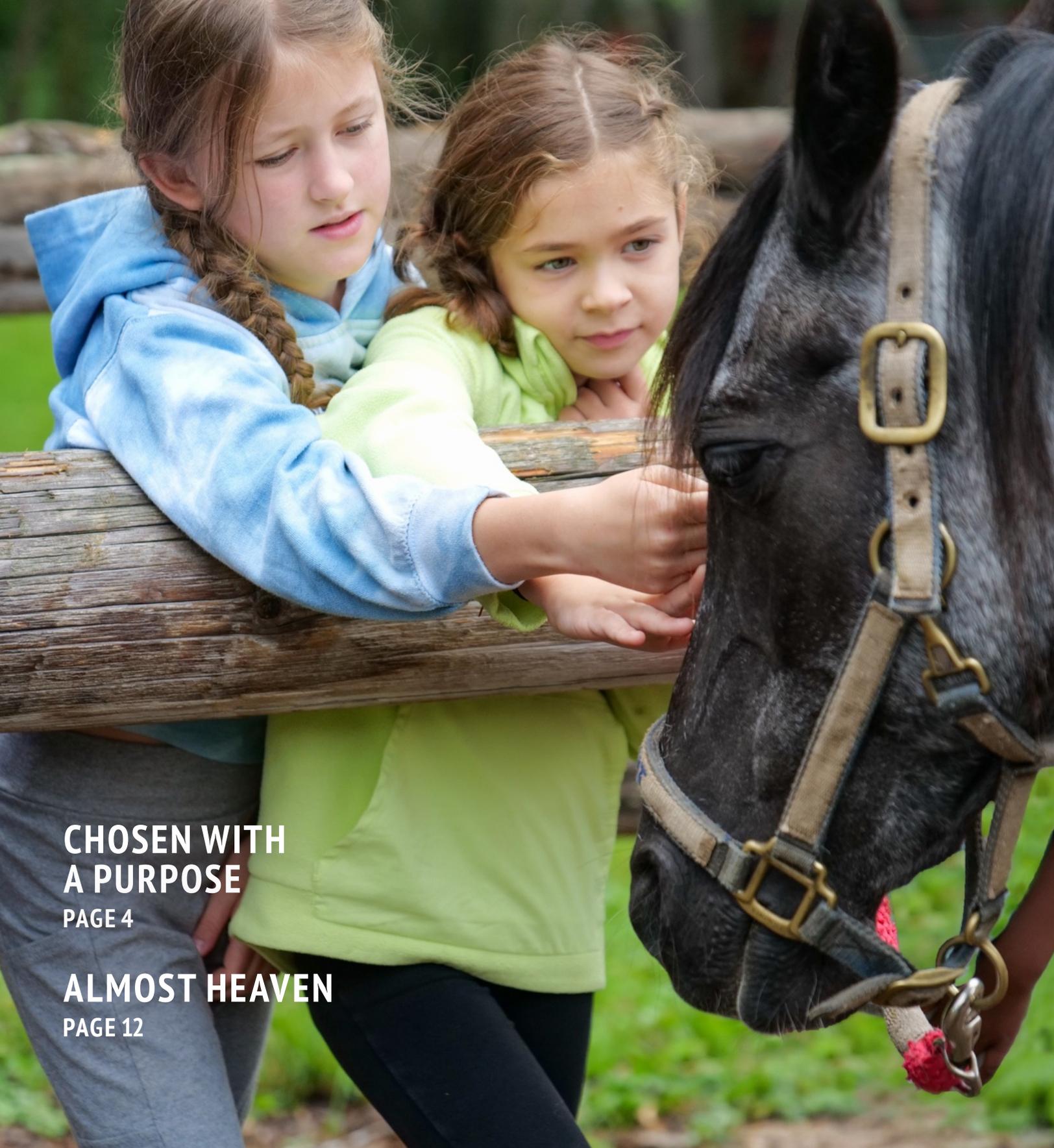


The Northern Light

A Publication to Keep Minnesota Seventh-day Adventists Informed V18, Issue 3/4 2025



**CHOSEN WITH
A PURPOSE**

PAGE 4

ALMOST HEAVEN

PAGE 12

Content

VOLUME 18, ISSUE THREE & FOUR | 2025

Director/Editor-in-Chief : Savannah Carlson

TNL Content : Vision Communication

TNL Designer : Red Dirt Studios

After seven years of saying “maybe next year,” my husband and I finally planted a garden. We tilled the soil, added fertilizer, laid a mulch path, nestled in our seeds—and watered. I watched with quiet satisfaction as the earth darkened, soaking in the life-giving moisture.

A few months ago, we started a weekly office prayer meeting—Wednesdays, 10 to 11 a.m. I was nervous. Not because I didn’t want time with Jesus, but because being spiritually vulnerable is hard, and praying for an hour felt impossible. Still, I took the plunge and admitted my discomfort. To my surprise, honesty opened the door for others to be honest too. That vulnerability became a foundation of trust.

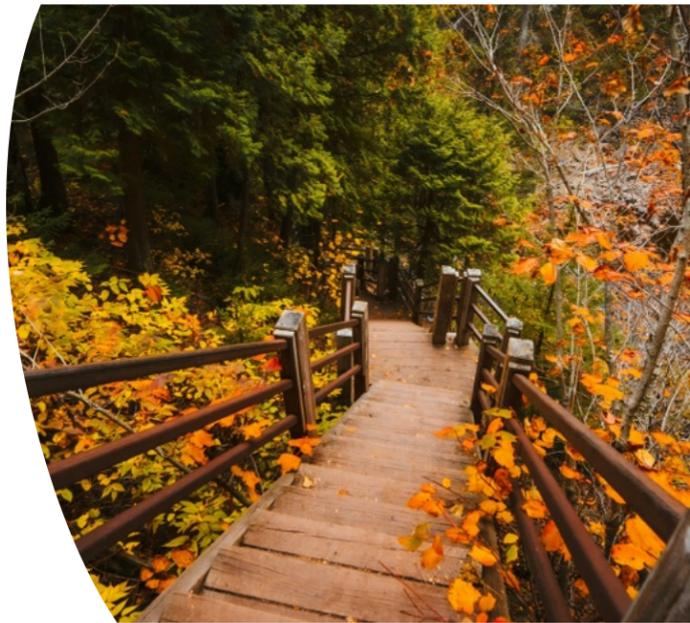
Prayer, I’ve learned, is the water my spiritual life didn’t know it needed. My connection with Jesus is deepening, my peace growing. Even in anger or worry, my heart feels anchored in joy—“like a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3).

So how’s your spiritual garden? Maybe it’s time to set an appointment with God. Just show up—and let Him make things grow.

—Savannah

- 4 : Chosen With a Purpose
- 8 : Waking Up to Love
- 10 : Sowing Seeds
- 11 : Flourishing Together
- 12 : Almost Heaven
- 14 : Where Are We Going?

- 17 : Let the Children Come
- 19 : Resting in Jesus
- 20 : Building Bridges
- 21 : United in Baptism
- 22 : Ripple Effect
- 23 : Welcome, Gavin Anthony
- 24 : New Employees



By Jeff Scoggins



THIS OLD HOUSE

Years ago I restored an old house with my father-in-law. It had been built in 1888. The exterior was decent, but the inside really needed work. The sagging upstairs floor made for a sagging ceiling on the main floor. Plastered walls bulged and crumbled. The plumbing was cracked, and the wiring was a frightful tangle of old and new.

