



General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter

An informative publication for members of the General Conference Executive Committee as a service through the office of the Chair

DECEMBER 2019

About this time every year

we begin thinking about flipping the hourglass called life and starting a new year. And we do so looking in two directions—backward at the year now ending and forward to the year ahead.

While we mark such calendar events with celebration or sometimes sadness, it is helpful to remember that, while our Lord God exists in a realm where time is marked differently, He chose to invade our time-limited circumstance to become one with us. That should serve to both lighten our sadness and condition our celebration. We are neither left to our own inadequacies nor abandoned to our temptations.

Over the years, I have come to reflect on the year-end/year-beginning fulcrum, not with resolutions to do better, which help but for a while; but rather with a prayer, usually a brief Scripture passage, such as Psalm 90, that reminds me all year long of the presence of God continuing among us by His Spirit: “Lord, You have been our [refuge] in all generations . . . even from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (vss. 1, 2).

I find great peace in knowing that the God I worship and serve is always there. He has always been and will always be. He is the great “I Am.”

It is our joy to wish you heaven’s richest blessings as 2020 unfolds. May His grace be real and powerful for you in the coming year.

—THOMAS LEMON,
Vice President,
General Conference
of Seventh-day
Adventists



EDITORIAL



RETELLING THE CHRISTMAS STORY APPLYING AN OLD STORY IN A NEW WAY

BY MERLE POIRIER, OPERATIONS MANAGER
ADVENTIST REVIEW MINISTRIES

Editor’s Note: While we do not know the specific date of Christ’s birth, more importantly, we do know it was an actual event, foretold in prophecy beginning with God’s promise in Genesis 3:15. In this article, Merle Poirier draws out leadership lessons from this most blessed event.

*‘T*his is the time of year when our Bibles turn to the first chapters of Matthew and Luke. December Sabbaths find pastors searching for yet another way to apply the Christmas story to contemporary lives. And this article does the same. Yet probably not in a way you’ve heard or thought about before.

Can a leader find lessons in the birth story of Jesus? Let’s take a closer look.

THE DONKEY

Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage

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of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child (Luke 2:4).

Let's be honest. The Bible doesn't actually say there was a donkey, although he appears in every painting, nativity set, and book about the Christmas story. But when you realize the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem is about 145 kilometers (90 miles)—just under two hours by car—and Mary is quite pregnant, there *has* to have been a donkey.

A donkey is strong, intelligent, curious, protective, and a burden-bearer. Mary had to depend on this small animal to bear her safely over the rocky road to Bethlehem. Joseph had to depend on the donkey's steadfastness to follow him and bear the precious burden of this mother and her unborn Son.

A good leader should be dependable and tenacious.

JOSEPH

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus (Matthew 1:24).

We don't know much about Joseph. He was a carpenter. He appears to have had other children prior to his engagement with Mary. Perhaps he knew sorrow in the loss of a first wife. But he finds joy in Mary and they are to be married. Then, as we know, things turn a bit upside down for Joseph. Mary is pregnant, she's been told by an angel that it is a boy—the Son of God—and Joseph is hard-pressed to believe her. His confusion is obvious, but his love for Mary enough so that he develops a plan that will not embarrass her, but rid him of his “problem.” And then enters an

angel, a dream, and Joseph obeys without question.

A good leader protects the vulnerable, and is obedient to God's call and direction.

MARY

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:30-34).

We don't know how old Mary was when the angel appeared to her. Some believe she was a

young teenager. Certainly she had a child-like faith. An angel appears and tells her she is going to have a child even though she is unmarried and a virgin. Mary doesn't respond with the impossible, but the possible. Not "This can't happen!" but, "How will it happen?" When the answer came that seemed to be more than impossible, her simple response was: "Let it be according to your word." Amazing faith and acceptance!

A good leader sees past impossibilities and believes God will show the way.

THE INNKEEPER

And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).

Another confession. There is no innkeeper in the Bible story either. We only know from Scripture that Jesus was born in a stable, barn, or cave where animals were kept because there was no room in the inn. Why? We're unsure. Joseph went to Bethlehem—his ancestral home. It would seem he would have extended family living there. But for some reason there is no place to house this man and his exceedingly pregnant wife. This seems harsh and unkind. One would expect someone to take pity on such a couple, especially if the wife is young and never birthed a child.

