



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

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2019

“How are you in yourself?”

This question caught my attention, as the world-famous researcher and physician gently approached the patient lying in hospital. In yourself! He was asking not only about the pain, fever, or discomfort, but about the *whole person*. 3 John 2 confirms the theme that runs through the Bible—we are wholistic beings with physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions.

Yes, we have heard this all before. The question that comes straight back at me is, “Am I listening?” Even deeper, perhaps—What am I *thinking*, What am I *doing*? How we sleep, rest, eat, exercise, drink, relate, and support one another influences this “fearfully and wonderfully made” being. The dimensions of our life are inextricably linked. Physical health and illness are often visible; our behavior may be acceptable and pleasant in public, but how are we in ourselves, in our families, and with our closest colleagues?

As leaders, when we are faced with the realities of needed change in our lives, habits, attitudes, and emotions, where do we turn? We are blessed to have our Friend and Savior, Jesus, who we can access through prayer, His Word, and inspired counsels. We may need and be able to share with our spouse, family, friend, colleague—we may even need professional intervention.

In this issue of the ECN, Dr. Torben Bergland, a psychiatrist and new addition to the Adventist Health Ministries Team, discusses key ways to enjoy wholistic mental health, and convey it to those we are entrusted to lead. May you have a happy, and healthy 2019!

Peter N. Landless, Director
General Conference
Adventist Health Ministries



EDITORIAL



MENTAL HEALTH AND WHY IT MATTERS

An interview with Dr. Torben Bergland, GC Health Ministries, Associate Director

*A*t the beginning of a new year, health is a topic that often comes into focus as people think about ways to improve their lives in the new year. Aspects of good physical health are often emphasized—healthy eating, exercise, weight loss, etc. While physical health is certainly important, as Seventh-day Adventists we recognize that good health is wholistic—involving the physical, mental, and spiritual. In the following interview, we discuss with Dr. Torben Bergland, a psychiatrist and new associate director of the

GC Health Ministries Department, aspects of good mental health and how leaders can promote healthy environments within their organizations.

ECN: What is “mental health” and how would you define “good mental health?”

Bergland: I agree with the World Health Organization (WHO) in saying that there is “no health without mental health”. Ellen White says that the “relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one

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is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize.” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 241).

If I may propose a somewhat spiritual definition of good mental health, I would say that it is when the way you think and feel allows you to appreciate, enjoy and pursue everything that is good, meanwhile resisting and being resilient whenever you encounter what is evil. Again, the WHO defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”

Physical, mental, social and spiritual health are interdependent. If one suffers, the others will suffer as well. And, this we know not only from the Bible and Ellen White, but research strongly affirms it.

Unlike physical health issues, there seems to be at times a stigma attached if someone is dealing with a mental health issue. Why do you suppose that is?

Historically, we have equated mental illness with insanity and demon possession. When we think about insanity and possession, we think about people who are no longer in control of their actions, thoughts and feelings. Such people exist, whether because of severe mental illness or possession, but the large majority of people with mental illness are nothing like this. The truth is, that in this broken and sinful world, we all struggle with our actions, thoughts and feelings.

It is not a question of whether or not we have any mental issues, it is rather a question of to what degree and extent. It is not the people who acknowledge this we should fear, rather the dangerous ones are those who only see problems in others, but not in themselves.

Because our mind is so intertwined with who we perceive ourselves to be and who we perceive others to be, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the person and the mental illness. If I break a leg, get diabetes or cancer, that doesn't necessarily fundamentally impact my identity. But with mental health issues, the illness may become equated with my identity, character and personality. It would be good if we could acknowledge that even people with severe mental health challenges can be reliable, trustworthy, good people who may be capable of doing great things. History has proven that to be the case.

What are some factors that can contribute to poor mental health?

First, and in many cases foremost, I would say lack of connection. Lack of connection to people, to God, to nature, to a life of significance, meaning, purpose and fulfilling content. God created us for lives in a perfect world in intimate relationship to himself and the rest of creation. Life in our broken world is very different from that. We live as broken people in a broken world in broken relationships. For most of us, it is a life quite far removed from what we were created for.