So we started to work. First, we stripped off ancient plaster lathe to expose wiring and plumbing. To straighten the tilted upstairs floor, we installed two beams in the living room and jacked them up to force the boards into a level position. Next, we stationed a new post in the middle to hold everything in place.

One day my wife, Becky, tiptoed into the construction zone while carrying one of our toddler sons. She discovered exposed 2x4s blackened with age, protruding nails, snarled electrical wires, exposed outlets, falling bits of plaster, splintered timbers, and paint chips that almost certainly contained lead. Gripping our son tighter, she slowly backed outside declaring, “I don’t want to see this again. It looks like open-heart surgery.”

However, by exposing the inner mess, we gave ourselves a clear view of what needed to be fixed. We replaced cracked pipes, re-engineered the bathrooms, and hid the chaos behind brand new sheetrock. With the help of a giant sander, dingy wood floors turned into beautiful, pale hardwood.

Steadily, the mess transformed. But personally, I can never forget what hides inside those walls.

Jesus chastised the Pharisees for keeping the outside of the cup clean when the inside was dirty, and for whitewashing tombs when the insides were full of dead men’s bones (Matt. 23:26, 27). Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks inside (1 Sam. 16:7). And what does He see? Only that our righteousness is like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6).

GOD LOVES US DESPITE WHAT HE KNOWS ABOUT OUR HIDDEN MESSES.

But don’t be discouraged, because the good news of the gospel is that God loves us despite what He knows about our hidden messes.

And He, master Creator that He is, has promised to do a good work not just on the outside but within our hearts (Phil. 1:6). Unlike the house I remodeled, our lives are transformed even on the inside.

Cooperate with Jesus, and He will make your life a masterpiece, just as He originally designed!

In Christ, Jeff Scoggins

God Surrounds North Star Camp With Power and Protection



Chosen With a Purpose

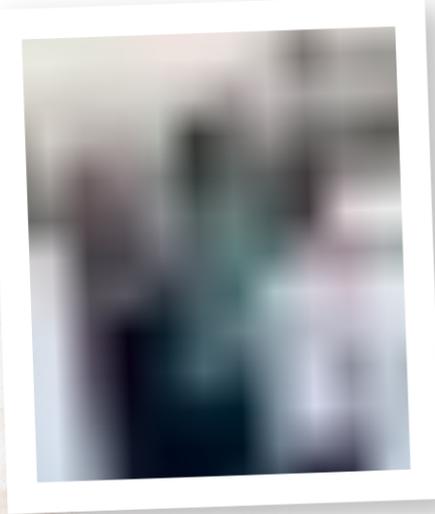


When I stepped into the role of Minnesota youth and camp director last March, I knew I was entering a new kind of ministry—one that would stretch my faith and draw my whole family into something bigger than ourselves. Camp ministry, I soon learned, isn't just a job—it's a way of life.

That first season at North Star Camp was an unforgettable journey of prayer and discovery. I arrived with gratitude, a bit of nervousness, and a deep conviction that God was calling us here for a reason. The camp had a new manager, a new season ahead, and more moving parts than I'd ever imagined. But from day one, I could see how God was already leading the way.

Surrounded by God

I'll never forget one afternoon when the tornado sirens went off. The alerts flashed across our phones, and I found myself inside Polaris Hall with nearly 80 people—kids full of questions, laughter, and a little fear. We prayed, we played, and we waited. Outside, the skies rumbled, but the storm passed around us.



Later in the summer, during the Pathfinder Camporee, we had over 700 people on the grounds—the largest event in North Star's history—and again, thunderstorm warnings came our way. The clouds gathered, the radar looked serious, and we prepared for the worst. But once again, the heavy storm circled around us. God built a wall of protection around the camp.

That's when I realized something: we weren't alone. God was not only surrounding the camp physically; He was surrounding it spiritually through the prayers of believers across Minnesota. I could feel those prayers. Along with our new facility manager, Joel Springer, I prayed every day for God's protection, and we saw miracles every day. I learned that North Star Camp is holy ground. When you come to this camp, expect to disconnect from the outside world and connect with nature and the God who created it.

Summer Recap

We launched our season with Adventurer Family Camp in late May, where more than 600 campers and parents came together for a weekend of laughter and testimonies.

Then came seven incredible weeks of Summer Camp dedicated to the theme "Chosen With a Purpose." From Cub to Junior, Camp Abilities, Tween, Teen, Extreme, and Family Camp, our grounds overflowed with energy, color, and life. Kids tried archery and horseback riding, learned to canoe, created crafts, and spent late nights by the campfire singing songs

of faith. But the real story wasn't in the activities; it was in the transformed lives.

By the end of summer:

- 460 campers experienced the joy of summer camp
- 169 accepted Jesus as their personal Savior
- 69 requested baptism
- 187 rededicated their lives to Christ
- 6 were baptized at camp
- 6 more scheduled baptisms in their home churches

Each of those numbers represents a heart touched by Jesus. One night, as I watched a group of teens raise their hands during worship, I realized that this is why North Star Camp exists: to help young people draw near to Jesus by bringing them to the foot of the cross.

The Heartbeat of Camp

This ministry works because of people—faithful, passionate, prayer-filled people. We had an amazing team of 45 young adult staff and volunteers who gave everything they had. They led worship, comforted homesick kids, organized activities, prayed over campers, and poured their hearts into service. They weren't just employees; they were ministers.

Behind them were so many supporters: camp pastors and nurses, conference leaders, community members from Brainerd and Wadena who helped us prepare for the season, volunteers from around the state who lent their skills, donors such as the men's ministry, and so many others. This camp belongs to the whole community of Minnesota Adventists.

And of course, I can't write this without thanking my wife and children. They have embraced this calling with me, spending weeks at camp, joining in the ministry, and sharing in the long hours and laughter. Camp life is not easy, but it's beautiful—and my family has made it holy ground for us.

This summer, I often walked through camp late at night after the kids were asleep. The stars would shine over the lake, the air would hum with crickets, and I would pray quietly: "Lord, thank You for what You're doing here. Keep surrounding us."



Join our 2026 staff!

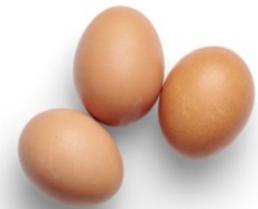
We need mature Christian young adults to staff our 2026 summer camp season.

- Grow your leadership skills
- Disciple kids for Jesus
- Spend the summer outdoors

New staff applications will be accepted starting in January.

Apply online: northstarcamp.org





WAKING UP TO *love*

By Becky Scoggins with Xzatica Patton & Paul Dosunmu

“IS NOT THIS THE KIND OF FASTING I HAVE CHOSEN: TO LOOSE THE CHAINS OF INJUSTICE AND UNTIE THE CORDS OF THE YOKE, TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE AND BREAK EVERY YOKE? IS IT NOT TO SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE HUNGRY AND TO PROVIDE THE POOR WANDERER WITH SHELTER—WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED, TO CLOTHE THEM, AND NOT TO TURN AWAY FROM YOUR OWN FLESH AND BLOOD?” (ISAIAH 58:6, 7)

It's Sabbath morning on Leech Street in St. Paul, Minnesota. In this leafy neighborhood just a few blocks from the historic mansions of Summit Avenue, dozens of women and their children are waking up at a homeless shelter, getting ready to face another day of frustration, loneliness, and often hunger. Just across the street, diligent volunteers are mixing pancake batter and slicing fruit in the kitchen of St. Paul Sharon Seventh-day Adventist Church. They've come to make breakfast for their neighbors.

