Cedar Grove hosted a community baby shower. Guest speakers included specialized professionals from such fields as pediatric health and childhood education. With assistance from individual supporters, the nearby Walmart, and seed funds provided by the NAD for Pentecost 2025, the team was able to share with those in need a hearty supply of items necessary for parenthood preparation, such as baby beds, car seats, diapers, etc.

The impact of this outreach is reflected in Cedar Grove’s Facebook page being flooded with positive,



Florinda Clark earnestly studies the Word. She became acquainted with the Cedar Grove church through the 2024 Christmas party service act. Photo provided by Winston Taylor

↑ On Sunday, January 19, 2025, the Cedar Grove Adventist Church hosted a community baby shower, with diapers and other supplies available to those in attendance. The event also featured professionals from such fields as pediatric health and childhood education serving as guest speakers.

Photo used from the Cedar Grove Seventh-day Adventist Church Facebook page

appreciative feedback, including this comment from Nakia Gee: “Thanks to Cedar Grove church at such a hard time for me right now. They have [become] a blessing to me and my kids. I have to smile to keep from crying almost every day.”

Taylor also highlighted the Praying in the Power of the Spirit project. The Cedar Grove team has been going to the hospital each Tuesday, standing outside to offer prayer support to people as they enter or exit. Taylor and his members gather the prayer requests, mostly health-related (contextually expected), as well as contact information to forge deeper relationships and follow up on how God is intervening in their lives. Dozens of people have expressed interest in Bible studies and spiritual matters through this project.

A foundational component to Cedar Grove’s evangelistic efforts is the extensive use of a felt needs survey. Their aim is to circulate about 5,000 surveys through the aforementioned and forthcoming events, as well as other means of contact. Shenika Bell, the church’s Bible worker, is fervently following up on the responses.

## “Just Do Something”

There may be churches—members and leaders—throughout the division that desire to participate in Pentecost 2025 yet are battling various hesitations. For his North American brothers and sisters Taylor has simple yet profound advice: “Just do something, and as you do something, something turns into something more and something more and something more. Allow the Spirit to lead you to creativity.”

Please visit the Pentecost 2025 website at [www.pentecost2025.com](http://www.pentecost2025.com) for more information and helpful resources, as well as the NAD Pentecost news page at <https://ow.ly/AGI350VfNa5> to keep pace with the initiative as pertinent efforts and events unfold.

John Simon writes from Michigan.



# “RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS A REFLECTION OF OUR COMMITMENT TO DIGNITY AND JUSTICE,”

Says Key Speaker Gwendolyn Boyd at the 2025 North American Division Annual Prayer Breakfast

During her special remarks at the 2025 National Prayer Breakfast on January 22, Reverend Gwendolyn Boyd, minister from the Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Fort Washington, Maryland, emphasizes that religious freedom is ultimately about belonging.



On January 22, 2025, about 80 people from diverse faith traditions gathered for the sixth Religious Freedom Prayer Breakfast hosted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (NAD) and organized by its Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) Department. The event recognized January 16 as National Religious Freedom Day in the U.S., and included prayer for religious freedom, elected officials, the community, the nation, peace, and for unity of spirit.

Representatives of several religious groups enjoyed a catered breakfast and prayed on these topics, including participants from Adventist, Sikh, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Lutheran, and nondenominational Christian faith traditions. Several NAD leaders and local church leaders participated through prayer and music. Representatives from Maryland state and local county governments, as well as Washington Adventist University students, including PARL interns, also took part.

After Orlan Johnson, NAD PARL director, welcomed attendees to the event, Audrey Andersson offered the first scheduled prayer, invoking God in a prayer for religious freedom. Prayer for the community was offered next by Gregory Yancey, chief of staff, Maryland Governors’ Office of Community Initiatives. A musical selection from the Foster Triplets followed, who shared their talent through song twice during the event.

Richard “Chappy” Bower, chief chaplain, Maryland Fire Chiefs Association, blessed the food, followed by Denny Rengifo, chaplain, Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center, praying for the nation; Naunihal “Nick” Singh Gumer, director, Regulatory Finance Office of the People’s Council, praying for peace.