Enter the innkeeper. The one person in Bethlehem who apparently does not shut the door, turn them away, or offer an unkind word. He, and perhaps his wife, sympathize with them and while they don't offer a bed, they give what they have—a shelter from the night, protection from the elements, and some kindness. In addition, we can hope there was support, food, and comfort to this young mother who births this Child in less than ideal circumstances.

A good leader is sensitive to the needs of others and offers support when others may not.

A Midnight Concert

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night (Luke 2:8).

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Shepherds spent most of their time with sheep. Sheep weren't the brightest of animals and they needed care. A good shepherd made sure the flock was fed and watered by day and protected at night. The shepherds in Bethlehem the night of the Christmas story perhaps huddled around a fire to keep warm. They took turns watching for predators and kept each other awake with stories; a favorite being the old prophecies—the day the Messiah would come and change everything.

A good leader takes care of those entrusted to his care, even when it means a sleepless night.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us” (Luke 2:13-15).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem and all of heaven was excited about it. So excited that they couldn't



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hold in the news—someone had to be told! As the angels looked for someone, anyone to hear the news, they found only shepherds awake in the fields guarding the flocks. But joy of joys—these same shepherds were talking about the very Messiah who had just been born. A perfect audience!

A good leader is excited to tell others about Jesus.

THE WISE MEN

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:1).

We don’t know where these wise men came from, although we know

they came far. We don’t know how many there were, but we know they brought at least three gifts. What we do know is they were seekers. They studied the writings of varied peoples. They studied the stars. And, while their belief system may not match ours, they studied long and well enough to notice a change in the sky. A new star had appeared. For them it portended good things. The star appeared more like a beacon than just a new light.



And this star seemed to match the Jewish prophecies of a king—a Messiah. Curiosity aroused and laden with gifts, they set out to follow the star.

A good leader studies the Scriptures and reads the Spirit of Prophecy with a mind open for inspiration, offering what he or she finds to others.

THE BABY

And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).

My three-year-old grandson has an Advent calendar he does with his mother each morning of December. It has 25 pieces of the nativity scene. Starting December 1 with the stable, he adds to the scene each day and they talk about the upcoming birth of the special Baby. One by one, sheep and shepherds, camels and kings, surround the stable, until the last day there is only one piece left—the Baby, who is tenderly placed in the manger.

This, as we know, was no ordinary Baby. Oh, He looked like one, and acted like one. He needed the care of His earthly parents just as all newborns do. But what was special about this Baby was where and why He came. This Baby was the Creator of the world; the result of a plan before the beginning of time. This seemingly ordinary Baby would grow up to do extraordinary things.

Jesus, Creator and God of the universe humbled Himself to enter this sinful world as an infant taking on all its infirmities. By doing this, He willingly entered into a war for the human race. A mission-driven love—Jesus conquered sin once and for all so that we might have eternal life with Him.

Good leaders follow the example of Jesus.

I'm guessing this is not how you've read the Christmas story before—that the idea of leadership and the Nativity aren't two topics you would associate with each other. I hope, though, that hearing this story again (with some new perspectives), will allow you to recognize principles within the story that, if embraced, will carry you into the new year, renewing and empowering you to be the Seventh-day Adventist Christian leader God meant you to be.

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INSPIRED COUNSEL FOR CHRISTMAS

Giving is good.
Remembering is
better.

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

The holiday season is fast approaching with its interchange of gifts, and old and young are intently studying what they can bestow upon their friends as a token of affectionate remembrance. It is pleasant to receive a gift, however small, from those we love. It is an assurance that we are not forgotten, and seems to bind us to them a little closer.

Brethren and sisters, while you are devising gifts for one another, I would remind you of our heavenly Friend, lest you should be unmindful of His claims. Will He not be pleased if we show that we have not forgotten Him? Jesus, the Prince of Life, gave all to bring salvation within our reach. Oh, matchless love! He left his

royal home, His high command, and stooped to share our poverty and shame, that we might be exalted to share His riches and His throne. His glorious perfection called forth the admiration of the angelic host; yet He, their adored Commander, came down to a world sunken in sin, that He might give us a perfect example in His life. Step by step, He descended to the deepest humiliation, that He might reach fallen, guilty men, and lift them up to become sons of God. For us He submitted to insult and shameful abuse. For us He denied himself at every point. He suffered even unto death, that He might give us eternal life.