The Morning Breakfast Program launched in March 2025, and already it's become a much-anticipated highlight on the weekly calendar of shelter residents and others in the neighborhood. Church doors open around 8:00 AM, and the regulars wake up new residents and invite them to hurry across the street. Sharon Church now feeds around 30 adults plus many children every Sabbath.

“Every plate served is a vessel for divine love and salvation,” reports community service leader Xzatica Patton. Visitors find “not just nourishing food but the love and acceptance that only Christ can provide. As we serve hot, wholesome breakfasts, we share the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath, a sacred time of rest and worship that reflects God's eternal plan. Many women have shown a keen interest in learning more.”

The centerpiece of every breakfast is the Prayer Box, which breakfast guests fill with scribbled prayers representing urgent needs, nagging fears, and dreams of better days. “We have witnessed incredible miracles,

answered prayers, renewed hope, and lives forever changed,” says Xzatica. The Prayer Box is prayed over at least twice each Sabbath—once during breakfast and again during the upstairs church service. Elders and other members also offer to pray with guests individually. Everyone is invited to attend Sabbath School and church if they wish, and one woman has even joined the church choir. The women know they belong here.

“Before I found this community, I felt invisible,” says one woman, “but here I've found friends, faith, and a renewed sense of purpose.” Another says, “Every Sabbath morning, I wake up knowing I'll be greeted with kindness and prayers. Learning about the seventh-day Sabbath has given me a new perspective on faith and God's love. It has helped me heal emotionally and spiritually.”

The Sharon Church breakfast ministry embodies the heart of Matthew 25:35: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.” It also offers a much-needed demonstration of genuine Sabbath observance as described in Isaiah 58. Instead of sleeping late or merely avoiding work, members joyfully sacrifice their time and money to loose the chains of injustice, set the oppressed free, and share food with the hungry (Isa. 58:6, 7).

Thrilled by early responses to their efforts, members hope to expand the program as funds allow. “It's the work of God,” says member Xzatica Patton. “You can do anything you set your mind to.”



How to Start a Meal Ministry

Would your church like to celebrate Sabbath by sharing food and friendship with others? St. Paul Sharon church members offer this advice:

Begin with prayer.

“God really gives us the strength when we're tired and don't feel like starting in the morning,” says Xzatica Patton. “As soon as we pray together, we get moving.”

Divide the duties.

If everyone cooks, your guests won't have anyone to eat with. Assign church members to visit and pray with people while others are cooking and serving.

Plan familiar menus.

“Our church is very international,” says Xzatica, “but I choose mostly American foods so women and kids from the shelter know what to expect.”

Follow budget strategies.

Affordable foods include pancake mix, frozen potatoes, and other groceries from discount clubs. For more expensive items such as fresh fruit, consider asking members to bring whatever is in season each week.

Set up ahead of time.

St. Paul Sharon members shop and do prep work before sundown on Friday so everything is ready to cook when they arrive on Sabbath. This allows volunteers to spend Friday evening with families and prevents last-minute stress.

Highlight the prayer box.

Breakfast guests at Sharon take the prayer box seriously and fill it with their requests and thanks to God. “We can see that prayer works!” they say.

Point visitors to Jesus.

It's important to offer food and love with no strings attached, but most people also have a deep desire for more. “We find that many ladies have already heard of Christ,” says Xzatica, “but they want to be reminded who He is. Our visitors notice that we quote directly from the Bible in our church.”

Create community.

Some people need space, but make sure everyone is personally invited to Sabbath School, church services, Bible studies, children's events, or lifestyle seminars.

Be predictable.

The most sustainable ministries happen at the same time and place each week. One-time events have their place, but a consistent schedule allows you to form a long-term community.

Keep Dreaming.



With faith and vision, St. Paul Sharon Church is seeking donors so they can expand their ministry to include daily meals or services such as counseling, job training, and health screenings. Pray with these volunteers as they share hope in Minnesota's capital city.

Sowing Seeds

Yin Schaff has done many cooking classes and health talks over the years, so it wasn't anything new when she began another round of classes held at the Duluth Adventist Church. But this time she made it a regular monthly class, inviting folks from the community and encouraging church members to attend and work toward forming relationships with our new friends.

During her health talks, Yin explained the importance of the spiritual aspect of our health, along with the mental, emotional, and physical aspects. She started a prayer box where people could place their prayer requests, and at each class Yin prayed over this box. Many people participated and responded positively, expressing how much they appreciated this thoughtful endeavor.

After a year and a half, Yin decided to move the cooking class from the church to her home, creating a more relaxed atmosphere and giving people space to mingle and get to know each other. With the transition, Yin explained that she would include a health-related Bible study along with the cooking demonstrations, food tasting, and recipe sharing. Many have expressed their appreciation for the new Bible study emphasis.

Please pray that our attendees will continue to experience spiritual growth and come to know Jesus better. “For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations” (Isaiah 61:11, NKJV).

Here's how other Minnesota churches are sharing food and faith:

- Hutchinson Church has offered healthy cooking classes just for kids.
- Dodge Center Church has invited professionals to present lifestyle or mental health seminars for members and guests.
- Several Minnesota churches have partnered with Pivio (formerly known as CHIP) to lead participants through a complete health transformation.
- Some churches invite neighbors to monthly plant-based meals based on a theme, such as Mediterranean, Chinese, or Thanksgiving favorites.

By Brenda K. Leavelle

Cooking Classes Lead To Prayer, Bible Study, & Friendship



By Jude Senatus

FLOURISHING

It started as a dream to create a spiritual space for single believers in Minnesota and grew into a living testimony of God's faithfulness. Our first Singles Spiritual Retreat took place last August and proved to be more than just a gathering.

Under the guidance of conference Family Life Ministry coordinator Eduardo Jacobo, this initiative blossomed into a reality that left participants filled with joy. The retreat was prayerfully planned and led by Dr. Ju and a dedicated team of volunteers, including Becky Porter, Choolwe Luya, Robert Nguru, Chipu Monga, and many others. Mutinta Dewa and her team led out in creating vibrant, welcoming décor for the retreat.

Attendees traveled from across Minnesota and even Wisconsin, eager to fellowship and experience an atmosphere filled with warmth and belonging. For many singles in our churches, this retreat offered something long overdue: a space where they were not overlooked or pushed aside but embraced as valued members of the body of Christ.

Dr. Jude Senatus opened the day with a reminder that “singleness is not isolation but instead preparation.” Pastor Darnisha Thomas delivered the keynote message, “Positioning to Flourish on Purpose.” Pastor Rachel Hyman presented “Dodging Dogs and Divas: Spotting Wolves in Designer Clothing,” while Pastor Ezra Kenyanya spoke on “Choosing Solitude Without Shame.”