Special remarks for the event were given by Reverend Gwendolyn Boyd, minister from the Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Fort Washington, Maryland.

## Safeguarding Religious Freedom

Boyd emphasized the importance of religious freedom through sharing her personal experiences as an engineer and highlighting the need for respect and unity across faiths. Boyd called for education, speaking out against injustice, and interfaith dialogue to safeguard religious freedom.

In her career as an engineer working on nuclear submarines, Boyd recalled her experience as one of the few civilians and often the only woman in such settings. One day a young sailor questioned her presence. “Excuse me, ma’am. Are you lost?” he asked.

Her response was firm: “It took four clearances just to get on this base, three clearances to get on this submarine, and two more for my specialty. Do you really think I don’t belong here?”

Using this story as a metaphor, Boyd emphasized that religious freedom is ultimately about belonging. “Whatever

All photos by Art Brondo

religion you represent, wherever you are, we all belong,” she said. “Religious freedom is not just words on paper—it is a living, breathing right that allows us to worship, reflect, and practice our faith without fear.”

She urged the audience to take three practical steps to safeguard religious freedom:

**Educate ourselves and others.** “Ignorance is the breeding ground of intolerance,” she said, emphasizing the importance of learning about different faiths.

**Speak out against injustice.** Quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., she reminded the audience, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

**Build bridges through interfaith dialogue.** “When we come together, not to debate, but to listen, we discover that we are more alike than different,” she added.

Boyd concluded with a call to action, urging everyone not just to defend their own beliefs but to protect the rights of others as well. “Be the kind of person who doesn’t just tolerate difference, but celebrates it,” she said. “Religious freedom is more than a right—it’s a reflection of our commitment to dignity and justice.”

The prayer breakfast continued with Eric Randolph, pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, praying for elected officials; and G. Alexander Bryant, president, North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, offering the final prayer of the morning through asking God for unity of spirit.

Andersson expressed her appreciation for being invited to participate in the event, saying, “It was a real delight, and it was so interesting to meet people.”

Guest Abigail Moats described the event as “phenomenal, uplifting, and encouraging.”

## Prayer Highlights

“We thank You, God, for our nation—a nation that stands for religious freedom, where men and women are free to worship according to their conscience, without fear of persecution. We are grateful for this land of opportunity. We lift it up to Your throne of grace, O God of heaven,” said Rengifo in his prayer for the nation. “God bless our leaders with strength, wisdom, and discernment. . . . May Your light guide our hearts, and may Your presence be felt throughout this land,” he concluded.

Randolph prayed for elected officials, saying, “Thank You for the privilege of democracy that offers the chance to serve our communities and nation in humility. Randolph also asked for God to bestow wisdom to “recognize the ways of justice and the courage to stand firm in integrity,” continuing to ask for officials’ hearts to be filled with compassion, “guided by Your wisdom and grace, so they may always recognize the humanity in every person. . . . May the work of each person bear fruit. May their spirits be revitalized and their commitment be unwavering for betterment of all humanity.”

“In this room there’s the power to change the world, if we can come together in oneness of spirit,” said Bryant in his prayer for unity of spirit. “Let us be unified in purpose, and let this change start with me. May our faith in You see ourselves as one humanity. May our faith in You help us to see past the artificial distinctions of language and color, ethnicity, culture, and religion. May our faith in You see in every human being the heartbeat of God.”

Bryant continued, “May our faith in You compel our voices to speak peace and unity from our churches, our synagogues, our mosques, and from all our places of religious gatherings. But may we not only speak in our places of worship; let our voices be heard in our communities.”

At end of the breakfast, Johnson thanked his team, including the students from WAU, and special guests. He added, “Last but not least, I would like to thank all of you for the work that you do. The idea that this is easy work is a fallacy. As people of faith, we want to make sure that we’re doing what God has asked for us to do. As we leave here today, my only question and my only prayer is: Are [we] willing to change, are we willing to be advocates? Or are [we] simply just choosing to be?”

—Kimberly Luste Maran is editor of Adventist Journey and communication director for the North American Division.