Genes, temperament, adverse life experiences, physical disorders and



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an unhealthy lifestyle make us mentally vulnerable. As with many physical disorders, mental illness may run in families. It may be partly because of genes, partly because of social dysfunctions and learned patterns of dealing with emotions, thinking, behaving and relating. Trauma such as abuse, neglect, loss and other negative life events, especially early in life, may increase vulnerability. Loneliness, dysfunctional relationships, or lack of meaningful and fulfilling content in life may erode the enjoyment of life. A range of physical disorders and dysfunctions may lead to mental health issues, making it important to identify and treat such disorders, as they may be the underlying causes of the illness.

What impact do issues such as unresolved grief, anger, trauma, anxiety, depression, or related challenges have on a person's life?

Well, such issues may adversely impact the quality of life and functioning. Worst case they can erode a person's will to live. On the other side, though, experiencing adversities and challenges may become opportunities for growth. Rather than running away from the problems or seeking quick fixes, they ought to be dealt with properly. If one does so, the difficulties may challenge one to improve or change one's life course and create opportunities for a richer and deeper experience of life, people, and God.

What are some tips you could offer leaders for maintaining good mental health, in spite of the heavy responsibilities resting upon them?

Remember that you are an "ordinary person." I once asked my five-year old niece what she wanted to become when she grew up. Annoyed with the stupidity of that adult question she answered; "I just want to be an ordinary person." I believe that is one of the most mature things I have heard anyone say about themselves. As leaders, we may be prone to forget that we are just ordinary persons with ordinary needs. If you want to maximize your leadership, then you should live sustainably. That means taking care of your basic needs. Eating, exercising, and sleeping properly. Connecting and maintaining deep mutually enriching

relationships with family, friends and God. If you do not practice this, you may not only become a hazard to yourself, but you may also become a hazard to the people you serve and lead.

Where can a leader safely go if they are struggling with anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges?

Our first recourse as leaders is to cast ourselves at Jesus' feet. Our Heavenly Father is our first recourse in all situations. We must continue to guard and nurture our relationship with Him. In addition, do not leave the task of looking for a safe place to go only when you are deeply troubled. Do not wait to make preparations for a potential retreat until after you have lost the battle. What you build in times of peace and prosperity is what you have to fall back upon in times of trouble. So, prioritize building a safety net for yourself consisting of family, friends, colleagues, mentors, and health professionals *before* you desperately need it.

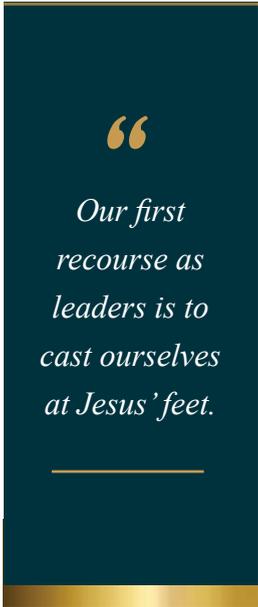
When you realize that you are struggling, do not hesitate or postpone seeking help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you may recover. Allow the people who can support you to do so. If it is affecting your quality of life and/or your functioning, then you should always seek help from a qualified health professional.

And, not the least, follow whatever good, balanced and healthy advice you are given. Be a doer, not only a hearer.

What can leaders do to promote good mental health within their organizations?

Be a leader like Jesus! His leadership was a leadership of closeness, empathy and care. He walked, ate, and slept with his disciples. He was a relational leader. He knew their hearts and they knew that his heart was all for them. His leadership was not about brute power, but about tender love. As participants in the great controversy between good and evil, between love and egotism, we ought to be and lead like Jesus.

It is said that great places to work are the ones where employees trust the people they work for, have pride





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in the work they do, and enjoy the people they work with.

In order to create such a workplace, you must cultivate the connection your employees have to you as a leader, to the people they work with, and to the missional work they do. Through such positive connections you will maximize their wellbeing and realize their potential, for the benefit of your workers and for the benefit of the church.

While on earth, Jesus was a leader of unquestionable benevolence, integrity and ability. He was a healthy leader who cultivated healthy disciples and modeled excellence in leadership. Thus, He empowered his “employees,” a bunch of “ordinary persons,” to become mighty

changemakers and ambassadors of His kingdom.