Each talk resonated deeply. Participants said the messages were highly relevant and needed. The speakers' words challenged hearts and brought healing and renewed purpose.

At its core, this retreat was more than an event—it was a movement. It boldly declared that singles in our churches are not forgotten. They are not defined by what they lack but by who they are in Christ. The Minnesota Conference, through this retreat, sent a powerful message: you are not invisible. God sees you, we see you, and you belong here.



TOGETHER

“The church can make a welcoming place for single adults by celebrating their wins and who they are as a person. Affirm them by saying, ‘You are enough.’ Avoid the unsolicited matchmaking questions: ‘Why are you single?’ or ‘When are you getting married?’ (it’s awkward). Be intentional with inclusive language and activities as a church family. Empathize with their struggles of singleness and avoid saying ‘Enjoy your singleness.’ Lastly, view them as adults and not children. Encourage them to share their expertise based on their ministry passions, such as children’s and youth ministry, deacon/ deaconess ministry, music, mental health, or education.”
—Pastor Darnisha Thomas

ALMOST HEAVEN

Minnesotans Meet the World at GC Session

Last summer thousands of Seventh-day Adventists traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, to worship together, choose leaders, and make decisions for the future of the world church. A General Conference Session (GC Session) is undoubtedly one of the most distinctive religious gatherings on earth. This year’s delegates represented more than 23 million worldwide Adventists from 212 nations who are currently proclaiming the gospel in 420 languages. Enjoy these reflections from Minnesota Adventists who participated in the 2025 GC Session.

Josh Ortizano, Maplewood student and member of the GC Session international choir:

“It was amazing to hear all the languages around me. We’re divided by lands but all united by music. During the parade of flags, we were cheering for every country. It was like a reverse Tower of Babel—we all spoke the language of heaven.”

Kim Almaraz, Maplewood student and literature evangelist:

“Our team canvassed [sold books] at GC Session. Everyone said Hi to everyone else, even strangers. It was like family.”

Iosif Dubreuze, Maplewood student and literature evangelist:

“It was especially great to meet other people who had done literature evangelism before because we shared the same experiences. GC felt like heaven—seeing so many people united despite surface differences.”

Sean Lee, pastor, Southview Adventist Church:

“A few things stand out: 1. The Adventist Church is big and global. It is big and broad enough to embrace all the differences. 2. At GC Session I reconnected with many friends, especially from my home country. 3. Church business is not an easy thing, and grace is required, but the delegates were able to update the policy for church mission. 4. It was very mission-focused.”

Denzil McNeilus, Minnesota lay leader and mission supporter:

“I had the honor to be a delegate and a member of the nominating committee. I witnessed firsthand God’s leading in the affairs of our church. I believe the Lord has blessed our church and given us leadership that will see us through to the end of time.”

Gavin Anthony, assistant to the president and director of strategic initiatives, Minnesota Conference:

“The tone of this session was missional and optimistic. The disciple-making theme sets our church on a different trajectory.”

Eric Mokua, vice president for administration, Minnesota Conference:

“Erton Köhler, in the last sermon of GC Session, emphasized that a strong mission is dependent on a united church. He believes that if the church is unified, the Holy Spirit will dwell among our members, and we won’t have time for division. I am fully persuaded that the Holy Spirit is leading our own conference in this direction.”



IT’S ALL ABOUT MISSION

On the final Sabbath of GC Session, newly elected world church president Erton Köhler of Brazil urged Adventists to measure growth not by “ABC”—Attendance, Buildings, and Cash—but by “D”—Disciple-making. Here are more thoughts from Pastor Köhler’s presentations:

PEOPLE COME FIRST

“Jesus came for people, Jesus lived for people, Jesus ministered to people, Jesus died for people, and when He returns, He will take only people to heaven.”

FREELY RECEIVE, FREELY GIVE

“Our church is not called to be a warehouse but rather a distribution center.”

WE NEED EACH OTHER

“Together we are stronger. Together we go farther. Together we arrive faster.”

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

“Our differences are like musical notes. In God’s hands they can form the most harmonious and beautiful symphony.”

DIFFERENCES NEED NOT DIVIDE

To those who express varied opinions: “You are part of the family, and we appreciate you, as well.”

WE HAVE THIS HOPE

“Our message is not about fear. It is about Jesus. He is coming soon—and we are people of that hope.”

AND A HEARTFELT FAREWELL

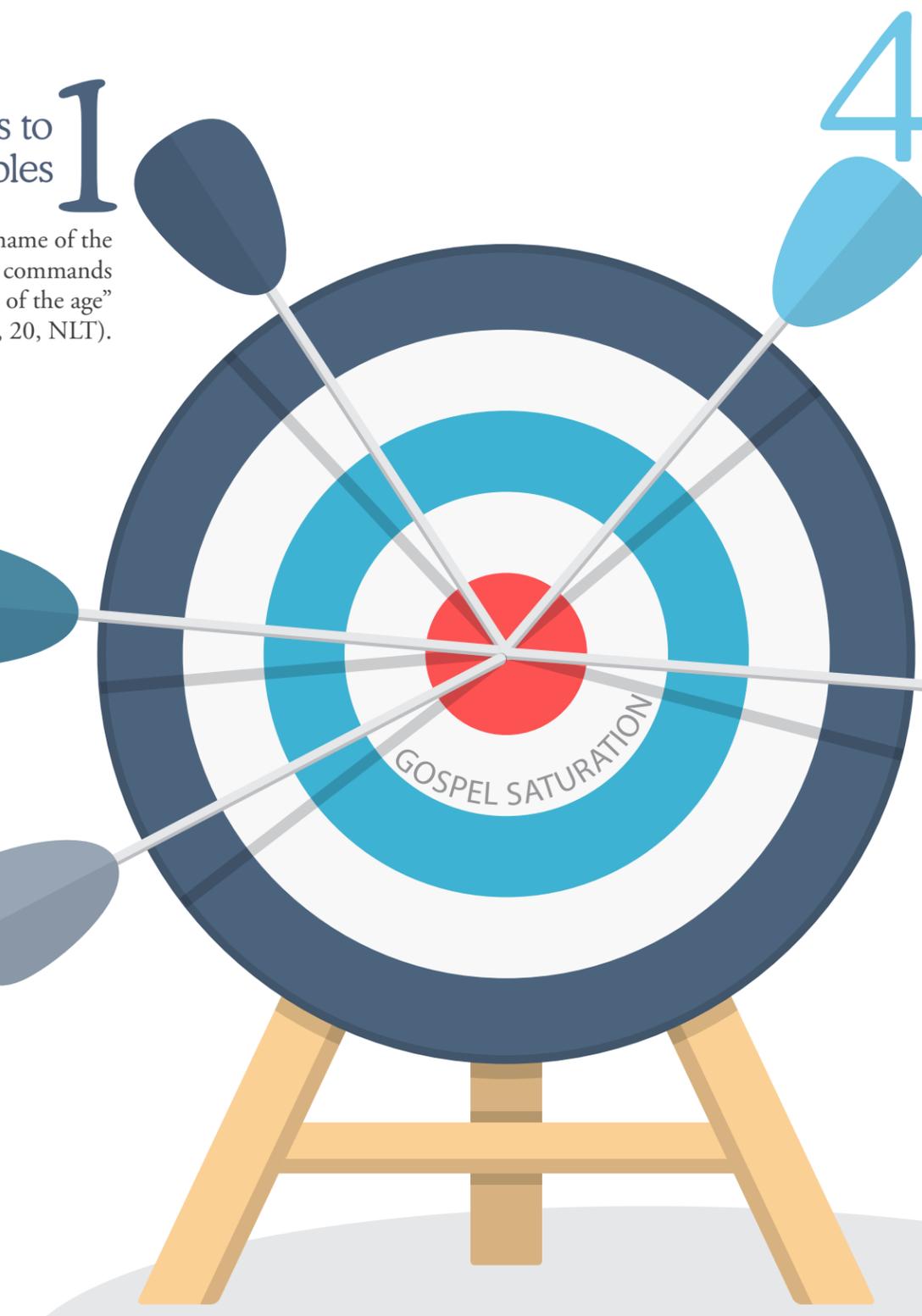
Retiring church president Ted Wilson also offered warm words of encouragement to the worldwide church family: “It has been such a privilege for Nancy and me to serve you and the Lord. . . . Remember Jesus’ words in Revelation 3:11. . . . ‘Behold, I am coming quickly. Hold fast to what you have, that no one may take your crown’ (NKJV). May God bless you! Maranatha!”