On January 22, 2025, tables of community leaders, church leaders, and government officials enjoy meals, conversation, and prayer at the annual prayer breakfast hosted by the NAD Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department.



Prayer breakfast attendees engage in conversation at the North American Division Prayer Breakfast on January 22, 2025.



# NAD NEWS BRIEFS



## Adventist Information Ministry Changes Name to Adventist Connect, Reflecting Expansion Into Digital Evangelism

On January 30, 2025, the Adventist Information Ministry board voted to rename the organization Adventist Connect, reflecting its expansion from an evangelism contact center for media ministries into a hub supporting local churches across North America in digital outreach. This change will be implemented in stages over the coming months.

“The name Adventist Connect encapsulates our vision: to help churches, schools, and ministries build community relationships, establish a strong online presence, and thrive in digital ministry. Our core mission remains unchanged—to be a bridge between seekers and the Adventist faith. This new identity allows us to streamline our services, modernize our approach, and extend our impact in meaningful ways,” said Brent Hardinge, director of Adventist Connect.

This name change will usher in three pillars of ministry:

**Frame Website Platform:** A next-generation website platform designed to offer churches, schools, and ministries a modern, flexible, and integrated digital presence. Completely rebuilt on WordPress, Frame will replace Adventist Church Connect and Adventist School Connect with a more intuitive, user-friendly, customizable experience, including better integration with ministry tools and a mobile-first design.

**Thrive Interest Management System:** Launching later this year, Thrive will help pastors and volunteers manage and track interests. Specifically, it will enable personalized follow-ups and customized discipleship for any individual. Thrive is scheduled to launch by mid-2025.

**Engage Connection Center:** Formerly known as the AIM Contact

← Adventist Connect, formerly Adventist Information Ministry, will provide the same ministry support plus more as it grows in the digital space. *Stock photo provided by Adventist Connect*

Center, the Engage Connection Center will be the foundation of Adventist Connect’s efforts: connecting individuals to a church or ministry. The center will serve as the first touchpoint, connecting with the public through multiple channels, including phone, social media, SMS, and email.

All churches and schools presently using Adventist Church Connect and Adventist School Connect will have their websites migrated to Frame, starting late spring 2025.

“Administrators will have the opportunity to review their site’s content, make updates, or start fresh before going live,” affirmed Anthony White, associate director for web platforms and operations. He added that Adventist Connect would provide enhanced training resources, a dedicated support team, and a solid knowledge base to assist users in this transition.

“We are so thankful to God for the new direction of ‘the former AIM’ with a laserlike focus on the digital space,” affirmed NAD president G. Alexander Bryant. “Adventist Connect is an outgrowth of this ministry’s strategic intentionality in leveraging digital assets in the mission of the church. I praise God for our leadership team that has brought us to this point.”

For more information on these upcoming changes, visit <https://www.adventistinfo.org/adventist-connect/>.

—Christelle Agboka, NAD Office of Communication

## Walla Walla University Short Film “Color of Threads” Wins International Award

Color of Threads,” a film produced by Walla Walla University’s Center for Media Ministry (CMM), continues to make waves after its strong start in the independent film circuit. Written by WWU alumna Josie Henderson, the story follows five women who move to the Pendleton Valley in 1909 in an effort to rebuild their lives.

London Director Awards, a film festival based in London, England, named Richard L. Ramsay, the director of “Color of Threads,” the best U.S.A. director of 2025. The short film also won the title of Best Western 2025 at the Los Angeles Short Film Awards.

Ramsay offered valuable support not only to the film’s production but also to the students on set. Fifteen students of the WWU film program had the opportunity to assist with filming in the Walla Walla area during the summer of 2023, working alongside Ramsay to learn from his professional experience and gain industry knowledge.

Six months after its initial showing, the film won its first two awards at the Wild West Film Festival in Vacaville, California. “Color of Threads” has won four awards and has been shown at 11 film festivals, including two international film festivals in Europe.

“We’re incredibly proud of this film and the work Walla Walla University has done,” said Julio C. Muñoz, executive director of Sonscreen Films. Sonscreen provid-



Richard L. Ramsay, director of the award-winning film “Color of Threads,” mentors a Walla Walla University student on set. *Walla Walla University*

ed major funding for the production, and Muñoz served as an executive producer.