What resources could you recommend for learning more about the importance of mental well-being?

I would recommend reading *The Ministry of Healing* by Ellen White. Its comprehensive and balanced perspective on health, including mental health, is invaluable. For quick access to information, I would recommend websites and YouTube videos on mental health by governmental and other reputable organizations (i.e. those that are consonant with Biblical principles

and draw on evidence-based and peer reviewed health science). For more in-depth reading, I recommend articles and books by Adventist and other qualified and balanced mental health professionals.

Finally, in order to help others, you need to help yourself. As a psychiatrist, an essential part of my education has been personal growth, learning about my strengths and weakness, reflecting on my interpersonal skills and patterns of thoughts and feelings. As a leader, you need maturity of introspection and interpersonal behavior. There is no better place to cultivate this than in close communion with God and also with people, open and listening to what He and they reveal and teach you about yourself.

BREAKING A CURSE

By Chanmin Chung



The “Waldensian Student” program is a General Conference initiative that encourages a frontline mission approach for Seventh-day Adventist students to live, study, and serve in secular universities in specific countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa. If you know of dedicated young adults willing to serve in this challenging area, please encourage them to contact: Questions@adventistmission.org.

Sunny and Salma met during the orientation for first-year students at a university in the Middle East.

Sunny, who is from Asia, is a Waldensian Student—a young Seventh-day Adventist living, studying, and serving at a secular university in the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission. Salma is a local student who grew up in a non-Christian family.

The two young women shared the same major and lived in the same city neighborhood. They quickly became friends. Salma soon learned that her new friend was an Adventist Christian. She had been taught to be wary of Christians, but Sunny seemed very kind and honest.

As their friendship grew, Salma accepted an invitation to attend a Friday evening meeting in Sunny’s home. Salma met other young Adventists at the meeting, and she liked the friendly conversation. Soon she began to enjoy singing hymns and praying with the group every Friday evening.

Near the end of the first school year, Sunny invited Salma to visit an Adventist church where 95 percent of the members were international students. Salma accepted, but she faced harsh criticism from her family and friends for doing so.

“What did you do there?” one asked.

“Does this mean you’ve become a Christian?” another demanded.

Family members warned that they all would be cursed if she became a Christian.

“It was a hard experience for me, and it made me worry,” Salma said. But she didn’t stop going to church. She even joined the youth choir and participated in health seminars. Her Adventist friends prayed for her.

One Friday evening, the group watched a video about

Jesus’ life, and Sunny noticed that Salma’s attitude began to soften. To Sunny’s amazement, Salma asked to study the book of Acts.

“I was surprised because Salma hadn’t been interested in Bible studies for about a year,” Sunny said.

Salma studied the Bible weekly with Sunny, but she had no desire to be baptized. She was worried that her family would be cursed if she became a Christian.

One Sabbath at a women’s ministries retreat, Salma participated in an activity where each woman had to select a heart-shaped card and meditate on the Bible verse written inside. She prayerfully chose a card and opened it. Inside, she read, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your household will be saved” (Acts 16:31, MEV).

Salma immediately knew God had answered her prayer. She didn’t need to worry about a curse falling on her family. She stood up and announced with a trembling voice that she wanted to accept Jesus as her Savior and be baptized!

It’s stories like Salma’s that inspire Sunny to continue serving as a “Waldensian Student.”

“After I finish my studies, I plan to stay in the Middle East to develop lifelong friendships with people like Salma,” Sunny said. “That’s about the only way we can touch the hearts of many people who don’t know Jesus in this region. Please pray that Salma will grow spiritually, and that God will send more people like her to me.”

Chanmin Chung is the communication coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission. Reprinted with permission from Mission 360° magazine. Visit www.Mission360Mag.org.

CHECKUP



Thoughts: The Power of the Mind

Much inspired counsel has been given to us regarding the mind. Here are a few to ponder from *The Ministry of Healing*.