Photo Credit: Tor Tjeransen / AME (CC BY 4.0) and Thaise Snider : AME (CC BY 4.0)



Where are we going & how will we get there?

Adventists voted church manual updates at the last two General Conference sessions. Why is this important for the world church—and for us in Minnesota?



Before Jesus went back to heaven, He called us to make disciples—who can make more disciples

1

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NLT).

This is why the call to make disciples is the focus of the official Seventh-day Adventist mission statement

2

“Make disciples of Jesus Christ who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages in preparation for His soon return” (See Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; Rev. 14:6–12).

Jesus’ call is also why Adventists at the 2022 GC Session added a completely new chapter to our church manual called “Making Disciples” (chapter 6)

3

Opening paragraph: Making disciples is a continuous process by which a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, matures as His disciple, and makes more disciples. Baptism is an essential part of the discipleship process, but it is not the end result of that process. (p. 44)

Challenge: Disciples are baptized into Christ’s body, the church. Their commitment to obey Christ in making disciples should be demonstrated before baptism. (p. 44)

Goal: Loving others as God loves us, which is intimately connected to unity, is the ultimate indication of true discipleship. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). (p. 47)

Building on this goal, delegates at the 2025 GC Session modified our church manual to emphasize the need for pastors to equip members for service and plant new churches

4

Summary of church manual changes: Following the New Testament model of Timothy and Titus, early Adventist ministers raised up new churches and visited established congregations to offer counsel. Ellen White explained: “Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: ‘Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields’” (*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 30).

5 OUR MISSION TARGET

Imagine what could happen in Minnesota if we directed our best efforts toward these priorities:

- Equipping members for service
- Planting churches in new places

Together we would move closer to the target Jesus set for us—to spread the gospel into every part of our world and state.

“The glad tidings of salvation are to be proclaimed in every village, town, and city. But where are the missionaries? In the name of God I ask, Where are the laborers together with God?” (Ellen White, *The Review and Herald*, March 4, 1902).

“And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole OF MINNESOTA, so that all THE VILLAGES, TOWNS, AND CITIES IN MINNESOTA will hear it; and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NLT paraphrase).

Staying on target

What needs to change so your local church can start actively making disciples? Talk about these questions with your Bible study group, youth class, or church board.

Jesus' Command

In the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Jesus gives one central command—to “make disciples.” “Going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching to obey” are all intended to support this key command—to make disciples.

Question 1: What happens if we prioritize baptizing or teaching rather than making disciples?

Follow-up: What can our local church do differently to start multiplying rather than just adding new members?



Disciple-Making Comes First

In the Gospels, Jesus' ministry of teaching and preaching and healing happened within the umbrella of building intentional disciple-making relationships with His core followers (the 12 and the 70).

Question 2: What happens when we try to do ministry apart from making disciples?

Follow-up: What can our church do differently to build long-term disciple-making relationships with youth, new members, and guests?



Changing Our Language

At the recent GC Session, delegates voted to amend the Church Manual by changing the word “discipleship” to “disciple-making” where appropriate. This highlights the active and missional purpose of Jesus' command to make disciples.

Question 3: What happens to us when discipleship focuses on self-improvement rather than actively making disciples?

Follow-up: Jesus says, “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matt. 4:19). What would this look like in our local church? What steps can we take to make disciples who make disciples?



By Jim Moon & Brent Lane

The sounds of young voices blanket all corners of the property. In the church yard frantic rounds of Nine-Square-in-the-Air take place. In the sanctuary a Bible lesson on the Holy Spirit unfolds. In the fellowship room crafts and snacks are enjoyed while community builds. It's Kids' Night at the Arlington Seventh-day Adventist Church.

For years the church has consistently held a yearly VBS for its neighbors, but 11 years ago the members took their community youth ministry to a deeper level with twice-monthly gatherings for children who live in the neighborhood. They saw the opportunity and chose to be present in young lives all year long.

It's a serious commitment and a great deal of work. But for the 15-30 neighborhood kids who regularly show up, these weeknight gatherings have become the only church many of them ever attend, a place where they not only hear the gospel, but more importantly feel the gospel.

Bible knowledge isn't the only gospel these young people take with them. Jodi Anderson told how one little boy was excited to take some leftover pizza home to share with his grandfather and deaf uncle. These kids take the love shown to them and return it to their homes and neighborhoods.

Let the Children Come



“They will often do that,” Jodi says. “Can I take extra food for my sister?’ or whatever. To me that’s the essence of evangelism.” This is not a short-term evangelistic campaign but a long-term investment in the community.

The children themselves realize that Kids’ Night is more than an entertaining evening. One girl, Julie, says, “They gave me a better understanding of God and taught me things I would have never found myself. I thank them for helping me get closer to God.”

And what happens next? The members believe that’s in God’s hands, and that if He keeps bringing kids, He will be faithful to continue leading the way in this ministry. They believe wholeheartedly in the call of Jesus in Mark 10:14 to “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children” (NLT).

Recently Jim Moon of the Minnesota Tent Makers Network sat down with Arlington Church volunteers to hear more about the beginnings of Kids’ Night. Here’s the short version of their conversation:

Jim: Let’s start at the beginning. How did Kids’ Night come to life?

Jodi Anderson: About 11 years ago, a church member who owned a thrift store in town noticed neighborhood kids flocking to her shop. She’d host little events at her house, and the kids always came. She approached me about doing something similar at the church. So we started with informal activities—games, snacks, just a place to gather.

Jim: What a wonderful grassroots start! Josh, what do you remember about those early days?

Josh Skelley: Jodi’s version is spot on. I wasn’t part of pulling it together at first, but soon enough, this group became the core. What’s amazing is how the group has replenished itself over time. When the original kids grew up and moved on, a new wave just appeared—no gap. Sometimes we have 13 kids, other times over 30. They keep bringing friends, and it’s just a really cool experience.

Jim: How has this ministry impacted the kids’ faith experience?