It is through Christ that we receive every blessing. . . . Shall not all these precious tokens of His love call forth a response from us

in free-will offerings for His cause? Shall not our heavenly Benefactor share in the tokens of our gratitude and love? . . .

As a people we have backslidden from God; let us return unto Him, and He will return unto us, and will heal all our backslidings. Let us, upon the coming Christmas and New Year's festivals, not only make an offering to God of our means, but give ourselves unreservedly to Him, a living sacrifice. . . .

During the past year, Satan has been making most earnest effort to sow discord and dissension among brethren. Now, as the old year is passing away and the new year coming in, is a good time for those who have cherished alienation and bitterness to make confession to one another. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." This is the Lord's direction; will we obey Him, or choose to remain in pride, and justify our course of wrong? Oh! that many may seek to have the sins of the past year blotted out, and pardon written against their names in the heavenly record. . . .

Let all enmity, dissension, and bitterness die with the old year. Let kindness and brotherly and sisterly affection revive in our hearts. We may open the new year with a clean record. How happy the thought! Let us draw near to God "with a true heart in full assurance of faith," that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. . . .

Oh! I entreat you who profess to love God to be less self-caring. Center your affections upon Jesus, your Redeemer. Give up all for Him, be willing to make any and every sacrifice to save souls for whom

He died. Give Him your loving homage, your willing service, and He will bestow upon you the priceless gift of everlasting life."

—*The Review and Herald*
December 26, 1882



CHECKUP

FOODS THAT BOOST THE IMMUNE SYSTEM*

During the end of the year, people are often more susceptible to colds or the flu. Fortunately, there are ways to boost the immune system. Eating certain foods may help keep your immune system strong. Try these 11 powerful immune system boosters!

Sunflower seeds contain phosphorous, magnesium, and vitamin B-6. They're also very high in vitamin E, a powerful antioxidant.

Citrus fruits: Vitamin C is thought to increase the production of white blood cells. These are key to fighting infections. Popular citrus fruits include grapefruit, oranges, tangerines, lemons, and limes.

Red bell peppers contain twice as much vitamin C as citrus fruit. They're also a rich source of beta carotene, which helps keep your eyes and skin healthy.

Broccoli is high in vitamins and minerals. Packed with vitamins A, C, and E and many other antioxidants and fiber, broccoli is one of the healthiest vegetables you can eat.

Garlic is known for its value in fighting infections. It may also help lower blood pressure and slow down hardening of the arteries.

Ginger may help decrease inflammation, which can help reduce a sore throat and other inflammatory illnesses. It may also help decrease nausea.

Ginger may also help decrease chronic pain and may possess cholesterol-lowering properties.