As the film’s recognition continues to grow, the CMM offers “Color of Threads” to be shown at schools or churches. Groups can request screenings of the film for their classrooms or events, and Matt Webster, producer, and director of studio operations for the CMM, is available to lead discussions on filmmaking, storytelling, and the themes of the film. There is a screening fee to cover the cost of travel.

To request a screening, please visit [www.colorofthreads.com](http://www.colorofthreads.com).

—Stacy Wisener, Walla Walla University student writer; NAD Office of Communication

## North American Division Ministries Unite to Provide Training Experience for Sabbath School Leaders

On February 7-8, 2025, more than 900 Sabbath School teachers, ministry leaders, and Bible students gathered to livestream the North American Division Do It Together Sabbath School Conference. The event aimed to discuss new and innovative ways to connect to the Sabbath School lesson while engaging students of every age.

Leading the event were Sherri Uhrig and Gerry Lopez from NAD Children’s Ministries, Armando

Miranda, Jr., and Vandeon D. Griffin from NAD Youth Ministries, Franklin Dorsey from NAD Sabbath School/Personal Ministries, Tracy Wood from NAD Young Adult Ministries, and Bill Payne, who was introduced as the new NAD Adult Ministries director.

Friday kicked off with visitors from the United States and Canada—and a few from India and Dubai—exchanging greetings in the bustling community chat that remained lively during the lives-

team. The event leaders initiated the discussion by posing such questions as “What challenges do you encounter while teaching

— continued —





— continued —

Sabbath School, and how do you tackle them to foster a positive and effective learning environment?”

Responses in the chat ranged from advice to testimony, sharing personal experiences as teachers and students discussed persons and experiences that influenced them the most. The conversation sparked on the revival of the Thirteenth Sabbath, a tradition where Sabbath School was the church service, with memory verse challenges, special offerings for mission outreach, and discussion time.

Children and Families Pastor Brooke Wong from the Madison Campus Adventist Church opened the Sabbath with a sermon, reminding teachers that they are not responsible for the salvation of their students, young or old. “Your job is to create an environment where people can listen and learn,” Wong stated, “and to provide opportunity, and Jesus will save them if they choose to be saved.”

Saturday evening featured three breakout session times for each age group, allowing members to attend one of the 15 workshops on Zoom. Instructors provided handouts for teachers to keep for future lessons; exploring such topics as using trends for youth outreach; supporting children through difficult changes, such as death, illness, divorce, or cultural upheaval; and setting a clear vision for Sabbath School.

Church groups and Bible studies could create watch parties, where viewers could comment, engage, and discuss. Throughout the workshops, the community chat was available to share ideas and foster support, encouraging other members to try new methods of connection and to ask questions.

The event organizers closed the conference with a final livestream, reminding viewers that there will be a second conference later in 2025, from September 11 to 13.

—Nicole Dominguez, freelance writer

## Bill Payne Embraces New Challenges as North American Division’s Director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries

**B**ill Payne is the new director of the North American Division Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department. Payne officially assumed this role last November after being elected by the NAD executive committee on September 6, 2024.

Most recently, Payne served as director of the Voice of Prophecy Bible School, helping churches organize Bible schools across North America and internationally. He also assisted conference and union directors doing big city evangelism, laying the groundwork for campaigns led by Voice of Prophecy speaker/director Shawn Boonstra.

Payne’s immediate focus is revitalizing a department that was without a director for several years. He has observed that at churches division-wide, “Sabbath School seems to be on life support” and “without vision,” and is keen to “reinvigorate leadership at all levels to make Sabbath School more dynamic.” He

is also motivated to educate and promote personal ministries, encouraging members to study the Word more deeply and share their faith.

Foundational to Payne’s work is his passion for small group ministry. For more than 25 years he has practiced, studied, and taught workshops on small groups. In 2022 he earned a Doctor of Ministry from Liberty University, completing a thesis on church revitalization, emphasizing Sabbath School and small groups. At the NAD he will continue advocating for small group Sabbath School classes as the discipleship arm of the church.