Jodi: Josh often says it best—when he was a kid, he wouldn’t have come to church unless his parents insisted. But these kids want to be here. Their parents aren’t pushing them; sometimes, I don’t think they even know exactly where their kids are going! The kids would love it if we did this every week, but it’s a lot for us. What’s special is that they call this “church.” To them, Wednesday night is church.

Josh: It’s true. The kids refer to this as their church. One girl even talked about sharing what she learned about Moses with her siblings. That’s Glenn’s teaching coming through.

Jim: Glenn, do you usually teach the Bible lesson?

Glenn Selchow: Yes, though we started with mostly games, it evolved. Now, we begin with a 10- or 15-minute Bible time, then move to crafts or games, and finally, we feed the kids before they go home. They love to eat!

Jim: What’s it like teaching the Bible to such a lively group?

Glenn: It can be challenging—lots of excitement and chatter. But there are definitely kids who all the time pay attention. They like to hear what’s being said, and one thing I find that’s really cool is when I have Scripture up there [on a video slide], they always raise their hand and ask if they can read it.

Kristin Skelley: I remember Glenn teaching his lesson once after our yearly VBS, and a little boy said, “I remember that from VBS!” It’s sticking—these lessons are making an impact.

Jim: Some of the kids told me, “This is family. We are family here.” How does that resonate with you?

Jodie Anderson: A few years ago, a girl told us, “This place is a safe place for us.” That meant a lot. We hope it’s life-changing for them, now and in the future.

Scan to listen to full interview



Bizzett-Johnson, Abby, 3/4/48–7/15/25
Bowie, Myrna, 6/15/33–6/14/25
Castillo, Samuel, 2/14/86–1/4/25
Dockham, Samuel Shayne, 3/31/91–5/15/25
Elling, Mary Lou, 8/17/37–8/16/25
Fleming, Gerald Dale, 1/1/34–2/15/25
Kaiser, Viola O., 8/31/46–5/7/25
Leavelle, Sandra, 1/7/47–10/11/25
Manske, Douglas, 3/22/39–2/27/25
Mintalar, Jose M., 10/18/41–1/7/25
Parker, Vernon F., 11/9/32–4/1/25
Procko, Gayle, 11/1/43–6/13/25
Ramos, Olga Iris, 6/1/50–9/8/25
Ruehmann, Marlene, 12/15/51–1/24/25
Skaaland, Palmer, 6/19/36–1/29/25
Sullivan, Eleanor Agnes, 12/26/24–4/14/25
Swanson, Evan, 3/2/40–3/5/25
Tayrus, Lydia, –2/15/25
Tucker, Ivy, 9/27/33–3/21/25
Williams, Cherie Ann, 9/14/78–2/1/25

William Lamine Vah, Sr.

Born Nov. 26, 1932, in Rivercess, Grand Bassa County, Liberia, and died Nov. 24, 2024, in the Good Samaritan nursing home in Robbinsdale, MN. He was a member of the Minneapolis First Church. He was preceded in death by his parents, Madam Synyee and Kaapenda Vah, uncles Charlie Vah and Teah Johnson, foster father William Nolan, wife Catherine Harris Vah, and two children, plus siblings Benjamin Harris and Tommy Vah. He was survived by his children, Carl Vah, Vivien Vah, Wilhelmina Vah Melton Keita, and Nelli Mae Vah Arthur; adopted son James Wleh; nine grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; four siblings; and a host of cousins. Elder Vah taught for several years at Konola Academy in Liberia.

Marilee McNeilus

It is with heavy yet hopeful hearts that we share the news of the passing of Marilee McNeilus, who fell asleep in Jesus early Friday morning, February 14, 2025, at her home in Dodge Center, MN.

Marilee’s family held a private funeral service on Monday, February 17, at the Dodge Center Seventh-day Adventist Church. During the service, the pastor shared verses and quotes he found in her Bible. The quotes were consistent with the selfless life of service to God and His church that she lived. She used her talents to share the love of Jesus with family, friends, local church, and in countries around the world through her involvement with ASI. Along with her family, she was also a longtime supporter of ministry in the Minnesota Conference.

In this time of reflection and mourning, we ask for your continued prayers and support for her family, especially for her dear husband, Garwin, who shared 65 wonderful years with her and now faces the challenge of this great loss. May the comforting words of Scripture, the hope of eternal life, and our belief that death is but a short sleep fortify our hearts and bring us peace as we remember Marilee.

Her son, Denzil McNeilus, shared his faith in the reminder that we will see Marilee again, as well as his family’s gratitude for the condolences that have been expressed: “While we grieve this loss, we take comfort in the promise of Christ’s soon return and the assurance of being reunited with my mother on that glorious day when the trumpets sound and He calls us home. Your prayers and support mean more to us than words can express during this difficult time. Thank you for keeping our family in your thoughts and prayers.”

Let us honor Marilee’s memory by continuing her legacy of love and service, ever mindful of the glorious hope that awaits us all.

Building Bridges

Minnesota-Based Ministry Brings Hope To Ukrainian Refugees

By Alexander Bolotnikov &
Becky Scoggins

“God calls us to go!” Minnesota Conference president Jeff Scoggins made this heartfelt appeal in the spring of 2024, urging members to embrace international evangelism. Many listeners signed up for mission trips to Africa and South America. However, Pastor Alexander Bolotnikov realized he could not travel to tropical climates because of his health. That’s when he received a phone call pointing him toward a different mission.

The caller, a Ukrainian Adventist pastor in Prague, Czech Republic (or Czechia), described how several visitors from varied Christian backgrounds had approached his church and asked to be baptized. He was surprised by their familiarity with Adventist teachings. Curious, he questioned the visitors and discovered that many had encountered biblical truth by listening to sermons by Pastor Alexander Bolotnikov of Shalom Media. For decades, this ministry has shared the gospel with Jewish people and seekers from Christian and secular backgrounds. Although he is based in Minnesota, Pastor Bolotnikov’s messages are available worldwide on YouTube, and the ministry also operates a Bible school.

Since the onset of war in Ukraine, the small nation of Czechia has welcomed around half a million refugees. In the capital city of Prague, Ukrainian churches have become a haven for these seekers, and many are eager to grow in their faith. Now they were asking, “How can we learn more?”

The Path to Prague

With this connection established, Pastor Bolotnikov and his son accepted an invitation to conduct an evangelistic series in Prague entitled “Law and Grace in the Epistle to the Romans.” Over 100 listeners



from across Czechia attended in person, and many more joined online. Among the attendees was Doctor Ivan, who traveled daily by train from the city of Pilzen to attend every meeting. His aim was not only personal growth but also sharing the harmonious revelation of Jesus’ character with his own Protestant congregation. Thrilled by the message of

Romans, he realized that the doctrines of law and grace do not contradict each other but harmonize.

As the evangelistic series progressed, the Word of God inspired transformation. On the final day, three individuals—shaped by war, displacement, and discovery—were baptized, publicly declaring their covenant with Christ.

Surprising Testimonies

The meetings coincided with the 15th anniversary of the Ukrainian church in Prague. That Sabbath, more than 500 guests filled the sanctuary, including conference and union leaders. It was a celebration of unity—Baptists, Adventists, and seekers from many backgrounds gathered under one roof.

