

ONTARIO CONFERENCE

# HIGHLIGHTS

Winter 2020

MINISTERING IN THE  
**CURRENT  
ENVIRONMENT**

THE COVID-19 ERA  
Impact on the Conference

OUTREACH  
Cessna Dedication

URBAN MISSION  
Reflecting Jesus in our Cities



 **Seventh-day  
Adventist Church**  
ONTARIO CONFERENCE

Conference President  
**Mansfield Edwards**

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**W**hen I first heard about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), I wasn't too worried. I figured it would come and go, like SARS or Mad Cow Disease. Back then, I couldn't imagine that this disease would impact everyone in the world.

The beginning of 2020 was a flurry of activity as I visited churches across Ontario for training and speaking engagements. Over time, I saw COVID-19 change our church culture—first no hugging; then no potlucks; then no communion.

In mid-March, our churches closed their doors, and Ontario Conference office workers began working remotely. By the end of March, the COVID-19 situation was changing dai-

ly. As soon as we sent out one set of updates from the conference, we had to send out another.

At first, I felt lost and afraid. I worried that I'd never return to the conference building and that I or someone I loved would contract COVID. Notifications on my phone of daily COVID cases heightened my fears. One morning, God led me to Psalm 91, and I meditated on it, particularly, "You shall not be afraid ... of the pestilence that walks in darkness" (Psalm 91:5, NKJV). Slowly, I learned to leave all my burdens to God—one of the most important lessons of 2020.

**Here are a few other lessons reflected in this edition of *Ontario Highlights*:**

1. You don't have to be in a church building to find community. I con-



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nected with a small group, which continues to be a lifeline, during the General Conference’s 100 Days of Prayer. See pp. 18-19, 22-23 for more on building a virtual community during COVID-19.

2. Be grateful and find joy in all circumstances. God showed me that His mercies are new every morning and brought me examples of others who found joy amidst unimaginable loss. See pp. 20-21 for a testimony from Bramalea Church.
3. We are not here by chance. If you are reading this, it means God still has work for you to do; work that nothing—even a pandemic—can hinder. In this issue, you’ll find examples of how ministry has con-

tinued at the conference, local churches and schools.

There is much to celebrate, in our conference even in a pandemic, including 346 baptisms and 74 professions of faith. However, God calls us to do more. We planted the seeds in 2020 with various initiatives, including total member involvement (p. 10) and urban missions (pp. 8, 14, 15). Virtual days of fasting and prayer, on January 9 and 16, will further solidify the vision of becoming all God wants us to be (p. 6). Let’s not waste the lessons of 2020 but instead use them to revive ourselves personally and corporally.

Finally, I must express gratitude to those who supported the conference over the past year. As Proverbs 11:25 (NLT) promises, “Those who refresh

others will themselves be refreshed.” Thank you for your support and prayers. Wishing you God’s richest blessings in 2021!



Another highlight was our first-ever Virtual Communications Summit. Click [here](#) to watch the series.



**Christelle Agboka**  
Director, Communications

# ONTARIO CONFERENCE IN THE COVID-19 ERA

**A**t our virtual day of worship, we gave thanks for the ability to worship virtually as a Conference family as well as for God's provision during the COVID-19 crisis. A feature of the day was the state-of-the-conference report by all three administrators—Mansfield Edwards (president), Jakov Bibulovic (executive secretary) and Virene Meikle (treasurer).

The following are excerpts from their reports, with updates through to December.

## President:

The first two months of 2020 kick-started what appeared to be a year poised for fantastic success. However, in just a few weeks, the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, changed the world.

COVID-19 grabbed our federal and provincial leaders' attention, introducing drastic but necessary measures that dramatically impacted us as a church.

For months, we have been experiencing what medical experts consider the most severe pandemic in 100 years. Here are a few of the measures we took early on in response:

- Heeded the call of the Public Health Agency of Canada to close our churches for members' health and safety.
- Helped our pastors secure Zoom video conferencing for weekly congregational worship.
- Added to our conference website the weekly updated list of churches offering virtual services for members whose churches were not yet online.
- Offered a series of Messages of Hope and Assurance in five languages, recorded at our studio, to encourage members province-wide.
- Hosted our first conference-wide

virtual day of worship (see more on pp. 12 & 13).

We eventually closed the Conference office and had almost all our staff working remotely. Our schools were also closed, as per government regulations. Thanks to Dan Carley, our outgoing acting superintendent of education; our principals; teachers; and parents for showing flexibility in transitioning to virtual classes.

We pray for our members daily during Zoom worship, and I have assigned our support staff to call and pray with you. They have been providing our members emotional, spiritual and practical support through these calls.

Here is one of many staff testimonies:

"In calling [our] members, they have encouraged me more than I feel that I have blessed them. Hearing their stories and concerns has touched my heart."

—Rose Dunn-Kalynko, Secretary,  
Personal Ministries and Stewardship

Much appreciation to our staff for embracing this new assignment.

Thanks to our Prayer Ministry director, who worked feverishly to set in place a prayer line (1-888-984-2326), available Sunday to Friday, noon to 8:00 p.m., for members and the community and host a weekly Sabbath morning prayer gathering reflecting on relevant topics.

Much appreciation to several other individuals whose efforts helped us navigate the storm:

- Our directors, who willingly cut their budgets and accepted additional responsibilities.
- Our pastors, who continued to minister via quarterly drop-offs, phone

calls to members, online funerals and more.

- Pastors' spouses, for their support.
- Our Risk Management director, who assisted the administration in developing guidelines for closing and reopening churches, the ABC Christian bookstore and virtual worship services.
- Pastor Jakov and Virene Meikle, my fellow administrators, for the long hours invested and sacrifices made as we sought to guide the conference through the fog.
- All of our members for their encouraging emails, calls and prayers.

To those of you who have lost family members, be assured of our sincere prayers.

To those of you who are unwell, may the Lord's healing hand reach you and heal you.

To those who've lost their jobs, we pray for God's providence, claiming His promise to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory.

In these difficult times, we must focus on the blessed hope we have in the imminent coming of Christ.

Be encouraged, for as Hebrews 10:37 tells us, "For yet a little while He that shall come will come and will not tarry."

—Mansfield Edwards, President

## Executive Secretary:

### How did COVID-19 impact membership growth?

Comparing membership figures from 2017 until now, we found that we have shown steady net growth despite the COVID-19 crisis and suspension of baptisms. From January to August 2020, church growth surveys revealed 213 new members (154 baptisms, 59

professions of faith), with a 0.3 percent net growth. As of December 2020, we had 346 baptisms and 74 professions of faith.

### How do the baptism figures for 2020 compare with previous years?

The number of baptisms in 2020 is the lowest since 2017, likely reflecting a temporary COVID-19-related suspension of baptisms.

### How many COVID-19-positive cases or deaths did we experience up to July 2020?

COVID-19-positive cases: 151 in April, 45 in May/June, and 48 in July. Sadly, we experienced 15 COVID-19-related deaths in April, 9 in May/June and 12 in July.

We express our deepest sympathy and sincerest condolences to those who have lost their dear ones during this crisis. Our prayers are that you will find comfort in the hope of resurrection, secured by faith in Jesus Christ and His soon return.

—*Jakov Bibulovic, Executive Secretary*

### Treasurer:

#### How did COVID-19 impact Ontario Conference's finances?

We started strong in 2020, with a 14.8 percent increase in tithe and offerings remitted to the Conference by the end of February, compared to the same period in 2019. However, in March, we experienced a 30 percent decline in tithe returns as churches stopped meeting in person and non-essential business closures increased unemployment.

How were churches able to continue supporting the Lord's work financially? We prayerfully took the following measures:

- Several churches enrolled in AdventistGiving and other e-transfer platforms to allow members to continue returning tithe and giving offerings.
- Pastors visited members' homes to minister to them and collected envelopes while practicing safe social distancing.
- Members visited the church on a

specified day and time to submit their envelopes.

These efforts were rewarded with a tithe increase of 1.2 percent by April and a year over year decrease of 7.5 percent by the end of June. From October 2019 to October 2020, we experienced only a 1.4% decrease in tithe income.

### What other measures were taken to manage the conference's finances during the crises?

A decrease in income necessitated a decrease in expenditures. Thus, early on, we took the following measures to continue supporting church members while working within our financial constraints:

- Reducing department expenses.
- Implementing a hiring freeze and laying off some staff.
- Continuing ABC operations on a limited schedule.
- Reassigning pastors to fulfill ministry needs across the conference.
- Assigning seven directors to provide support to some church districts.
- Assigning one support staff as a part-time assistant pastor.
- Shifting Ontario Conference ministry activities to an online platform.

Let us continue to pray for and support those who lost loved ones to the pandemic, our essential workers who unselfishly put themselves in harm's way every day to serve, our schools and the challenges they face, and for one another so that our faith may be strengthened while we look forward to the day when there will be no pandemics.

—*Virene Meikle, Treasurer*



**Jakov Bibulovic, Mansfield Edwards and Virene Meikle**

## "I CAN'T BREATHE"

In this video, President Mansfield Edwards reminds us of our responsibility to be our brother's keeper in response to the tragic death of George Floyd in May.

[Click on the title to watch](#)

[I Can't Breathe - Ontario Conference's Response to George Floyd's Murder](#)



## CONFERENCE MAKING STRIDES TOWARD MULTIPLICATION IN 2021

In a brief, yet profound parable found in Luke 13:6-9, the owner of a fig tree wanted to cut it down because it was not bearing fruit after three years. The keeper of the vineyard asked for one more year to dig around it and fertilize it. Then, if it didn't bear fruit, he would cut it down.

At a joint meeting of the conference's Strategic Planning and Evangelism/Church Growth Committees in November, President Mansfield Edwards compared our conference to the fig tree. Although our conference was blessed with 346 baptisms and 74 professions of faith in 2020, recent reports indicate we have much room for growth.