“Sabbath School is not just 45 minutes on Sabbath mornings. It encompasses home Bible study, social connection, and community [service]. My prayer is to incorporate the five pillars of small group ministry—community, evangelism, leadership, accountability, and equipping—into the Sabbath School environment.” He is presently writing a curriculum inte-



Bill Payne North American Division

grating the four objectives of Sabbath School—study the Word, fellowship, community outreach, and world mission outreach—with these five pillars.

He cited as his inspiration a quote from Ellen G. White’s *Sabbath School Worker*: “If properly conducted, the influence growing out of the Sabbath School will improve and enlarge the church” (Oct. 1, 1886, par. 1).

“It’s a tremendous honor to welcome Elder Bill Payne, who fills the position vacated by Elder Al Johnson. Payne brings a wealth of experience, but his passion and work with small groups will be extremely helpful in creating small group resources and training for our local churches,” said G. Alexander Bryant, NAD president.

—Christelle Aghoka

BY JOHN BRADSHAW

## Not the Finished Project

**I** had the same conversation twice within six months. On both occasions a young man approached, concerned—and convinced—that he could not go to heaven.

Both men said the same thing. “I’ll never be able to go to heaven, because I’m not able to stop sinning.”

Sin is a serious business. It was sin that nailed Jesus to a cross. Its wages is “death” (Rom. 6:23). Jesus came to earth to “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). There’s nothing good about sin.

While God does make a way of escape—people who come to that realization typically do so after a long battle with a relentless enemy, after their default reaction to almost everything in life has been selfishness. Human beings are at war with their own DNA. While that does not excuse sin, it does speak to the extent of the battle in which we find ourselves.

The world is marinating in temptation. Ellen G. White writes that we would have “hard, stern battles with self” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 331). The apostle Paul writes the same thing (see Rom. 7:14-23).

“I can’t go to heaven,” “I’ve gone too far,” and “God won’t forgive me after what I’ve done” are simply manifestation of the battle with self. In fact, they are self-centeredness. One of the Bible’s plainest statements is that “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). The appropriate response is not to wallow in self-pity, as Jesus pointed out time and again.

### Where to Look

A funny thing happened on the way to John 3:16. Immediately prior to Jesus speaking some of the most famous words ever uttered, He explained what it is to be born again. In the wilderness a discouraged Israel, murmuring against God, were afflicted by venomous snakes. People began to die.

Having sinned against God, their predicament was entirely of their own making. Yet God offered them a way out of their situation: to look away from themselves and fasten their gaze upon a

snake made of brass. And as they looked to this representation of Jesus, they lived. To look was to live. To look was to roll back the deadly effects of the venom. To look away from their wounds and focus on a representation of Christ was to lay hold on everlasting life.

The bigger problem was not sin. Failing to look in faith to Jesus; failing to claim His righteousness and trust in His merits; failing to believe in the reality of grace, the power by which God forgives and cleanses—that was the problem. As Jesus Himself once said: “You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:40, NKJV).

### Growth in Grace

I explained to both young men that while sin is serious—deadly—the fact that you are a sinner does not mean you may never go to heaven. It means, in all likelihood, that you’re simply not the finished product. Jesus taught clearly that Christianity is a growth experience. “First the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head” (Mark 4:28, NKJV).

Christianity isn’t anything unless it is a growth in grace. If you’re only the blade, and not the full corn in the ear, thank God you’re the blade. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and continue to grow.

Christianity need not be a decision between justification and sanctification. Christianity is both. By faith in Jesus you come to Him, and you are justified. By faith you continue to look to Him, and you are sanctified. The key is to continue to look—and continue to grow. Continue to read, pray, and share, while looking away from yourself and looking to Jesus, remembering that “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6, NKJV).

John Bradshaw is the president of *It Is Written*.

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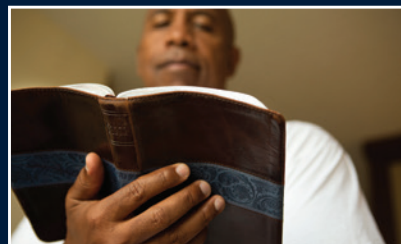
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