Throughout the day, Pastor Bolotnikov heard more than 30 personal testimonies from viewers of Shalom Media. Stories ranged from finding Christ through online broadcasts to experiencing spiritual renewal in the midst of war.

Shalom Media has become a bridge across borders. From a humble base in Minnesota, the video sermons and lessons have impacted distant corners of Europe and prepared hearts for in-person ministry. Pastor Bolotnikov now sees that God turned an unexpected path into a fruitful mission. “God’s path may differ from ours,” he says, “but it leads exactly where we are needed.”

By Ilona Stepanova

United in Baptism

International conflicts fail to divide church family

While the enemy uses every opportunity to destroy humankind, our Lord continues to win souls for His kingdom. On August 23, an unusually cold yet most wonderful summer day, ten beautiful young people chose light over darkness and declared before the entire universe that their lives now belong to the Lamb who saved them by the power of His blood. Pastor Valera Ruchko baptized the new members and welcomed them into Source of Life Adventist Church. What a victory!

It was nothing short of a miracle to witness these young people of Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Moldovan origin—despite brutal conflicts raging on the world stage—embrace and rejoice over one another as one family in Christ. Our joy was made complete with the testimony of an American man, David, who also chose our multinational, Russian-speaking congregation as his spiritual home.

While the enemy strives to fracture nations and divide tongues, the citizens of heaven stand united—shoulder to shoulder—ready to join God’s army and continue the work of our Lord Jesus Christ until their last breath or His glorious return. May this story uplift spirits and remind us that heaven is nearer than we dare imagine. Stay blessed!





By Savannah Carlson

Ripple Effect

Church Leadership Summit Equips Minnesota Missionaries

Worthy insights from summit presenters:

“The power of your calling is directly related to the intimacy and trust you have with Jesus.”

—Bob Folkenberg, Jr.

“If someone struggles with mental health, never say they have weak faith. We need to stop thinking we can ‘fix’ people but journey with them.”

—David Kamande

“Evangelism is not about inviting people to your church. It is inviting people into your life.”

—Vadim Dementyev

“In Leviticus 19:34, God says, ‘I love the stranger and want you to love the stranger too.’”

—Lisa Isensee

It was the calm before the chaos. At 6 a.m. I walked from my hotel room to the River’s Edge Convention Center show office, where my team would be gathering in 15 minutes to finish setting up for the Church Leadership Summit. I unlocked the door and turned on the lights. Our boxes of programs and giveaway bags sat open, ready for distribution. Name badges were lined up alphabetically, waiting for their owners to check in. Silence reigned.

I took a deep breath. I had done the math. It looked like 725 people would be on site—the largest convention I had ever helped organize. I asked God to be with us. I prayed that He would inspire every heart and intervene where needed: in travel plans, illness, technology, and speech.

As the conference office team gathered in the show office, an exterior door banged open, and the chaos of the day began.

The day was a blur of people checking in, turning on projectors, greeting presenters, troubleshooting, answering questions, and walking thousands of steps, and the clamor of the day soon turned into the quiet of the evening.

From 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., we witnessed people asking questions, growing, meeting friends, and praying together. We nodded along during Pastor Bob Folkenberg, Jr.’s sermons. We smiled as Maplewood Academy students led in congregational singing. We winced when the last of our giveaways disappeared from the registration table. And when the caterer served lunch to all 725 people, we saw God multiply food just enough to feed everyone who came.

Every single one of our 55 presenters showed up, a first in Church Leadership Summit history. Not one breakout session was canceled due to illness or other unexpected challenges.

As the day came to an end, and silence began to overtake the building, I reflected on what I witnessed. I hadn’t made it to many sessions, but I had listened as people processed what they were learning. And I realized: God was present in the building that day.

He reminded us that we are called. Called to “live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them” (1 Cor. 7:17).

You don’t have to be in an elected position to be a leader. God has given each of us gifts to answer His call—wherever we are. If 725 people each influenced just one person for Jesus every month—and then that person did the same—the ripple effect would be incredible. By next October, that single day of training could represent nearly three million people touched by the gospel.

That’s the power of embracing your call. It starts with one person saying “yes” to God—and multiplies from there. How about you? Is the Holy Spirit speaking to you today? Will you embrace your call?

By Jeff Scoggins

Welcome, Gavin Anthony

This year Minnesota Conference welcomed Pastor Gavin Anthony as our assistant to the president for strategic initiatives. We created this newly restructured position to combine mission-focused fundraising with big-picture planning. Gavin and his family came to Minnesota from Iceland, where Gavin served for 14 years as conference president. He has also lived and worked in England, Sri Lanka, Albania, and Ireland. He met his wife, Tobba, in Iceland and they have two children, Kristiana, and Eoin. As an experienced author and teacher, Gavin is available to lead out in seminars about mission, stewardship, prayer, and disciple-making.

Gavin, it’s been great working with you. Coming from Iceland, you’re the first person who ever moved here and didn’t complain about the weather. What exactly do you do for the church in Minnesota?

Anything the president asks me to do! Joking aside, I help to identify what matters most and make plans to do that.

In my view, this starts with getting down to basics. Right now, we are beginning to prioritize prayer and disciple-making. Before Jesus returned to Heaven, He left two commands ringing in the disciples’ ears. First, make disciples, and second, wait for the Holy Spirit before you start doing this. It was only when the disciples humbled themselves in prayer before God that the Holy Spirit gave them supernatural power to make more disciples. This is the foundation everything else is built on. Of course, as leaders we must be visibly modeling prayer and disciple-making ourselves.

Another part of my role is helping ministries such as Maplewood Academy and North Star Camp achieve financial stability and fulfill their calling from Jesus.

Your department includes Planned Giving and Trust Services. What do finances have to do with mission?

Giving allows each of us the chance to invest our resources in the Kingdom of God. God may have given you funds to share now. Or you may be able to invest in God’s work by leaving a will. Our department can give you practical help for investing financially in God’s work—just send us an email or give us a call.

With the many hats you wear, how would you most like to serve our Minnesota churches and schools?

In describing Pentecost, Ellen White wrote, “One interest prevailed. One subject of emulation swallowed up all others. The only ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ’s character and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom” (*The Review and Herald*, April 30, 1908). That’s the calling God has placed on my life. So this is the vision I want to help cast. I want to do whatever I can do to help our churches prepare the whole of Minnesota for the return of Jesus. I believe Jesus is coming really soon.



This year God blessed the Minnesota Conference with multiple new coworkers. We're so grateful for each team member!



Gavin Anthony
Assistant to the President; Director for Strategic Initiatives

Gavin brings a wealth of experience as a conference administrator and a deep passion for prayer. His newly restructured position allows Minnesota Conference to approach ministry with greater strategic and missional focus.



Wenn Paul Adam Baliton
Assistant Boys' Dean, Maplewood Academy

Paul holds a master's degree in education from the Adventist University of the Philippines and is completing a doctorate in educational administration. He has dedicated recent years to teaching and serving in Adventist schools.



Dean Campillo
Maintenance Director, Maplewood Academy

With a professional background in landscaping and extensive skills in mechanics, carpentry, welding, and plumbing, Dean brings valuable hands-on expertise to maintaining Maplewood Academy's facilities.