As shared by Executive Secretary Jakov Bibulovic at our September

Workers' Meeting, when categorized into four categories—1) multiplying, 2) growing, 3) plateauing, or 4) declining, most of our churches (66%) are plateauing (47%) or declining (19%). The remaining 34% are growing. These figures are comparable to those of the North American Division (NAD), with a 58% decline in churches, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada (SDACC), with a 63% decline.

"If a tree is not producing fruit, it is not producing seeds. If the tree is not producing seeds, then there is no growth, there is no multiplication," Edwards stated.

Accordingly, since early November, conference administrators have formed think tanks considering causative factors and workable solutions

for declining and plateauing churches. Administrators and directors began this conversation at their weekly Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) meetings. It continued with the joint committee meeting, including pastors serving as regional field secretaries. Edwards also met with support staff, seeking their perspectives. Soon, all pastors and lay leaders will be engaged in this brainstorming process.

As Edwards told conference directors, the workable solutions they're now pinpointing "have to be a significant turning point. We are now setting the groundwork for 2021, and we cannot and must not be satisfied to stay where we are."

## JAN. 9 AND 16 VIRTUAL DAYS OF FASTING & PRAYER

We are pleased to announce that the second and third Sabbaths of January, the 9th and 16th, have been set aside as virtual days of worship, focusing on prayer and fasting for our conference. After defining our reality, including a synopsis of think tank reports, we will prayerfully lay down our vision of "moving [our churches] from declining, dying and plateauing to churches that truly represent the bride of Christ," said Edwards.

The rationale for these special days arose from Joel 1:14, "Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord." Amidst overwhelming challenges, the prophet Joel asked Israel to gather, set aside distractions and pray.

We encourage all members to dedicate time to fast and pray in the

coming weeks, leading up to these days of prayer. As we unite in petitioning God, we will realize the promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 (AMP). "If My people, who are called by My Name, humble themselves, and pray and seek (crave, require as a necessity) My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear [them] from heaven, and forgive their sin and heal their land." God is calling us to do the same.





## SOUTHERN ONTARIO CAMP MEETING REACHES 7,900 GLOBALLY

Each June, the 24 churches of the Southern Ontario Region hold a camp meeting. The committee usually plans three years in advance so attendees can enjoy a weekend of spiritual food. Imagine our disappointment when, in March, the COVID-19 pandemic ended any hope of meeting in person. Thankfully, we decided to have a virtual camp meeting.

Although we had never staged an online event before, everyone pitched in. Sub-committees for programming, event promotion and prayer were front and centre. The region’s churches lent us personnel with audiovisual skills to help run the virtual event,

and Ontario Conference assisted with online marketing and aired the program on their social media channels.

On September 4 and 5, we successfully ran the Southern Ontario Adventist (Virtual) Camp Meeting, the first of its kind in the region. On Friday evening and all Saturday, the camp meeting was broadcast on YouTube, Facebook and Zoom. As with in-person meetings, we provided programs for all age groups. Four dynamic speakers presented messages of hope and healing: Pastor Jose Rojas, president of Movementum; Pastor Derrick Morris, president of Hope Channel International Inc.; Pastor Garth

Dottin of the Oregon Conference; and Pastor Mansfield Edwards, Ontario Conference president.

The adult program broadcast on YouTube had 7,900 views—more than the usual 1,200 who attend in person—and viewers tuned in from around the world. Presenters’ messages reminded us of God’s unfathomable love and care during troubled times, the power of prayer, the need to move from fear to faith and our calling as fishers of men. All glory and praise to God for teaching us that this gospel shall be preached to all the world as a witness!

**Russell Preddie**  
Camp Meeting Committee Chair

## WILLOWDALE CHURCH HIGH SCHOOL CLASS RAISES \$1,769 FOR CANCER RESEARCH

In January, the Willowdale Adventist Church high school class decided to be more intentional about community outreach. We completed two projects and were working on a third in March when COVID-19 shut all activities down.

Since then, coordinating outreach activities has been challenging. But in October, we completed one of our scheduled events: the Princess Margaret Hospital’s Journey to Conquer Cancer. Most team members have relatives or friends who’ve battled cancer, so the cause was near to their hearts. A

small team from our class signed up, aiming to raise \$1,000 for cancer research. With the support of our classmates, family, and friends, we raised \$1,769.50.

After our 5K walk, one member, Abby, said, “It was great to raise money for a good cause and be part of the community. It’s important for the church to be active and help people, and I’m really glad I was part of this. Plus, I got to go on a walk with my friends!”



In these challenging times, we trust the promise in Luke 1:37 — “For nothing is impossible with God.” Pandemic or not, we will continue to look for ways to help our community and praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

**Sue Mathi**  
Willowdale Church

# Urban Mission Convention Inspires Attendees to **REACH Ontario in New Ways**

**H**ow can we do ministry in a complex, ever-changing urban context? Ontario Conference tackled this question head-on by hosting the Urban Mission Convention (UMC) online. The weekend event, held Friday-Sunday, September 11-13, emphasized the importance of the church as a force for change in our urban communities.

UMC planning began in 2019; however, multiple crises in 2020 created a need and an opportunity to think of novel ways of fulfilling the Great Commission. Thus, the planning committee proceeded with this vision—"to establish contextually relevant churches in every environment in Ontario."

The virtual UMC was divided into two tracks: (a) church planting and (b) church transformation and community engagement. This initiative aimed to equip individuals and groups with a passion for urban ministry to plant new, urban-focused congregations and inspire and equip growing local congregations to become multiplying, missional, contextually relevant and sending congregations.

Ontario Conference partnered with the North American Division Community Services & Evangelism Institute to offer a rigorous curriculum in church planting (speakers: Anthony WagenerSmith, Steve Leddy, Boyan Levterov, Halsey Peat) and church transformation and community engagement (speakers: Errol McLean, John T. Boston, Sung Kwon, Ed Schmidt, Jonathan Burnett). Attendees from youth leaders to seniors gained something from the event. Participants especially valued the shared practical experience: "I appreciate the time the committee took to find people who didn't just write

research papers or books but are boots-on-the-ground speakers," said Kevin Benta, Property Management director.

Attendees also appreciated these speakers' overall vision. "Growth is defined by a church that continues to redefine and adjust to be relevant to the community!" noted Pastor Andrew Thomas, Philadelphia Church.

The event featured plenary sessions by President Mansfield Edwards on Friday evening and Executive Secretary Jakov Bibulovic on Sabbath morning. Both based their messages on the story of the woman at the well, stressing that once we are filled with the Living Water, we can transform our cities. Like Jesus, we must be willing to enter difficult places (i.e., Samaria) to be prepared for further service (i.e., Calgary).

Attendees from Ontario, Quebec, the U.S. and beyond left with vital takeaways:

- To change our churches and communities, we must change our DNA (e.g., lifestyle, values and mindset), first as individuals, then as churches.
- If you are not discipling someone, do not attempt either church planting or church transformation.
- In Ontario Conference and elsewhere, every church plant must have a host church.
- The church multiplication process consists of multiplying disciples, small groups, ministry leaders and churches.
- Identify your community's core values by connecting with government, community service and other leaders to determine how you can make a difference.

- When planting a church, interview potential disciple-makers and select self-sacrificial, mission-oriented individuals for the core group.
- Community service must be coupled with sharing the gospel, otherwise we are just doing social work.

After the UMC, Edwards noted, "A seminar and workshop [is not the end, rather it] lays the foundation for the beginning of an important conversation."

Accordingly, attendees were connected with resources like the Adventist Church Planters Exchange (networking group for church planters) and Mission Works (tools for church growth and community engagement). We anticipate continuing this conversation and taking meaningful action toward changing our communities.

**Christelle Agboka**  
Director, Communications





# ONTARIO ADVENTISTS DEDICATE CESSNA 185 FOR MISSION TO NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO



Despite the challenges of a global pandemic, Ontario Conference had much to be thankful for in 2020. The biggest blessing arrived in the form of a Cessna 185 aircraft obtained in collaboration with Adventist World Aviation (AWA). According to public health reports, Indigenous populations in Northwestern Ontario suffer from a disproportionate risk for lifestyle diseases; and the conference's newest acquisition will enable us to help meet their health and humanitarian needs.

On Friday, October 9, 2020, a dedication ceremony for the Cessna and its mission was held at the Oshawa

Executive Airport. Participants included Ontario Conference President Mansfield Edwards; Executive Secretary Jakov Bibulovic; Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canada President Mark Johnson; Ray Young, AWA's Canada project manager/global operations manager; and Brian Koldyk, the Cessna's pilot/manager. A small gathering of our directors, support staff, some of their family members and other supporters were present and adhered to health and safety protocols.

Dr. Edwards explained that Ontario Conference leaders became aware of northern Indigenous communities'

dismal public health records six or seven years ago. Their rates of suicide, cancer, circulatory and other diseases far exceed the average in Ontario. Their life spans are also four to five years shorter than the average. Our leaders found these statistics unacceptable and moved to assist the at-risk community with the Cessna initiative. We anticipate that this project will facilitate health training, agricultural projects and other humanitarian services in the North for years to come.

Communications department and Office of the President



# NEARLY 700 VIEWERS TUNE IN TO FIRST-EVER VIRTUAL FRENCH STEWARDSHIP CONVENTION

Every first weekend in September, Ontario Conference hosts a province-wide Stewardship Convention. This year, organizers transformed what was to be a full weekend in Ottawa into a full-day virtual event on Sabbath, September 5. The convention's theme was "Stewardship in Challenging Times," reflecting our reality. Notably, this event was the first of its kind by and for our Francophone churches.

The event was streamed live on Église Adventiste Francophone d'Ottawa's YouTube, Facebook and internet radio via Zoom. A total of 691 people viewed the convention, and more listened to the audio stream.