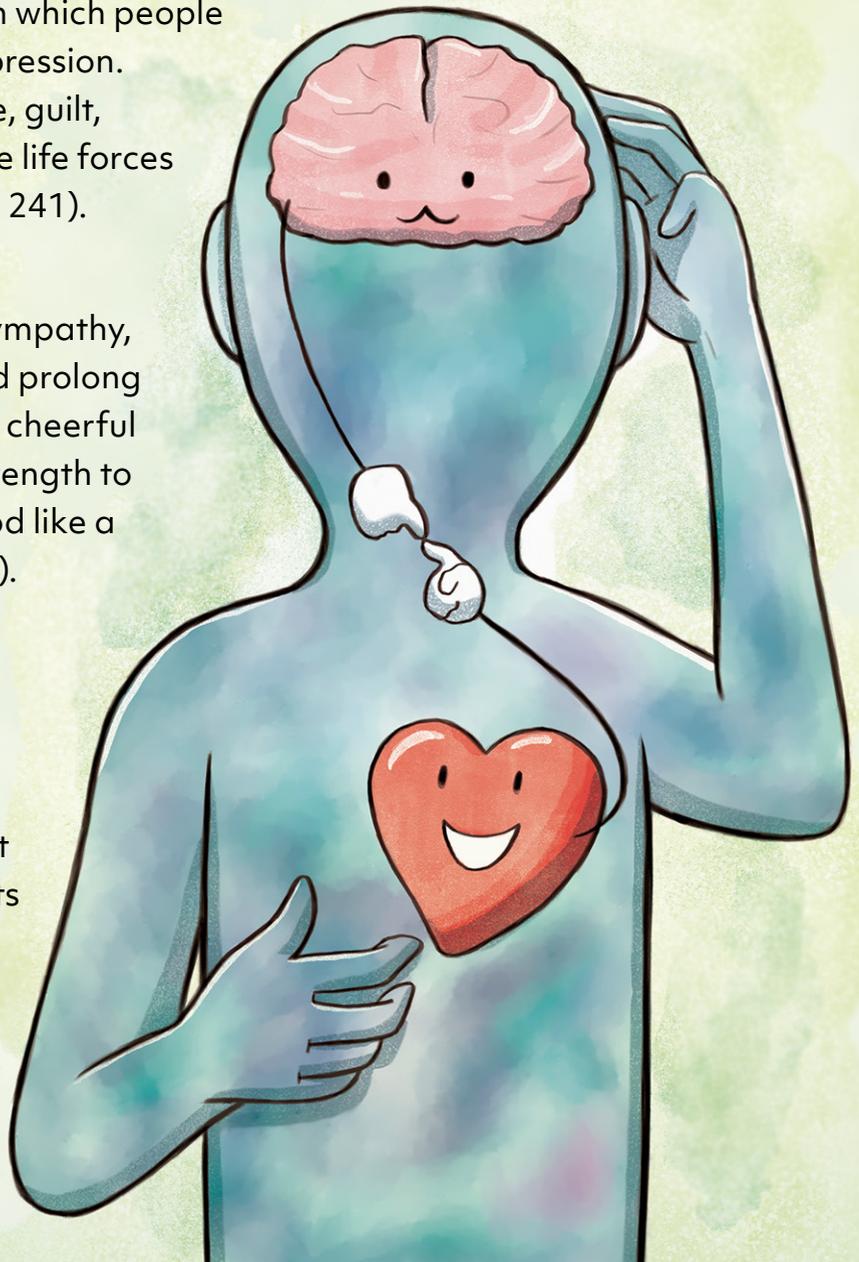
"The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which people suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death" (p. 241).