Noelyn de Dios
Lead Teacher, Maranatha Adventist School in Dodge Center

Noelyn brings years of classroom experience and most recently served as principal and grade five and six teacher in Quezon City, Philippines. She is completing a master's degree in education from the Adventist University of the Philippines.



Gerald Dube
Bible Worker, Cornerstone Seventh-day Adventist Church

Originally from South Africa, Gerald and his family followed God's call to the United States. After serving as a church elder, youth leader, Pathfinder counselor, and Bible teacher, he completed the Minnesota lay pastor program and continues to share the gospel faithfully.



Charles "Chad" Dungan
Kindergarten / 1st Grade Teacher, Minnetonka Christian Academy

Chad previously served as lead and middle school teacher at Omaha Memorial Adventist School in Nebraska. His teaching journey has also taken him to Taiwan, Texas, and Minnesota's own Capital City Adventist Christian School. Chad holds a master's in educational administration from La Sierra University.



Kenny Ebinger
Bible and English Teacher, Minnetonka Christian Academy

Kenny completed a master's degree in religion at Andrews University. His background includes teaching at São Paulo Adventist University and working in communication and social media management. Fluent in four languages, Kenny is passionate about helping young people encounter Jesus through Scripture.



Pamela Fenton
Science Teacher, Maplewood Academy

Pam brings a strong background in science education. From 2012 to 2024, she served at Dakota Adventist Academy. She holds a master's degree in education from Mount Vernon Nazarene University and enjoys incorporating technology to make learning engaging and meaningful for her students.



Chala Gemeda
Bible Worker, Oromo Seventh-day Adventist Church

Chala serves part-time as a Bible worker and ministry leader for the Oromo Seventh-day Adventist Church. Chala earned a theology degree from Union Adventist University and has been active in evangelism across the U.S. and abroad, including leading youth Bible studies and mission work in India.



Fannie Khoza
Bible Worker, Wadena Seventh-day Adventist Church

Fannie participated in the Minnesota Conference's literature evangelism program and now shares her love for Jesus through Bible work. Fannie's passion for connecting people to Christ is evident in every aspect of her ministry.



Jae Rim Song
Pastor, Minneapolis Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church

Jae Rim came to Minnesota from Kangwon Province in the Republic of Korea with his wife and daughter. He brings more than a decade of pastoral experience and holds a master of divinity degree from Sahmyook University.



Joel Springer
Camp Facilities Director, North Star Camp

Joel previously worked at Mount Aetna Retreat Center in Maryland, where he coordinated outdoor school programs, hosted groups, and managed challenge course operations. Joel and his wife, Darlene, have one adult son and are excited to be part of ministry in Minnesota.



Gilead Tarus
Ministry Leader, Rochester Seventh-day Adventist Church

A Maplewood Academy graduate, Gilead holds a theology degree from Union Adventist University. His experience includes literature evangelism, pastoral internship, substitute teaching, and leading a week of prayer. Gilead brings a contagious energy and love for Jesus.



Thorbjorg "Tobba" Thorbjarnardottir
2nd Grade Teacher, Minnetonka Christian Academy

Originally from Iceland, Tobba served as a teacher at Iceland Elementary School from 2017 to 2025. She holds a master's degree in education and leadership from the University of Iceland and brings rich international experience to her classroom.



Joel Toro Callejas
Pastor, Multi-Church Hispanic District

Joel previously served as a Bible worker. With many years of pastoral experience, he now ministers to the Fairmont Hispanic SDA Church, St. James Hispanic Group, Worthington Hispanic Church, and Northwest Metro Hispanic Church.



5 FAVORITES

“The Privilege of Prayer,” *Steps to Christ*, ch. 13
Connect with your Savior as a friend

Why We Pray, by John Peckham
Find out how prayer fits in the cosmic conflict

If My People Pray, by Randy Maxwell
Revive your prayer life starting today

Lead With Prayer, by Ryan Skoog + others
Learn the spiritual habits of Christian leaders

Prayer Warriors, by Celeste Perrino
Available at adventistbookcenter.com
Re-imagine prayer warfare in an epic story

WISE WORDS

“In every difficulty we are to see a call to prayer.”
(*The Desire of Ages*, p. 667)

GOD’S CALL

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Phil. 4:6)

TRY THIS

Pray the words of Scripture.
If your prayers ever seem devoid of content, open the Bible and pray God’s words back to Him. This will transform your devotional life.

Experience united prayer.
Join worldwide Adventists for 10 Days of Prayer, January 7–17, 2026. Find resources:
tendaysofprayer.org
revivalandreformation.org

Start praying every day for revival.
Do this for yourself and for our Adventist mission here in Minnesota.

Favorite prayer discoveries to share with friends

PRAYER POWER

MINNESOTA PRAYER THANKS

We celebrate God’s gifts:

Jesus saved us by faith and chose us to be His disciples here in Minnesota.

MN churches show encouraging signs of growth.

Record numbers of Pathfinders, Adventurers, and campers are being disciplined at North Star Camp events.

Despite current challenges, Minnesota was one of four NAD conferences with a slight increase in tithe last year. Your faithfulness is inspiring.

700+ members attended our Church Leadership Summit and carried their enthusiasm back to their local churches.

Recently Minnesota launched three new church groups: Ghanaian (Brooklyn Center), Brazilian (Bloomington), and Karen (Albert Lea).

“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”
(James 1:17)

MINNESOTA PRAYER REQUESTS

We seek God’s mercy:

For an expanded prayer movement to transform our families and churches in Minnesota.

For an unprecedented wave of the Holy Spirit to crash over our state, leading to revival and decisions for Jesus.

For blessings as Minnesota churches continue Pentecost 2025 outreach and follow up with visitors.

For renewed commitment to stewardship as we expand God’s mission in Minnesota.

For greater wisdom, more students, and financial miracles for our Adventist schools.

For our children to know and serve Jesus and for spiritual mentors to lead the way.

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matt. 19:26)

UPCOMING

- Jan. 1 North Star Camp starts accepting new staff applications
- Jan. 7–17 Worldwide Adventist 10 Days of Prayer
- Jan. 18 Special Constituency Session (MWA)
- Mar. 2 Registration opens for 2026 North Star Camp season
- May 17 MN Conference Constituency Session
- May 24 Maplewood Academy Graduation
- May 29–31 Adventurer Family Camp at North Star
- June 9–13 Camp Meeting at Maplewood Academy
- June–Aug. North Star Camp summer sessions
- Aug. 6–9 Pathfinder Camporee at North Star

For more events, check emails and websites for North Star Camp, Maplewood Academy, and local Adventist schools and churches.

SIGN UP FOR MORE NEWS

Go to mnsda.com and scroll all the way down to find a sign-up box for Pastor Jeff’s monthly e-newsletter, the EXTRA. If you already signed up and don’t receive it every month, check your email junk folder.



Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is quoted from Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.* Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture marked NKJV is taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture marked NLT is from Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Bible Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois. All rights reserved.



MN SDA Conference
8232 Highway 65 NE
Spring Lake Park, MN 55432

Address Service
Requested

The Northern Light

SAVE THE DATE

110th Regular Session

This is preliminary notice of the 110th Regular Constituency Session of the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

10:00 a.m. Sunday, May 17, 2026
Heritage Center of Brooklyn Center

More details and delegate materials
to come in spring, 2026.