Highlights included dynamic hosts Mae-Lyna Beaubrun and Billy Lundy from Ottawa French; Christ-centred

presentations from the speaker, Pastor Aniel Barbe (associate stewardship director, General Conference); inspiring, multigenerational worship in song; and moving testimonies.

Spearheaded by Eastern Ontario pastors, the French language convention aimed to celebrate God's goodness; acknowledge the faithful stewardship of our Francophone brethren; and appreciate our diverse membership in Ontario, including French speakers.

Thankfully, we met further objectives:

1. Fostering revival and transformation by promoting the biblical doctrine of Christian stewardship.
2. Increasing collaboration among pastors, elders, ministry leaders and church members in hosting the convention.
3. Stimulating stewardship growth through worship, fellowship, interactive seminars and relevant resources.

Gerry Pasikatan, Stewardship director, noted, "By God's grace, COVID-19 didn't have any negative effect on this year's Stewardship Convention. It only brought to light the positive attitude, flexibility and creativity of our dear Francophone pastors involved in running the event, particularly our incredible resource person, Pastor Barbe."



Gerry Pasikatan  
Director, Stewardship



Christelle Agboka  
Director, Communications



## ONTARIO CONFERENCE'S TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT TEAM "TRAVELS" PROVINCE-WIDE

Since January 2020, Ontario Conference churches and regions have benefited from Total Member Involvement (TMI), a seminar series that teaches participants to disciple others within various disciplines. To date, the TMI group, comprising our Personal Ministries, Stewardship, Communications, Sabbath School, Adventurer, Master Guide and Pathfinder Ministries and Youth Ministries directors, has offered programs across Ontario; in-person programs for Salem/Toronto North, Brampton and Bramalea Churches, and virtual programs for Philadelphia, Orangeville/Woodbridge and Peel region, Eastern Ontario (English and French is ongoing), Northern Ontario and Southern and Western Ontario.

Initiated by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, TMI is a full-scale evangelistic initiative in which every church member does something for Jesus. Its key premise is that pastors, Bible instructors and evangelists alone cannot finish the critical work of spreading the gospel, so every member must identify their gifts and unite in hastening Christ's coming.

Virtual sessions in 2020 boasted up to 300 viewers. TMI programs offered

a full day of worship, with morning services jointly coordinated by the TMI team and the region's churches. Midday speakers inspired participants toward disciple-making, with speakers including Dr. Mansfield Edwards (Conference president) and Dr. Alfred Johnson (the North American Division's Personal Ministries director). By the end of the afternoon sessions, viewers gleaned a new understanding of ministry. Post-session comments included, "So I don't have to always do a Bible study?"; "I have been doing TMI without realizing it"; and "Being a disciple is not that difficult after all."

When COVID-19 shuttered in-person programs, the TMI team found success online. The team learned to make presentations shorter, more attractive and visually appealing, and to add interactive elements like polls and breakout rooms. Describing this transition, Personal Ministries Director Dr. Reynold Hazelwood said, "The greatest blessing is that of reaching more members."

### Communications and Personal Ministries departments

[i]Contact Stewardship Director Gerry Pasikatan at [gpasikatan@adventistontario.org](mailto:gpasikatan@adventistontario.org) for more information.

### As we enter a new year, consider incorporating these TMI ministry ideas into your daily life:

- Take every opportunity to cultivate friendships with others and get to know their needs.
- Dedicate 10 minutes of your Sabbath School online time to fellowship, which entails praying, planning for community outreach and sharing testimonies.
- Use programs that will disciple every child, such as the Kids in Stewardship program.[i]
- Start a small group on Zoom, Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp (see pp. 22, 23).
- Share inspiring Bible verses, spiritual quotes or testimonies on social media.

If you are interested in having TMI come to your region, please contact Dr. Reynold Hazelwood at [rhazelwood@adventistontario.org](mailto:rhazelwood@adventistontario.org).

**"From the biblical point of view, the mission that God entrusted to His church is not just a corporate mission, but includes the participation of each and every one of the believers."**

- Alejandro Bullón, *Total Member Involvement*

Order this life-changing book from [adventistbookcenter.com](http://adventistbookcenter.com) or visit the ABC Christian Bookstore (95 Clarence Biesenthal Dr, Oshawa, ON L1K 2H5 | (905) 579-2311).





## ONTARIO PATHFINDERS CELEBRATE 45 YEARS IN STYLE

**D**id you know that 45 years ago, there were only four Ontario Pathfinder clubs (Harvie—now Toronto West, Mississauga, Perth and Toronto East)? And today there are 70 official clubs and 1200 Pathfinders?

There was much to celebrate on September 19 — the 45th anniversary of Ontario Pathfinders and the 70th anniversary of the worldwide Pathfinder Ministry. Due to COVID-19, the conference's Pathfinder director, Edwin Martin, and lay leaders had to shift their plans to a virtual event. Former Pathfinders and current leaders, Akeem and Deandra Favorite, scripted an ambitious three-part news-style program and participants were recruited. The planning committee then met weekly, interviewing/recording almost daily from the beginning of September.

Camp meeting speakers were Andrés Peralta, World Pathfinder leader, Nyjel Camanzo, a Hamilton Hylanders Pathfinder, and Pastor Jordane Smith, a former Pathfinder who is now the young adult pastor at College Heights Church (Burman University). An intended fourth speaker, Mount Olive's Pastor Frankie Lazarus, our former Youth director, was shown a few weeks later due to technical difficulties on the 19th.

The special day encompassed segments on the past, present and future of Pathfinders: Connected—what's your story?; Connected—where do I belong?; and The Connection Continued. Viewers enjoyed powerful messages, testimonies and panels, music and more.

Despite some technical glitches, the on-air and behind-the-scenes team presented an excellent program. Their work yielded an average of 300 live YouTube viewers from Ontario, the UK, Brazil, Mexico and beyond, and 415 live viewers in the morning. There are now 2.4 K views for the morning, 1.2 K for the afternoon and 816 for the evening.

### Pathfinders Got Talent

The Ontario Pathfinder Drum Corps—first-prize winners at the 2019 Oshkosh—kick-started the day with a literal bang. Pathfinders were also featured prominently as speakers, news anchors, panel facilitators, interviewers and musicians.

### Honouring Pioneers

Viewers enjoyed seeing some of the lay leaders, pastors, conference directors and support staff who had contributed to Ontario Pathfinders. Some featured leaders were Pastor Lazarus, Pastor Cyril Millett (joining from Bermuda) and Janice Maitland, former Education director and Pathfinder lay leader. A highlight was the panel of Ena Dawn Edwards, Letitia Osborne and David Clarke, who played a pivotal role in Ontario Pathfinders' inception.

Sis Osborne shared, "Be authentic. Be the same person in the club, at home, at church. And above all, let Jesus be your guide in leading young people."

Maurice Rose happily expressed, "Good to see Bro Clarke. I remember seeing him way back when I started Pathfinders at age 10."

### Inspiring Messages

Andrés Peralta preached live in the morning. Focusing on the parable of the Prodigal Son, he admonished Pathfinders to stay connected to the Father. He assured them that God's eyes are upon all Pathfinders, even those who have strayed, especially during a pandemic. And like the Prodigal Son, we are never too far from the Father's embrace. Nyjel Camanzo and Pastor Smith's messages, combined, taught that as we stay in the will and Word of God, He'll give us the strength to do whatever He is calling us to do.

### A Bright Future

Finally, a panel including Dr. Mansfield Edwards (Ontario Conference president); John Scott (Youth director), Chester Lewis (OCPC executive coordinator), Martin and local church Pathfinder leaders, Olivia Pryce and Jenai Wilson, shared things we look forward to with Pathfinders. These included: 1) increased community engagement, 2) more joint projects with the Youth Department, 3) collaboration between clubs, 4) greater emphasis on spiritual grounding for Pathfinders, and 5) adaptability and preparedness to do ministry in any situation, as we ultimately prepare to go home.



**Christelle Agboka**  
Director, Communications

**“Be authentic. Be the same person in the club, at home, at church. And above all, let Jesus be your guide in leading young people.”**

# Ontario Conference's First-Ever Virtual Day of Worship Reaches 22K+ Globally



**W**hen the Ontario Conference's administrators first envisioned July 18's Virtual Day of Worship, they had modest expectations. They hoped to encourage Ontario members during a time when the General Conference Session and most major in-person events were cancelled or postponed. After months of separation, people could worship together virtually and prepare for an eventual in-person reunion.

The program far exceeded expectations, reaching viewers in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, the US, Brazil and Canada. Within the first 10 hours, the morning program video had 22,000 YouTube views; the evening program had 6,700 views. These numbers do not account for families watching on one device, churches restreaming or Zoom viewers.

God showed up and assisted our efforts. Unbeknownst to many, that Sabbath morning, the conference building lost electricity for nearly three hours. Thankfully, the media team, comprised of Fifaliana Rakotoarison, media manager, and Ashton Blake, IT/web developer, devised a contingency plan. After tense moments, everyone

breathed a sigh of relief as things got running again.

God's favour allowed this initiative to materialize quickly. At June's end, directors finalized the program. For the media team, the next few weeks were a flurry of conceptualization, construction, scheduling, recording and editing. Blake noted, "Due to the rapidly changing dynamics of COVID-19, we knew we had to rise to the challenge of putting together a program that would draw the Ontario Conference together." Two weeks of sleepless nights and countless prayers later, what seemed impossible came to fruition.

President Mansfield Edwards reflected, "This was tremendous. Tremendous! I'm deeply grateful."

Thousands of comments confirming viewers' appreciation streamed in throughout both services. Here are a few of the day's highlights:

## 1. Mission spotlight

In the morning, we profiled individuals and churches serving others throughout the pandemic. Many appreciated Marsha Ram's testimony of asking God to use her despite her 2019 cancer diagnosis. Just one month after Marsha completed chemotherapy, a

colleague requested phone Bible studies. They now study together almost daily. The takeaway? God will use anyone who is willing.