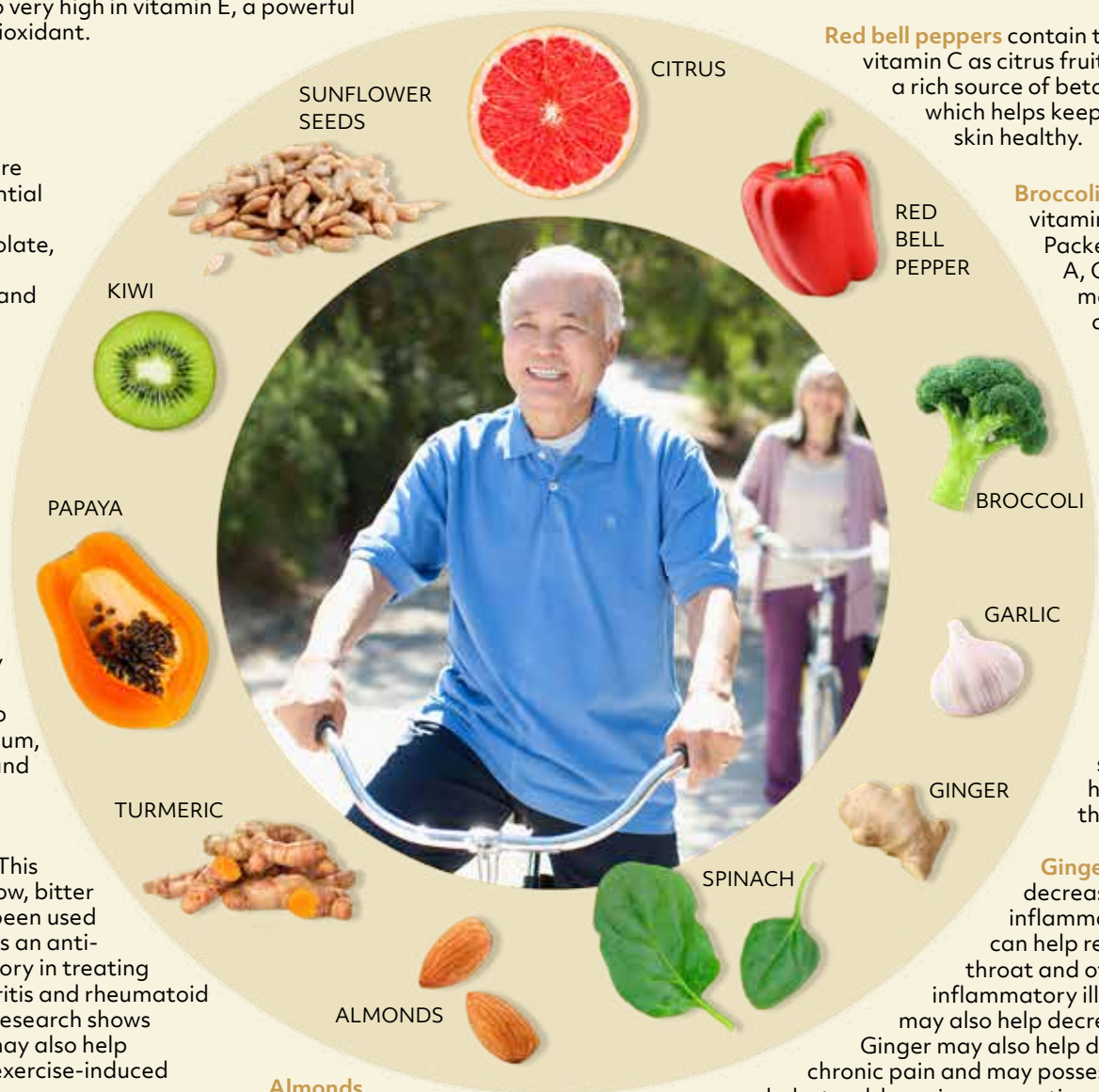
Spinach is rich in vitamin C and packed with numerous antioxidants and beta carotene, which may increase the infection-fighting ability of our immune systems. Light cooking enhances its vitamin A and other nutrients.

Kiwi fruit are full of essential nutrients, including folate, potassium, vitamin K, and vitamin C.

Papaya is loaded with vitamin C, and filled with an enzyme, papain, that has anti-inflammatory effects. Papayas also have potassium, B vitamins, and folate.

Turmeric: This bright yellow, bitter spice has been used for years as an anti-inflammatory in treating osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Research shows turmeric may also help decrease exercise-induced muscle damage.

Almonds contain vitamin E, a fat-soluble vitamin key to a healthy immune system. A handful of shelled almonds provides nearly 100 percent of the recommended daily amount of vitamin E.



*Adapted from heathline.com

THE AMAZING ESCAPE

BY G. T. NG, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

It was Friday and I was grateful as the plane landed at the Washington-Dulles International Airport in Virginia, U.S.A., after visiting a division. I looked forward to the Sabbath at home and some much needed rest.


As the plane taxied to the gate the flight attendant announced, “The airport is experiencing a computer failure in immigration and everyone is to stay on the plane until it is resolved.” I sighed and leaned back. I guess it will be a few minutes.

One hour passed. Two hours passed. The 300-plus passengers on my flight were getting irritable.

“What is taking so long?” they repeatedly asked the flight attendants. Always the same answer—“They are working on it.”

Many more planes had landed from outside the United States while we were waiting. The number of passengers to go through immigration was growing. It was obvious I wasn’t getting home any time soon.

The flight attendants started passing out more drinks to the impatient passengers. My leg started to experience some cramping and I needed to walk around. I decided to get out of my seat and do my best to stretch my legs in the narrow airline aisles. Up and down I went until finally my limited pathway brought me to the front of the plane and the open door. I took a moment to peek my



**I kept close
to him as we
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through the
large crowd.**

head out the door to look around the causeway. The flight attendant standing guard, asked, “Where is your seat?”