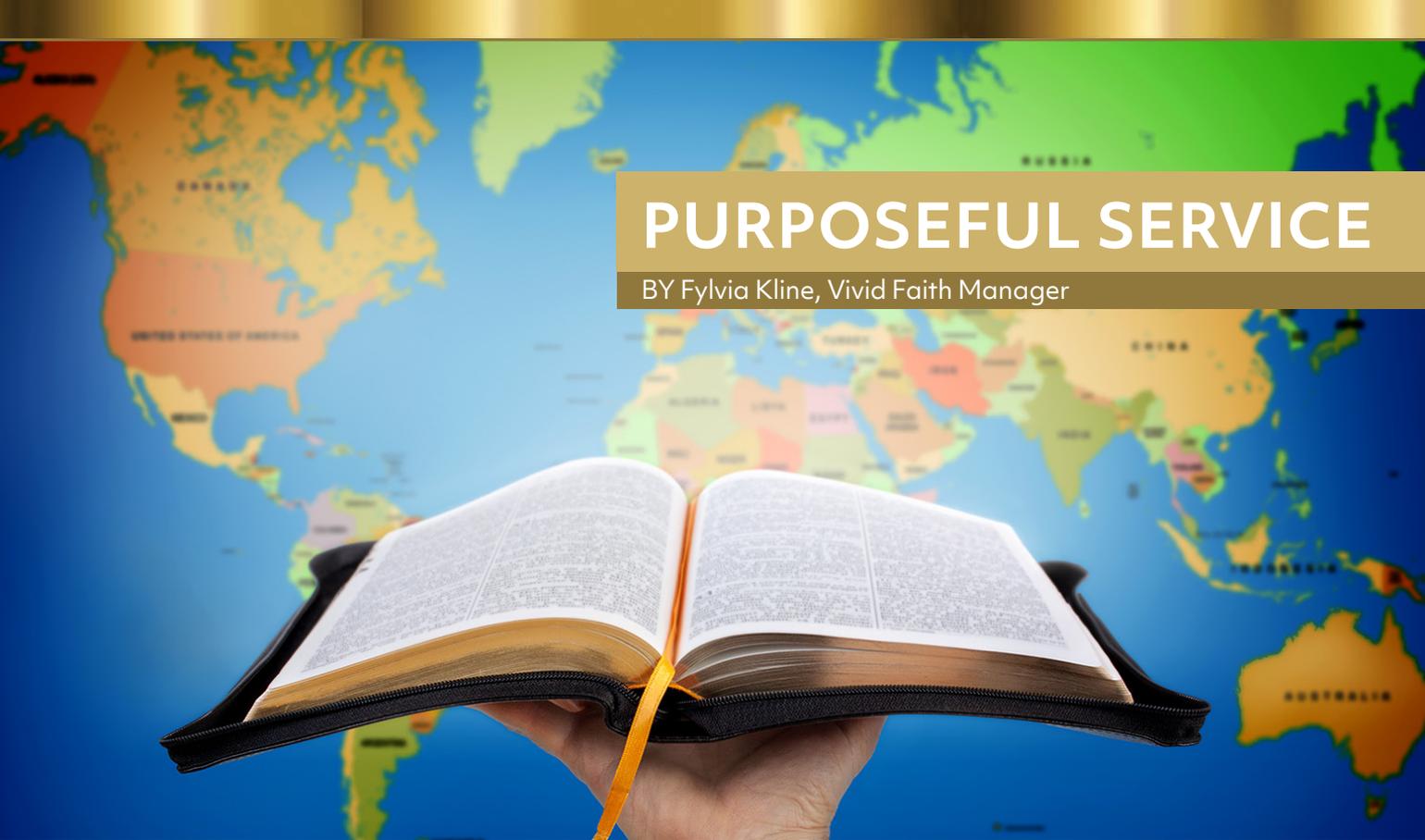


"Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul. 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.' Proverbs 17:22" (p. 241).



"Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. . . . It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance. While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words." (p. 251).





PURPOSEFUL SERVICE

BY Fylvia Kline, Vivid Faith Manager

More and more people are looking for opportunities to serve, to make the world a better place.

In a 2015 survey “84 percent of millennials said that they would travel abroad to participate in volunteer activities,”¹ and this trend has not declined.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long tradition of volunteerism. It’s how people put their faith into action—they go as missionaries and meet local needs. However, the face of volunteerism has changed over the past couple of decades. With travel more accessible, people more cognizant of their place in a global society, and the Internet bringing world events directly into personal lives, many today are adopting a volunteer lifestyle, regardless of their faith.

Unlike past generations that used money to safeguard the future, accumulate assets, or live a more comfortable life, today’s generation

is more interested in spending on life experiences.²

They are looking for purposeful opportunities to make a tangible difference in the world.