## 2. President Mansfield Edwards's sermon

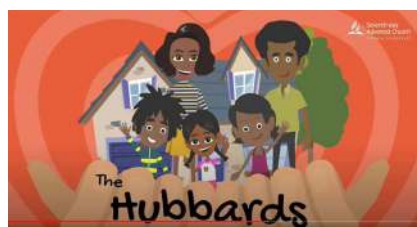
In a message titled "All for Us," Edwards noted the human experience is unpredictable, but everything God has done and will do is for us. Nothing—not economic uncertainty, moral decline, racism, classism or a pandemic—can separate us from His love. All God asks is that we come directly to the throne of grace, open the door to our hearts and let Him in. Attendees described the sermon as "timely," "powerful and practical" and "inspiring."

## 3. Music

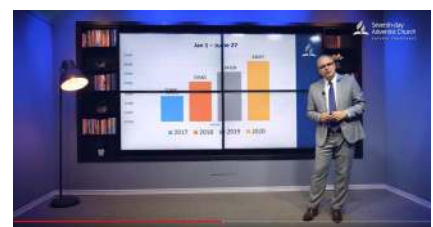
Music enhanced the worship experience. Morning standouts were virtual children's choirs, like Crawford Adventist Academy singing "It Will Get Better." Another highlight was "Il Te Voit," performed beautifully by Myrlande Labbe in French, assuring us "Jesus sees you." Thousands of online visitors returned for the evening concert and praise session. Children again stole the show. Deb Webber stated, "Now we can see why the Lord loved the little children. They worship from the heart."



Program hosts Orlando and Elizabeth Pule, Family Life directors



Animation created/presented by Alden Cudanin and family, Willowdale Church



Executive Secretary Jakov Bibulovic giving State of the Conference address

## DIRECTORS' PERSPECTIVE: WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

During the COVID-19 lockdown, many of our directors pivoted to organizing on-line programs, increasing their online presence, including social justice panels, resourcing and equipping pastors and church leaders, serving as associate pastors at churches and much more.

Here is a snapshot of what the past nine months have looked like for them.

Top 5 activities in early days of the COVID-19 shutdown[i]:

- 1 Attending multiple Zoom meetings for planning and collaboration purposes
- 2 Connecting with church leaders to offer encouragement and support
- 3 Providing pastors, church leaders and members vital info & resources
- 4 Creating new events for an online forum[ii]
- 5 Increasing their department's social media activity

Selected takeaways:

**“The enthusiasm of many volunteers in my departments for us to engage in online training.”**

- Allan Chichester, Director, Sabbath School and Children's Ministry

**“Working with churches, although taxing on top of a heavy schedule, has been a blessing.”**

- Halsey Peat, Assistant to the President; Director, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty/Church Planting

**“Need for self care and Selah.”**

- Reynold Hazelwood, Director, Personal and Prison Ministries

**“COVID-19 brought about positive changes in our perspective of church and its mission. It made us more creative and enabled us to think outside the box by utilizing technology to reach more people for Christ.”**

- Edwin Martin, Director, Adventurer, Master Guide and Pathfinder Ministries

**“Church is not limited to four walls.”**

- Christelle Agboka, Director, Communications

Check out this [video](#) example of how we have continued to serve during COVID-19:



Pastor James Rooney, Camp Frenda director, and Pastor Glenn DeSilva, College Park Church, distributed toilet paper and hand sanitizer to residents of Kingsway Pioneer Home, a retirement home owned by Ontario Conference. This simple act meant so much to the residents. Let's continue to find ways to reach this vulnerable population.

To connect with any of our departments, call 905-571-1022. Also visit our recently redesigned website, [adventistontario.org](http://adventistontario.org), to stay informed about conference-wide, departmental and local church initiatives; find media, newsletters and other content produced by the conference; and explore our ministry offerings for all age groups, from children to seniors.

Participants' diversity in terms of ethnicity, age and locale was also noteworthy. "It was a true representation not just of our Conference but of what heaven will look like," said John Scott, Youth director.

Finally, July 18 was a time for thanksgiving. Administrators highlighted how the conference and its churches have continued to meet members' spiritual and practical needs.

Summing up the day's beauty, Jennifer Waithe wrote, "Thank you for this service. Although church services were discontinued, God always finds a way to reach His people."

Our first virtual day of worship had its hiccups, but it was a strong first effort, especially given the media team's challenge of balancing their vision with social distancing mandates. Asked if they would do it again considering all they had learned, the team responded, "Most definitely!"

Click on the titles below for videos of the day:

**Morning service**

**Evening service**



**Christelle Agboka**  
Director, Communications

[i] Results from survey conducted end of July

[ii] Look at p. 26 to find out more about our new Prayer Ministry initiatives.

# REFLECTING JESUS IN OUR CITIES

“The city is an opportunity for the church to respond with love and care to urban populations’ challenges.”

I can recall an incident in my undergrad where I dropped the small mirror I had bought to use for shaving. It broke in two places, but the back cover held it together so it was still useable. However, for the rest of the semester, I had to turn it at different angles to see my face.

As with my broken mirror, the city’s true identity is also obscured. On the one hand, “cities have gotten a bad rap and are known as resource hogs,” seen as “health hazards, desperate places, shantytowns replete with environmental risks, and crime.” [1] On the other hand, “a city is firmly established as the center of influence in trade, politics, and power.” [2]

The United Nations estimates project that “by 2050, 70 percent of the world’s population will live in cities.” [3] Dr. Skip Bell notes, “The city is an opportunity for the church to respond with love and care to urban populations’ challenges. Christians should bring their influence into urban centers as they live, work, play, socialize and worship in their neighbourhood.” [4] We need to ask ourselves, are we viewing the city as an opportunity, or are we fleeing in desperation?

As we look at the cities and their daily challenges, it is hard for us to imagine we were created to reflect God’s image. Genesis reminds us, “God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27, NIV). Our identity as bearers of God’s image is foundational to our understanding of urban mission.

Let me explain. You may know the Latin words *missio Dei*, “mission of God,” or the sending of God. This concept originates from the Hebrew word *salah* and the Greek word *apostello*, which simply means to send.” [5] The question arises, what is God sending us to do?

While we are sent to do many things as a church, I will focus on two. First, we are sent to represent, then to restore God’s image in our communities.

## Sent to represent

Dr. Grant LeMarquand notes that the “...mission begins prior to the fall. The mission of God, the mission of humanity is not primarily about fixing things—it is first of all about representing the life of God in the world in all that we do.” [6] Paul states that we are Christ’s ambassadors (see 2 Corinthians 5:20). The apostle Peter concurs, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). Our mission thus begins by representing God’s image to the world through our daily lives.

## Sent to restore:

Second, the church has been sent to restore God’s image in our fallen world. The prophet Jeremiah delivers God’s command to Israel: “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV). Even in captivity, God was using Israel to bless the city of Babylon. Jesus echoed this notion when describing His mission—and ours—on earth. “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Luke 4:18-19, NKJV).

Fast forward to 2020, a year of unexpected turns and challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the global shutdown of our church buildings, businesses, schools and other service areas. We have seen an increased threat of domestic violence, mostly against women and children.

[7] We have witnessed unfortunate incidents of police brutality and racial injustice against the Black community; names like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake and many others are etched into our collective memory. We have seen a blaze of outrage and global protests as people demand systemic change to a construct designed to oppress and marginalize Black, Indigenous and other people of color. With everything happening in the world around us, what does the *missio Dei* look like in our cities?

Ellen White is resolute on our need for urban mission. She writes, "The Lord is calling upon the men and women who have the light of truth for this time to engage in genuine, personal missionary work. Especially are the church members living in the cities to exercise, in all humility, their God-given talents in laboring with those who are willing to hear the message that should come to the world at this time." [8]

She continues, "The neglected work in our cities testifies to the lack of Christlike energy among believers. Let all awake to the need of establishing Christian missions in the cities." [9]

Furthermore, we must abandon the arrogant belief that God is not in a community until we have an Adventist Church there. God is already working in those communities. David Bosch explains, "The missiological concept, *missio Dei*, acknowledges that mission is primarily the initiative and prerogative of God, and that the church is called to participate in this endeavor with the Triune God." [10]

Adventist Community Services describes four levels in which we can fulfill God's mission to our communities. [11]

### Level 1

Through relief: directly supplying food, clothing or housing to someone in urgent need. Most churches operate at this level. Relief is also known as compassion work.

### Level 2

Through individual development: transformational ministries that empower a person to improve their physical, emotional, intellectual, relational or social

status. Individual development could mean teaching job skills, hosting classes on parenting or financial planning or mentoring children and young adults.

### Level 3

Through community development: renewing the building blocks of a healthy community, such as housing, health care and education.

### Level 4

Through structural change: transforming inequitable political, economic, environmental, or cultural institutions and systems. Long-term, sustainable changes are made for communities to experience equal access to that region's services and opportunities. Highlighted here is the work of social justice, where churches can call for systemic changes in policing, job security, housing policies and education reform.

### Level 5

Finally, the Bible says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NKJV). The *missio Dei* is a sending into all the world, and God wants us to partner with Him in this call of restoration.

Eventually, I changed my broken mirror and saw my face clearly. God's mission for us as His church is to transform the city by restoring God's image through our presence and our service. By doing this, we see a clearer vision of God in our lives and our communities. This is urban mission.