I told him my seat number. “Do you have luggage?” he asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“How many bags? What do they look like?”

“Two. Both black. A carry-on and a computer bag,” I responded.

“Wait here.” And he disappeared. Soon he reappeared with my bags. Handing them to me, he said, “Now, run!” And I did!

I went up the passageway. As I emerged, a woman met me. “Follow me,” she said. And I obeyed.

We walked swiftly through the airport. Suddenly we arrived

where one would normally go down to immigration. The entire second level was filled with people! The floor below was also filled with people! All waiting for immigration. While I had escaped the plane, I clearly wasn’t getting home tonight!

Another young airline employee met me. “Follow him,” instructed the woman. And I did.

He wove quickly in and out through the people. I kept close to him as we maneuvered through the large crowd. He brought me directly to a Global Entry Kiosk. I scanned my passport, checked through the items, and was on my way! A full escape! I marveled at what had just happened.

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Recently someone asked me my most memorable event of 2019. This experience immediately came to mind. I relayed the story to those gathered around. “Just think,” I said. “Not one, not two, but three airline employees!” They also marveled at this intervention. Then one individual said, “Just like Peter’s release from prison. Those were angels.” I saw nods around the table.

At first I shook my head. No, not angels. But as I reflect more, I recall very clearly that all of them were actually *expecting* me to show up. They were not at all surprised to see me, a lone traveler who was supposed to be confined to the airplane! Maybe they were just

helpful. Perhaps they *were* angels. Either way, one thing is clear. God was watching out for this weary traveler who made it home in time for Sabbath, for some much needed rest, and a feeling of being very blessed.

My amazing escape reminds me of the miraculous escape of humans from the certainty of death because of Jesus’ incarnation. He condescended to this sinful world, born as a babe, lived like a man, died like a criminal, resurrected to minister in the heavenly sanctuary, and soon will return to exterminate sin forever. That’s what Christmas is all about—the greatest escape story ever told! Hallelujah!



GC SESSION MINI-QUIZ

HOW MANY ANSWERS DO YOU KNOW?

Answers are below.

1. When/where was the first GC Session held, with how many delegates?
2. What has been the fewest number of delegates to attend a GC Session?
3. What Session had the largest number of delegates?
4. True or False: A GC Session was held in Rome.
5. When/where was the first GC Session held outside of Battle Creek, Michigan?
6. When/where was the first GC Session held outside of the United States?
7. After Battle Creek, Michigan (hosted 32 GC Sessions), what city has hosted more GC Sessions than any other?

Answers:

1. Battle Creek, Michigan, May 20-23, 1863, with 20 delegates.
2. Just 14 delegates attended the 10th GC Session in Battle Creek, Dec. 29, 1871-Jan. 3, 1872.
3. The 60th Session, held July 2-11, 2015 in San Antonio, Texas, had 2,536 delegates.
4. True! The 21st Session was in Rome, *New York*, from Dec. 7-19, 1882, with 47 delegates.
5. The 15th Session, held Sept. 19-24, 1876, was in Lansing, Michigan.
6. The 52nd Session was held in Vienna, Austria, from July 10-19, 1975.
7. San Francisco, California—in 1918, 1922, 1930, 1936, 1941, 1950, 1954, and 1962.

For these and more interesting facts, visit www.adventistarchives.org/general-conference-sessions.

Changing Hearts in Alaska

By Tandi Perkins,
Director of Development
Alaska Conference



Toluk* and his friends were tough guys. Each came from a broken home and learned early in life to fend for themselves on the streets of their Alaska native village. One day, Toluk heard that the “Seventh-day” church was sponsoring a week-long day camp in his village. Word spread throughout the kid network that there would be activities, music, food and lesson studies about Jesus at camp. Toluk was secretly excited, yet conflicted. To his friends, he was supposed to be this tough rebel leader that they looked up to and he did not want to appear weak by going to a church camp. The night before camp started, Toluk and his friends met to lay out their plans to disrupt the programs. The next morning as the camp staff was leading worship at the Seventh-day church, the group burst through the doors on their bikes and rode up and down the aisles cursing and shouting at the staff and campers. This was repeated in the afternoon and again on the second day of camp.