With its many organizations, projects, and history of volunteerism, the Seventh-day Adventist Church can meet this generation’s need to be purposefully involved. Building on our already established free programs, we need to be intentional in our process and our marketing. How we advertise and package volunteer assignments, how we host and support volunteers, how we meet their needs while they serve, how we engage and build relationships that continue long past their time of service—all of these will determine the success of not just our volunteer programs but also our efforts to share our faith and engage with others.

Volunteer assignments are verdant opportunities for evangelism and discipleship. When Adventists take

time off from every-day life to volunteer, their service strengthens their faith. When people serve alongside Adventist friends, their service is a window to the Adventist lifestyle and faith.

Let’s go beyond recruiting volunteers; let’s offer a well-crafted, unique experience. “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”³

To find out how you can partner with VividFaith, a service of the General Conference Secretariat, and set up an effective service opportunity program, email manager@vividfaith.com.

¹ <https://www.volunteeringsolutions.com/blog/voluntourism-will-continue-to-be-a-top-travel-trend>, accessed January 8, 2019.

² <https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/news/105535305/change-in-volunteering-trends-you-should-know-in-2018>, accessed January 8, 2019.

³ Maya Angelo



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

1 Physicians at Loma Linda University Medical Center—**Murrieta (California)**, performed the hospital’s first transcatheter aortic valve replacement procedure (TAVR) on Jan. 12. TAVR is an alternative to the riskier open-heart surgery and is used to treat aortic stenosis — a heart valve disease that causes reduced blood flow through the aortic valve. Currently, LLUMC-Murrieta is the only hospital in the region to offer this non-invasive heart procedure to patients in the community. [Learn more here.](#)

2 The South American Division (SAD) recently hosted the largest International Pathfinder Camporee in history with nearly 100,000 young people attending from every country in SAD. “The Best Adventure” was held at **Parque do Peão, Brazil** and was divided into two identical editions: Alpha, Jan. 8-13, and Omega, Jan. 15-20. Emphasis was placed on young people making decisions to commit their lives to Jesus. For the camporee’s [philosophy, objectives and more click here.](#)

3 The Adventist Church’s Ministry of the Deaf in Spain was able to make a tremendous difference in the lives of Elena and Constantin Duca during the birth of their first child in **Vila Real Castellón, Spain**. Elena and Constantin

are deaf and needed an interpreter to communicate with hospital staff. Thanks to the presence of members from the Ministry of the Deaf and its director, Taida Rivero, the couple were able to freely communicate with the medical staff throughout the 30-hour process, culminating with the birth of their daughter, Karen Rebeca. [For more, click here.](#)

4 Membership in the East-Central Africa Division (ECD), based in **Nairobi, Kenya**, has recently topped 4 million members, showing a 10 percent annual growth rate for the past three years, according to ECD Executive Secretary Alain Coralie. Leaders attribute this to the work of the Holy Spirit, along with a ‘Mission Priority’ theme encouraging every member to be part of Total Member Involvement, embracing the work of winning souls as a lifestyle. Coralie also reported the loss of nearly 150,000 members over the same three-year period and urged leaders and members to let the love of Christ propel them to spare no effort in reclaiming former members. [Read more here.](#)

5 In line with Adventist World Radio’s (AWR) continuous effort to engage unreached people groups, the Southern Asia-Pacific (SSD) headquarters inaugurated the first-ever AWR Center

for Digital Evangelism (CDE) in **Silang, Cavite, Philippines**. The CDE purposes to connect to radio contacts leading them to in-depth learning about Jesus through Bible studies and online evangelism, leading them to baptism and discipleship. As more CDEs are planned to be established in other world regions, AWR seeks to partner with more divisions and institutions to advance the growth of the church’s online influence. [Read more here.](#)

6 More than 200 Indigenous Australians gathered in **Victor Harbor, South Australia**, for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ministries (ATSIM) national camp from Jan. 16-21. The ministry is celebrating 40 years of service, and leaders rejoiced to see the positive impact ATSIM is having on indigenous communities. Numerous testimonies were given during the camp meeting. [Read more here.](#)

#FollowHim

Adventist Mission has launched the #FollowHim film contest for students 18 and under. Young people around the world are invited to tell the world how mission inspires them to follow God. Please invite teens to participate. Deadline is March 31. For details [click here.](#)