**R. Orlando Pule**  
Director, Family Life

[1] Amy Edmonson and Susan Reynolds, *Building the Future* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016), p. 14  
[2] Skip Bell, *Christ in the city: Six Essentials of Transformational Evangelism in the City Center* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2018), p. 3  
[3] Amy Edmonson and Susan Reynolds. *Building the Future* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016), p. 20  
[4] Skip Bell, *Christ in the city: Six Essentials of Transformational Evangelism in the City Center* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2018), p. 12  
[5] <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/mission/> (accessed August 31, 2020)  
[6] Grant LeMarquand, "The Mission of God in the Biblical Story," <https://www.tsm.edu/wp-content/uploads/LeMarquand%20-%20From%20Creation%20to%20New%20Creation.pdf> (accessed August 31, 2020)  
[7] Jonathan Forani, "Domestic violence increases with 'stay home' pandemic response," CTV News, April 6, 2020, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/domestic-violence-increases-with-stay-home-pandemic-response-1.4885597> (accessed August 31, 2020)  
[8] E. G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 332  
[9] E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 4, 1904, par. 6.  
[10] David Bosch, 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 392.  
[11] [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55003b33e4b0542f7571ba64/t/556f084be4b0c-ca786c883fd/1433339979694/ACS\\_Project\\_Application.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55003b33e4b0542f7571ba64/t/556f084be4b0c-ca786c883fd/1433339979694/ACS_Project_Application.pdf), p. 11.



## Ontario Conference's Successful Pivot To

# CORONA SCHOOLING



**O**n March 11, when the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a pandemic, it disrupted nearly every aspect of our lives. For instance, in an effort to contain the virus, 192 countries, including Canada, shut down their schools, colleges and universities.

For students at our nine Adventist schools, a typical day once involved on-site learning with peers and teachers, recess and other social activities. However, when Premier Doug Ford announced that, following the March Break, publicly funded schools would close for two weeks in response to COVID-19, Ontario Conference followed suit. Eventually, it became clear that our schools would have to shift to online instruction for the rest of the academic year.

“Corona schooling” included the following:

- Receiving teacher instruction by grade or class via Zoom
- Completing assignments posted in Google Classroom under the watchful eye of Mom or Dad
- Mastering new technologies and various educational software

### “Corona Classroom” — Challenges and Opportunities

Our teachers, parents and students were suddenly thrown into the deep end of e-learning. In a whirlwind two weeks, our teachers:

- Compiled resources provided by the province and Ontario Conference
- Set up day, night and weekend schedules for online learning
- Determined the best approach for each grade level
- Conducted group and peer-to-peer coaching for online learning tools



Zoom etiquette was another to-do list item, including reminding students not to wear pjamas to class.

While some teachers were already using online instruction, the learning curve for others was steep. Teachers typically worked overtime preparing online assignments and receiving and grading submitted assignments. Robertha Greenaway, then-Ottawa Adventist School principal, noted, "My work days are longer because I stay by the computer and phone all day to answer questions."

Adjusting to e-learning was not easy. Outside of the school setting, younger students, in particular, needed more help from parents. Additionally, many students missed their peers. Nonetheless, students and teachers stayed connected through Zoom classrooms. Most teachers would agree with Sara Mora, a K-6 French teacher at Crawford Adventist Academy, who said, "I am grateful that we live in such a technologically adept society."

Many students adapted to school closure better than anticipated. Ellen Bannis, principal at Grandview Adventist Academy, added, "The feedback from the students for the new type of learning is positive. One even asked that when we go back to school, should he be sick, can he Zoom in?"

### More Than Reading, Writing, and 'Rithmetic

Beyond academics, schools also took students' social and spiritual needs into account. Assistant Superintendent of Schools David Forsey, then a teaching principal at Adventist Christian Elementary School, recounted an uplifting, whole-school Zoom meeting where the local pastor led worship. He also mentioned keeping Zoom open longer than class time so students could visit and share. Other efforts toward holistic education included Crawford's virtual High School Week of Prayer in April, featuring Pastor Andrew Fuller from the UK, and Grandview students creating posters for residents and staff at the Heritage Green Nursing Home.

### What We Learned from Four Months of Corona Schooling

Before the start of the present school year, we asked our teachers and

principals to share their experiences from four months of online instruction. Here are some of their responses:

"The Crawford Adventist Academy Elementary Division Main Campus has learned that online learning can be done effectively for our students. We can do almost all of our regular classes online, including music, French and PE. Some of the teachers even held 'show and tell' and mini concerts, allowing students to spectate or participate however they chose. That told me that teachers understood where their students were."

- Sandra Godsoe, then-interim principal, CAA Main Campus (Elementary)

"I think this crisis will change the way we operate in that nothing can ever be taken for granted. We must live in anticipation of things changing at a moment's notice. The relationships we have with each other in school have deepened, and being able to work together has been wonderful. Prior to COVID-19, we worked [mostly] independently. Now, we work collaboratively in all aspects."

- Ellen Bannis, principal, Grandview Adventist Academy

"Crawford Adventist Academy East has learned that where there is a will, there is a way! Staff and students realized that learning could take place anywhere, at any time, as long as we put God first and apply ourselves to His will. Our sense of community became even stronger. The key message for our staff and students is that we are committed to a safe and healthy school, in line with conference and government directives, and, most importantly, the direction of the Holy Spirit."

- Wendy Hutchinson, principal, CAA East Campus

For the last several months, teachers have relied on patience, humour and prayer to help them see the bright side. They have also taken a community approach, helping one another, students and their students' families adapt. Finally, as College Park Adventist Academy Principal Jason Perkins stated in March, "If we continue to trust in Jesus, He will see us through these terrible times."

## Fall Education Update

This fall, a new normal has come over our schools. That new normal includes daily cleaning, distancing and mask-wearing. Although enrollment is down by 16%, overall, the students are happy to be back and reunited with their classmates. We have noticed that students are more willing to participate voluntarily in the COVID-related procedures to keep each other safe.

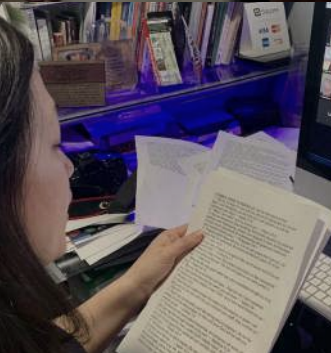
There are many challenges this academic year, but we will overcome them, by God's grace. Thank you to the conference for assisting with supplies for each school and additional funding for cameras in the classrooms. We also thank those who have provided funding for needs-based scholarships.



**David Forsey**  
Assistant Superintendent  
of Schools, Office of  
Education



**Christelle Agboka**  
Director, Communications



## OPPORTUNITY IN CRISIS:

### Maximizing Small Groups for Effective Inreach and Outreach

#### INSIGHTS FROM PASTOR ARDISON BERNARDO, MISSISSAUGA FILIPINO AND FAITH FILIPINO CHURCHES

If we look for opportunities, we can find them, even in times of uncertainty. For Ontario Conference churches during COVID-19, one such opportunity is the resurgence of small group ministries. Small groups can foster a stronger bond between church members at home and build a bridge to the post-pandemic church. Not just another program, they can provide members with a greater sense of community than corporate worship services.

“They can provide members with a greater sense of Christian community”

Pastor Ardison Bernardo of Mississauga Filipino and Faith Filipino Churches has always embraced small groups (which he calls LifeGroups) in his ministry. When the pandemic struck, his churches had their first combined Zoom meeting and have been successfully functioning as one, including their small groups. LifeGroup members are “Living in Faith Everyday (LIFE) from witnessing into baptism to spiritual maturity into becoming a devoted and committed disciple-maker like Jesus.”

Small groups, combined with corporate worship, help fulfill the five purposes of Christianity—worship, discipleship, ministry, mission/evangelism and fellowship. In his first year at his present churches, Bernardo conducted a series on small groups’ biblical foundations, then launched LifeGroups in members’ homes the second year. From this

foundation, small group ministry flourished during the pandemic, with 15 groups meeting weekly.

COVID-era small groups have helped lapsed members reconnect to the church and have drawn other members closer to God. Members invite non-members, such as their friends, family or colleagues. One member invited her colleague to an evening meeting on Daniel and Revelation, which led to her attending prayer meeting, the Sabbath service, and now Growing Together, a group for non-members wanting to delve into church doctrines.

Moreover, while these groups primarily discuss spiritual growth and Christian living, they also become small families within the church. Small groups have prayer partners checking in on each other during the week. In one of Bernardo’s districts, LifeGroups delivered groceries to a student infected with COVID-19 in Niagara with no family nearby. Another group’s leader created a children’s ministry website for parents: [childrensministry.adap.org](http://childrensministry.adap.org).

According to the Natural Church Development survey, thriving small groups signify a healthy church with spiritually healthy members. Across Ontario Conference, out of eight categories, we scored the lowest in holistic small groups and loving relationships. COVID-19 has offered us a chance to reconfigure the



way we do church. As your church starts or expands this vital ministry, consider the following pointers from Bernardo.

## Keys to a Successful Small Group Ministry

### 1) Clear vision/purpose

Before launching life groups, Bernardo spent a year sharing his vision for the church as a two-winged bird, with corporate worship on one side and small groups on the other. He also spoke to possible leaders and conducted small group training. Small groups will fail without members' buy-in.

### 2) Spiritual oversight

Since church went virtual, Bernardo has been attending more small group meetings than ever before. His presence at several of the sessions, even if just for 30 minutes, is intentional. He gets to know his church members more intimately and offer spiritual guidance as needed. Spiritual oversight is critical to small groups' success.

### 3) Support for LifeGroup leaders

Bernardo and his elders work with facilitators at all experience levels as long as they meet certain requirements (e.g., baptized church members, spiritually mature). They ensure that "all of the LifeGroup leaders are at their best" by training them, communicating with them and praying for them individually. Overall, he believes the leaders are doing a fantastic job.

### 4) Digital hub

Aside from having active Facebook groups, Bernardo created a digital hub for meeting schedules, online worship services, announcements and more. The groups also have a WhatsApp chat, where Bernardo sends content from the hub, like video prayers, devotionals and lesson summaries.

### 5) Discipleship focus

All small group study topics link back to discipleship. Generally, the groups have been asked to go through the Seventh-day Adventist Church's *Discipleship Handbook*.