The camp director and staff knew they needed to do something about Toluk and his friends, but didn’t want to ban them from coming because, like Jesus, the group had come to the village to reach the unreachable. The staff met and prayed that God would

touch John and his friends’ hearts to be open to camp and began to intentionally reach out to these boys in kindness. Slowly, Toluk’s heart began to change. He no longer found it fun to disrupt the program; he felt drawn to these people who were so nice to him. On the third day of camp, Toluk and his friends walked through the doors of the church, sat quietly and respectfully listened to the stories being told. By the end of the week, the group started helping the staff with worship and events. The story of Toluk and his friends is still being written. While they haven’t been baptized yet, it is a powerful example of how the love of Jesus is transforming lives in Alaska native village communities.

Every day, kids in Alaska native villages face enormous challenges. This holiday season, Adventist Community Services has offered a match of \$100,000 by March 2020, to support day camps and Vacation Bible Schools in Alaska. Please give today and double your power to change a life. For more information, visit www.articmissionadventure.org.

*Names have been changed

THE BACK PAGE

Directions: For more information on an item, click on the corresponding number on the map.



1 The congregation of Beth Shalom Community and Learning Center hosted their first Jewish Adventist Camp Meeting Oct. 14-21, at the Unicoi State Park in **Helen, Georgia**, USA. Approximately 75 people attended, with 30 to 35 attending daily workshops and lectures. In addition to Jewish Adventists, Jewish and Messianic Jewish friends in the area also attended the event.

2 The Seventh-day Adventist Church in **Brazil** is placing a high priority on encouraging everyone to participate in daily study of the Bible and the Sabbath School lessons through The Mana Project, a free subscription-based program designed to encourage members, guests, and neighbors by providing daily study materials delivered direct to subscribers. In addition, to further promote the importance of Sabbath School and The Mana Project, a Sabbath School Congress

with nearly 1,100 people gathered at the Adventist Church's Recreational and Training Center on August 31.

3 Middle East University (MEU) in **Beirut, Lebanon**, celebrated its 80th Anniversary on Nov. 15-17. During the celebration, Amir Ghali, a 1990 graduate now serving as MENAU field secretary, testified, "despite wars, migration, financial difficulties and shortages of teachers, God saw to it that this institution has continued uninterrupted. He has a purpose for MEU."

4 The 2019 **Youth Rush Japan** yielded excellent results in this highly secularized country. Participants included 86 young people who visited 115,287 homes during the summer. They sold 10,725 books, prayed with people in 1,129 homes, and garnered 38 personal Bible study interests. "At one house," writes Daniel Fukuda, Youth Rush Japan

Coordinator, "the person had been reading the Bible for 20 years. This person had bought books from Fukuinsha (Japan's Adventist publishing house) 20 years ago! This person immediately signed up for personal Bible study."

5 Students from Betikama Adventist College (BAC) along with other students in the **Solomon Islands**, had the opportunity to meet Prince Charles, Prince of Wales and heir apparent to the throne of the United Kingdom, during his visit to the islands on November 25. As the Prince shook hands, he recognized the Adventist Christian education logo on a shirt and asked, "You Adventists worship every morning and evening?" Affirming Adventist practice, school principal Partinson Bekala stated, "BAC was truly a witness of Adventist Christian education during [Prince Charles's] visit to the Solomon Islands."

6 PERSECUTION INTENSIFIES IN BURUNDI

Persecution of faithful Seventh-day Adventists in **Burundi** has intensified. On Sabbath, Dec. 7, the military and police descended on Adventist churches and homes, maiming and arresting numerous innocent members. Many faithful Adventist pastors and members have been thrown into prison. Others are in hospitals with serious head injuries or broken limbs due to government brutality.

Pastor Lamec Barishinga, the duly elected president of the Burundi Union Mission, has been arrested and taken to prison due to his video-taped message for GC Executive Committee Members, shown at the 2019 Annual Council. Pastor Barishinga's crime, according to the Burundian government, was his request for prayer. Since the government denies any religious liberty issues in Burundi, Pastor Barishinga was accused of incriminating his own country before the world.

Let us re-double our prayer efforts on behalf of Pastor Barishinga and all of our brothers and sisters in Burundi.