However, leaders are free to choose a curriculum matching their group's needs; thus, some are studying *Steps to Christ* while others are working through Daniel and Revelation.

### 6) Flexibility

For Bernardo, the first few weeks of virtual church were stressful because groups were already having meetings, and he had to synchronize schedules and times with the different leaders. Accept that it may take a while to find a rhythm.

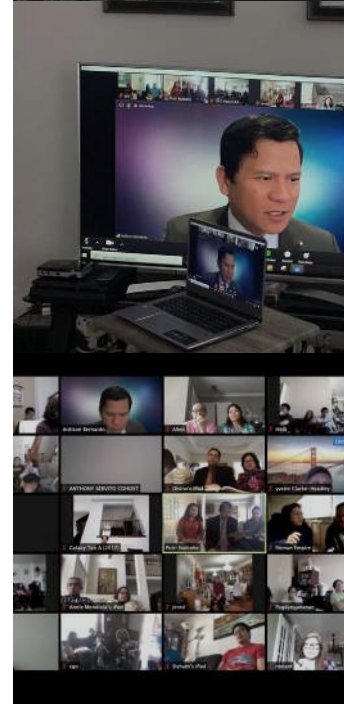
### 7) Fun and fellowship

The benefit of Zoom meetings is that people don't have to rush home. Small groups often stay longer to chat and joke around. This bonding time helps small group members better support one another in practical and spiritual matters.

Small groups foster connection, belongingness, support, and fellowship. In these unusual times, we must return to the Acts 2 church, which began as a small group. Bernardo concludes, "LifeGroups are the main connection hubs of the church. We aim to be a church of small groups, not a church with small groups."

For small group resources, visit [adventistbook-center.com/successful-small-groups.html](http://adventistbook-center.com/successful-small-groups.html) and order online, or, for faster service, contact our local bookstore at (905) 579-2311.

**Christelle Agboka**  
Director, Communications



“COVID-19 has offered us a chance to reset — to reconfigure the way we do church.”

# COVID-19 TESTIMONY

## FROM BRAMALEA CHURCH

**W**hen I first heard about COVID-19, it seemed like a problem in another country. I didn't expect it to touch my family or me.

A few days after the pandemic started, my mom told me that my dad had developed flu-like symptoms. I suspected it could be COVID-19, but I was in denial. All I knew was that my dad needed to be isolated as a precaution.

A week later, I received a call at work that Dad, a healthy 58-year-old with no pre-existing medical conditions, had tested positive for COVID-19. My mind raced: "Did he contract it at work in the hospital?" "Was it somewhere from the community?" "Why didn't I trust my gut?"

That night, Mom and I could hear Dad wheezing more audibly and laboriously. As it grew worse, I told Mom that we should call the paramedics to transport Dad to a hospital for treatment. Although Mom was hesitant, I persisted and contacted EMS. When the first responders arrived, they instructed Mom and me to be physically distant from Dad. It was early in the pandemic, so the paramedics were unsure if Dad's oxygen saturation was low enough for him to be admitted to the hospital. After their assessment, they determined that Dad's blood pressure and oxygen saturation warranted hospitalization. From afar, I said, "See you next week."

The next morning, the police were knocking on doors around the neighbourhood. I assumed they were

looking for us. They apologized and said, "Your dad is unconscious but alive." It had been less than eight hours since he left. Mom, my brother and I were confused and afraid to hear more. They explained that Dad presented with symptoms of acute respiratory failure and was in an induced coma. Once they left, we dropped to our knees to thank God for the care Dad was able to receive.

A few days after this news, my diabetic, 58-year-old mother was infected with COVID-19. Amid sleepless nights and constant phone calls with the nurses and doctors, my healthy, 20-year-old brother also developed COVID-19, despite strict social distancing and other protocols. Finally, as I was under continuous physical and mental stress, the virus reached me—a healthy 23-year-old—the following week. I had enough strength to keep pace with the medical updates and care for my family. But I had no motivation to do anything for myself—nothing.

Over the next two weeks, Dad's condition changed dramatically. He battled respiratory, kidney and lung failures, starting with multiple 16-hour dialysis sessions and moving to a four-hour dialysis regimen. Finally, one morning, my family gathered in our hallway while maintaining physical distance. The doctor delivered the most gut-wrenching news. Dad was dead. To this day, we are unsure if the cause of death was related to cardiovascular complications or the effects of COVID-19.

Dad was the first known health-care worker in Ontario to die of COVID-19. News reporters were searching for us, looking for a story. Heartbroken, we tried to keep the story as confidential as possible. All we wanted was a safe place to breathe and deal with the pain outside the public eye. Even more devastating was the reality that, from the beginning, we could not comfort one another. We could not hug or even be close. For a family whose primary love language is physical contact, this was such a lonely time.

A week after Dad's death, my family's health started to improve, and my brother and mother tested negative. Days, weeks and months later, however, my results remained positive.

While I was in quarantine, enclosed in four bare white walls, my anxiety levels increased. I spiralled into negative thinking: "I just started creating my career and finding my passion in ministry." "I just overcame my mental health problems. Why are there more?" "I just got engaged and started planning, but there's no excitement anymore." "Will this ever end?" I battled depression and PTSD. I was triggered by the tagged posts about Dad, messages sent by distant family and friends about their relationship with him, conversations with friends who were affected by COVID-19 directly, and by watching the world dealing with the virus.

I had to step down as Adventist Youth Ontario's co-chair for Compassion Ministry. I was not in the right frame of



mind to lead the ministry as it started its virtual evangelism series. Despite multiple video calls with friends and family, I felt isolated and defeated. Multiple attempts from my fiancé to console me also did not work. Moreover, the three-day on-line funeral service did not provide the closure I craved. I had never said goodbye to Dad when he was alive. The whole experience was surreal. My family and I believed he was on vacation in the Philippines. It felt like a nightmare, and we were still asleep.

In moments of intense heart-break and pain, I found comfort in turning to God. Although sad and angry with God, I remained connected to Him. Through the chaos, there was one verse in a care package from an Adventist Christian Fellowship university group, Aftershock Ministry, that spoke to my heart—"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" Exodus 14:14 (NIV).

This message prompted me to meditate on the story of the Israelites' deliverance from the Egyptians who pursued them. It reminded me that I could not limit God, who strengthens me in challenging situations.

“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still

- Exodus 14:14 (NIV)

Recently, I have been overcome by a peace I've never felt before. Following continuous prayers from many individuals, I accepted the call to re-join Compassion Ministry as a leader where I could minister and be inspired. Three months after the initial diagnosis, I tested negative. Finally, I was able to return to my work ministering to lonely seniors in nursing homes. I have also

joined the Compassion team in sharing the love of Jesus through in-person outreach. My mother and brother have been coping as well as possible. Mom has benefitted from horticultural therapy, fellowship with church members and work. My brother has found therapy in volunteering at church, resuming university studies and caring for a new addition to the family—a cat.

The pandemic continues to cause turmoil, and we continue to experience the pain of Dad's death. We are grieving, but our family is comforted by our fond memories of Dad. I will praise God forever for the blessings that He gives us each day.



**Jhona David**  
Bramalea Church

## JHONA'S VIDEO

After her father died of COVID-19 and all her family, including herself, contracted the virus, Jhona felt broken, lonely and completely helpless. She was on the verge of depression and had to find ways to stay sane. Watch to learn how her pain renewed her passion for ministry.

To watch more inspiring Christian content like this, please take a moment and subscribe to our new channel, [Called Out Media](#).

**Click on the title to watch**

[My dad died of Covid-19, Here is how I SURVIVED IT | Jhona David](#)



# WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR HAND?

## *Obeying God's Call to Be a Digital Disciple*

**W**hen I heard that all churches had to shut down in March due to COVID-19, I was among the few who were excited. As Personal Ministries leader at my church, I had exhausted my resources for promoting soul-winning among members. I believed God was telling me to rest a bit and pursue other interests.

That night, I was awakened by a dream or vision. A voice asked me, "What are you doing?"

"What do you mean?" I replied.

"Why are you so happy? Do you think your work is done?"

I said I had to pause due to social distancing mandates, but he insisted my work had just begun!

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

"What do you have in your hand?"

"A phone!"

"Use it!" He said.

I woke up immediately. All night, I thought of how to use my phone for the Lord.

Finally, I decided to write and share my testimony of overcoming abuse to encourage others spiritually. They would see how the Holy Spirit helped me forgive my abuser and witness to him until he accepted Christ.

On March 18, I sent my written testimony to my church's WhatsApp group. I encouraged them to share it and said we would have an online Bible study using the same materials that had transformed me.

To my disappointment, no one in the church's WhatsApp group responded immediately; but I didn't let that deter me. The Lord told me to use my phone, and that's what I was going to do.

I reposted my testimony to my school groups and selected contacts. I hoped for eight responses. As God would have it, I got 22. Soon, I started a Bible study group called "Light of The World."

We started studying the Beatitudes. Members kept asking me to add friends who were interested in joining. By the end of this study, we had 50 members.

I was blown away! While I worried that we had too many people for a "small group," I didn't want to refuse people interested in Bible study. We

then studied Storacles of Prophecy—online Bible lessons by Amazing Facts. When those ended, we had 89 members—Adventist and non-Adventist.

I thought my work was done. Then, I ran into a problem. Churches were still closed, and I had nowhere to send the people. The Holy Spirit said, "You are their church. Do a Revelation Seminar!"

I was amazed.

Meanwhile, people were asking what we were going to study next. They were thrilled to hear about the Revelation Seminar. Like many of them, I had never done a thorough study of Revelation despite my interest. I determined to learn it, then teach it.

Initially, I struggled to transfer the printed Revelation manual onto WhatsApp. I tried doing a voice-to-text transcription, but the computer couldn't understand my accent. Finally, my son told me about an app that converts pictures with words into text—a lifesaver! In 24 hours, I had completed one lesson.

I initiated a ten-day fast and study on the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the group while preparing the lessons. That study set us on fire for God. We sent invitations for the seminar to all our contacts. By the time it began, our

ranks had grown from 89 to over 200. We've maintained a small-group feel with the six to eight members regularly participating in our morning studies, others following the lesson later. A few Adventist pastors participate to answer tricky questions. We've also formed a twenty-member prayer group. By God's grace, we've experienced several miraculous healings and breakthroughs in the group.

Members hail from across Canada, the US, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. Ranging from ages 15 to 80, participants represent different levels of education, careers and religious backgrounds: all on level ground at the feet of Jesus.

Our members include a Pentecostal pastor and two non-Christians who were accidentally added to the group and decided to stay. One of those "accidental members" recently requested baptism.

### DiscipleShift

Several members have begun using the lessons to have their own group Bible studies, including a 16-year-old girl and a lady from Zimbabwe. Witnessing is not limited to the baptized. For instance, a non-Adventist who recently requested baptism has been studying with her family. Also, a young lady getting baptized soon often shares her testimony of how

the study opened her eyes to biblical truths.


We witnessed our first baptism online in Orlando, Florida in August. Arrangements are being made with local pastors for baptisms in Jamaica and St. Lucia.

I have never had access to so many people for Bible study! God foresaw this time and provided tools to reach people worldwide. My experience has taught me that we must be even more intentional about using technology for mission.

Finally, **Galatians 6:9** reminds us, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

### Call for Virtual Bible Workers

There are approximately 60 non-Adventists in the Bible study group, and they need encouragement and prayer. I also need help setting up baptisms in different locations.

 Please text me at 416-559-1458 for more information.



**Cheryl Bailey**  
North West Brampton Church

### Here are some tips for starting your own WhatsApp ministry:

1. Start with a phone, tablet, or computer and reliable internet.
2. Know your target audience and what interests them.
3. Choose your platform—e.g., WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Facebook groups, Messenger, Zoom. Bible studies may employ, text, voice notes or phone calls.
4. Prepare the lessons on a tablet or computer, then copy into WhatsApp. Make two copies to be safe.
5. If using a printed book, find an app that converts images with words to text (e.g., OCR scanner).
6. Save time by copying and pasting from an online resource.
7. Create questions from the text, and copy each question individually to the WhatsApp group. When participants answer the question, let them know if they are correct, then add the correct answer, including any explanation.
8. Mark your questions and answers with an icon, to make it easier for those reading later to identify info, questions and answers.
9. Study the lesson yourself beforehand.

# THE SURVEY'S IN!:

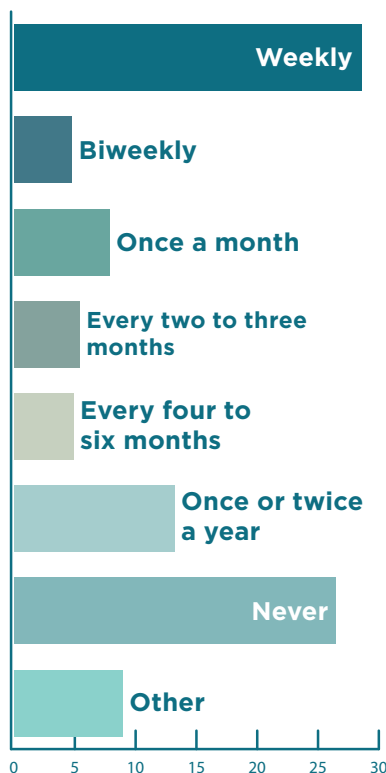
## 805 Ontario Conference Leaders and Members Share Views on Online Church

In March, Ontario Conference churches temporarily shut their doors in response to COVID-19; but ministry continued. Several churches reached online audiences with Sabbath services, AY programs, evangelistic series, panel discussions on social justice and other issues and more.

Between July 29 and August 27, 805 church leaders and members completed the Communications department's 10-item survey on members' online church experience; 764 in English and 41 in French.

### Here are some of the results:

**Q. 1 How frequently did you watch online worship services on Sabbaths before the pandemic?**



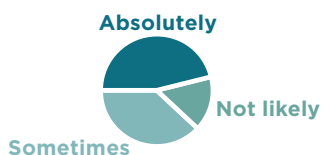
*Takeaway: Nearly 75% of respondents had engaged with online worship services to some degree pre-COVID, whether after the in-person service or when unable to attend in person.*

**Q. 2 Which online services do you normally follow each week?**



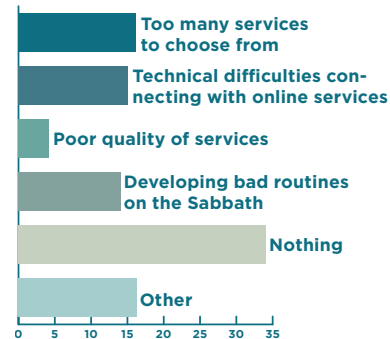
*Takeaway: The majority of respondents were loyal to their local church; they also enjoyed online services from different countries.*

**Q. 3 Will you continue watching online services once churches reopen?**



*Takeaway: The favourable response to this question (84.26% stating they would "absolutely" or "sometimes" continue watching) indicated that online church is not a fad.*

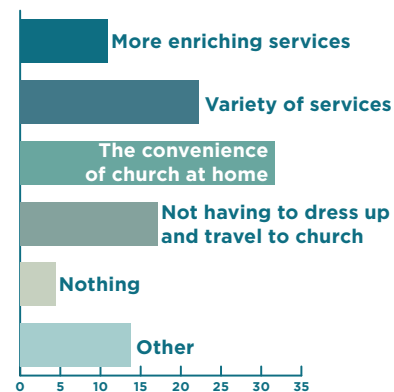
**Q. 4 What have you found most challenging about having church online?**



*Takeaway: Despite the challenges cited, many agreed that online services "were a blessing in these difficult times."*

### Many agreed that online services "were a blessing in these difficult times."

**Q. 5 What have you appreciated the most from having church online?**



*Takeaway: The most cited benefit of online church was convenience. Respondents also enjoyed time in nature and "learning to be in the presence of the Lord outside of church."*

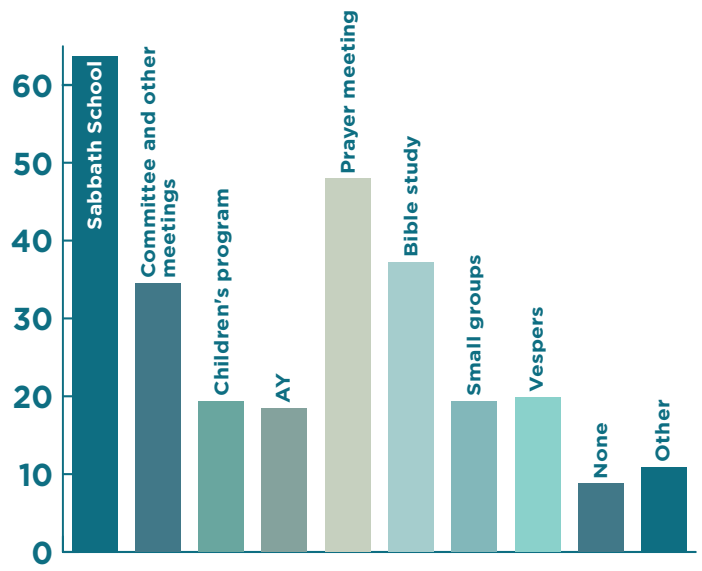


**Q. 6 What do you miss most about in-person services?**



*Takeaway: Respondents missed fellowship and interaction the most. Several mentioned missing other elements, like potluck and praise and worship.*

**Q. 7 Which online programs have you engaged with besides the mid-day service on a regular basis (e.g., weekly or biweekly)?**



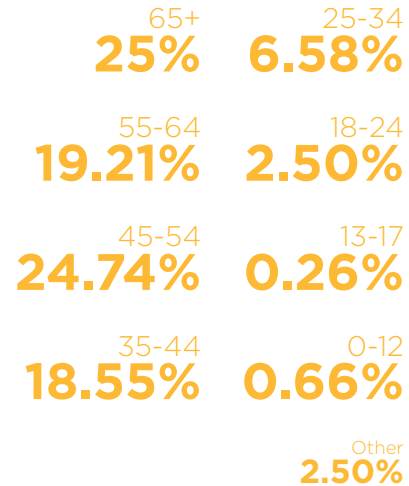
*Takeaway: Among the more creative online programs were discourses on race and social issues, Adventurers and Pathfinders, workouts, socials, prophecy seminars and music programs.*

**Q. 9 Is there anything from this period of online church that you think we should continue doing, even after the pandemic crisis is no longer as pressing?**

*More than half, 64%, of respondents answered this question. Their comments typically fell into the following categories:*

- Keep streaming church services as an option for people who can't attend church for various reasons and as an outreach tool.
- Continue to prioritize online ministry, including digital evangelism, as a complement to in-person initiatives.
- Ontario Conference should host more virtual worship services.
- Create more programs for children and youth.
- Produce more online programs relevant to church members and their communities, including social justice, finances and mental health.

**Q. 8 What is your age range?**



*Takeaways: Children ages 0-12 were least satisfied with online church, with four out of five (80%) saying they were "not likely" to tune in online once churches reopened.*

*The majority (36.84%) of 18-24 year-olds described their church experience as "I've been feeling lonely and missing my church family."*



A representative comment was—"we should perfect media ministries in our churches and marry them with our outreach and community service to attract and engage those outside the church seeking answers."

Overall, the survey reveals that the last several months have been both difficult and rewarding. For some members, the inconveniences of online worship, including isolation, have been hard to overcome. For others, this time has helped them know God and their families more deeply.

Since March, we have been pushed to let our light shine in new and sometimes uncomfortable ways. But as we have been stretched, we have grown, and the survey indicates that as we continue to adapt to new realities, we can thrive as individuals and as a church.

## “THE HOPE EXPERIENCE”

INSPIRES ORGANIZERS AND GLOBAL AUDIENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Above photo: Toronto Central praise team behind the scenes

**A**s our American neighbours worried about the outcome of the presidential election and the rise in COVID-19 cases, Metro South Central Regional leaders and pastors decided the theme of the fall evangelistic series should be “hope.” Part of our mandate as a church is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, which provides humankind with hope, especially in these challenging times. Thus, we decided “The Hope Experience” was a relevant title for the three week-long series, running from October 17 to November 7.

Pastor Jermaine Johnson, a talented evangelist, was chosen to be the series’ main speaker, and Pastor Selburn Fray, shepherding Guelph and Milton Adventist Churches, was selected to be the cohost. After months of planning, we created an online series and prayed viewers would be blessed.

A day before the series began, we received the shocking news that

Pastor Johnson had been rushed to the hospital. We prayed for his speedy recovery, but we needed someone to become the main speaker to ensure the series could continue. Pastor Fray graciously accepted this role while we waited for information about Pastor Johnson’s condition. He delivered powerful messages in sermons such as “The Power of the Cross,” “The Power of Hope,” “Come See a Man” and “Operation Rescue.”

One week later, our prayers were answered: Pastor Johnson recovered and picked up where Pastor Fray left off. Local pastors managed the countless prayer requests that poured into the Facebook and YouTube live chat feeds, and the series’ prayer line was available throughout the series.

As the series progressed, people from across the globe tuned in to worship and receive the encouraging nightly messages. One night, 11,000 viewers watched, which was an inspiring

reminder that we need to press on and remember our mandate “to share the gospel of Jesus Christ” even when facing opposition.

During the series, 25 people from Ontario were baptized and added to our church family, and viewers in the Caribbean are preparing for baptism.

“The Hope Experience” provided a much-needed response to an uncertain time by allowing people to gather for worship and experience a sense of hope. Although Toronto Central Church provided the media centre for the series, we want to especially thank churches in the Metro South Central Region that helped make “The Hope Experience” a success.

Many thanks to Guelph, Milton, New Beginning, Berea, Toronto Heritage, Hope, Parkdale and Toronto Central Adventist Churches.

**Metro South Central Region Communication**

## NEED PRAYER?

On June 11, 2020, Ontario Conference Prayer Ministries launched a prayer line to receive prayer requests between noon and 8 p.m. Sunday to Friday.

The number for the prayer line is 1-888-984-2326. When you call this number, a prayer partner will be available to accept your prayer requests and pray on your behalf.

Also, join Health and Prayer Ministries’ weekly worship gathering (Sabbath, 8 am) for learning (through health and

other relevant presentations), supporting, praying and sharing.

For more information on either initiative, contact Health and Prayer Ministries director, Maria McClean, at [mmcclean@adventistontario.org](mailto:mmcclean@adventistontario.org).

“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

- Jeremiah 29:12-13



# OLD IDEAS CAN BE TURNED INTO NEW WAYS TO EVANGELIZE

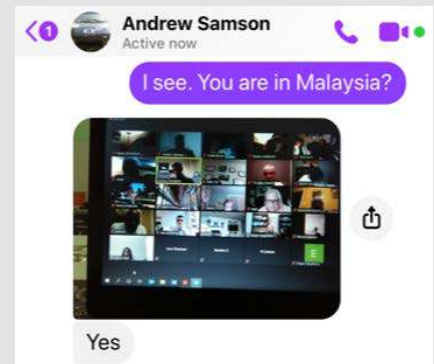
ONLINE VESPERS AT CAMBRIDGE  
AS FAR-REACHING AS ASIA

In the language of Seventh-day Adventism, vespers, vesper services or sundown worship is a worship experience held on either Friday or Sabbath evenings. These services have been designed to assist members in welcoming the Sabbath or reflecting on its meaning. It has been coordinated at or near sundown with frequently smaller and less formal gatherings of members in homes or church buildings, where attendees enjoy testimonies, Bible study and music.

In many Adventist churches, gatherings like Friday evening vespers have been disappearing due to the logistics of getting to a physical church on Friday night. But now, God is making the impossible possible, thanks to the opportunity to attend vespers on online platforms such as Zoom.

Cambridge Adventist church has helped mend the Friday night edges of the Sabbath since COVID-19's quarantine and lock-downs by running excellent vesper services. Through the dedicated effort of Elder Eileen Strombom, organizer and host, vespers has come alive on Zoom! Attendance has grown exponentially. Program content has been inspiring, uplifting, of highly meditative and reflective quality. Moreover, it has reached viewers as far as Asia (e.g., a lady in Malaysia contacted Eileen and asked to join).

"It has been truly amazing," said Eileen, "that I have been able to connect with so many people around the world, both in the type of speakers and the vast and varied background of those who want to join us on Zoom to listen to God's Word! I am also very thankful that we have a



technical support expert, Michael Roy, who keeps the Zoom program running smoothly and is committed to this every Friday evening."

Our biggest takeaway is that the revival of Friday evening vespers worship can be an amazing and effective online outreach.

If you would like to start a vespers program like ours or join in on this one, please do not hesitate to contact Eileen at [estrombom@aim.com](mailto:estrombom@aim.com).

## Here are a few of our attendees' comments:

**"We had an amazing experience tonight. Thank you for the wonderful work you are doing."**

- B.L., Cambridge

**"I will continue to enjoy and encourage Friday night to others. Vespers have been an absolute blessing to me."**

- V.D., Georgia

**"What a wonderful, blessed hour. My husband and I were blessed by the most beautiful songs. We truly felt closer to heaven!"**

- V.Z., Cambridge

**"Thank you again for inviting me to participate in your vespers. It is the best Zoom experience I have ever been part of!"**

- R.D., Tennessee

**"These Friday evenings charge me spiritually, and I can see the members and guests are enjoying them as well. Personally speaking, the vespers is like a spiritual oasis."**

- H. Novac, Pastor, Cambridge Church



Renee Wallace-Konu

## KINGSTON CHURCH SMALL GROUP COLLECTS 1,752 POUNDS OF FOOD FOR THANKSGIVING

In 2019, Kingston Adventist Church, under the leadership of Janine Edmunds and Mareli Nunes, started a small group Sabbath School class called “Making Friends for Jesus.” The class focuses on responding to people and their needs. Along with Bible study, we take time for fellowship and nurturing, which includes sharing prayer requests and testimonies.

Another aspect of this class is community outreach. To celebrate our one-year anniversary, we contacted the Partners in Mission Food Bank. They graciously gave us free bags, which we distributed in our neighbourhoods for a food drive. We printed up leaflets to be attached to the bags with info about our church, most-needed items and collection time.

Thanksgiving weekend, we anxiously watched the weather and prayed.

The bags needed to be picked up at 3 p.m., and it was thundering and raining, with heavy wind gusts. Our prayer warriors were busy interceding for us. At 2:55 p.m., the storm stopped, the wind calmed, and the sun peeked out.

Back at the church, we were surprised to learn that we had collected 130 of 340 bags distributed. We had expected a 12.5% response, but God blessed us with 38%. In total, the Partners in Mission Food Bank received 1,752 pounds of food—enough to feed 60 families for two weeks.

Pastor Nunes closed the day with a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s bountiful blessings. What an amazing God we serve!

**Janine Edmunds**  
Kingston Church



## PETERBOROUGH CHURCH SABBATH SCHOOL CLASS MOVES OUTDOORS DURING COVID-19



Since August 2020, Peterborough Church Beginner’s Sabbath School class has been meeting outside to safely experience Bible stories together. We began in our backyard but moved to a nearby park as the class grew. Each child comes with a parent, spreads a blanket on the grass, and collects an activity basket. Each basket contains sanitized shakers, crayons and toys to help the children experience the lesson. Each basket is labelled with the child’s name so they can reuse the props weekly without fear of cross-contamination.

We adapt the lessons from the teacher books according to families’ needs. Sometimes we cover only part of the story, but the children are always encouraged to enjoy the outdoors and celebrate God’s mercies. Crafts are simple and use natural materials. As the weather has cooled and outside crafts have become less practical, we have made craft kits for children and parents to complete at home.

The kids enjoy learning about God’s love through songs, crafts and stories! One week, we brought sheep

into our park for the children to pet. As Sabbath mornings get chillier, we keep warm through activities like hunting for little lambs in the bushes or walking with Jesus to Jairus’s house. Physically distanced and bundled up in our snowsuits, you will still hear us singing, “I’m glad I came to Sabbath School” and “Jesus loves me, this I know”!

**Alvea and Priscilla Hurlington**  
Peterborough Church

# CAMP “I’M POSSIBLE”

## VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS



This year, a traditional Vacation Bible School (VBS) was not an option. We were neither able to meet in-person nor purchase and adapt a VBS kit. Thus, I took on the challenge of writing a VBS curriculum—Camp I’m Possible, a five-day program for campers to experience the power of faith.

All week, campers explored faith via different Bible stories—e.g., David fighting a lion; Elisha and the widow whose oil never ran out; the blind man healed by Jesus; and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. These examples illustrated that faith helps us overcome, provides for, heals and

protects us. Finally, they learned we are saved through faith in Jesus, who offers us the gift of eternal life.

In daily 90-minute Zoom sessions, campers engaged in singing and a puppet show, then separated into classrooms for age-specific lessons. Campers received kits with supplies for two activities per day—one teaching activity for our Zoom session and one craft to complete alone while following pre-recorded instructional videos.

God blessed this VBS beyond expectations. Typically, we have 80-90

participants, but we were blessed with 106 registrants this year. That number rose to 115 as participants invited their friends, some of whom were from non-churchgoing families. God also provided several volunteers from the Ottawa and Ottawa East Churches, who tirelessly assembled kits, filmed content and taught classes.

We thank God and ask for your prayers as we continue to minister to His children.

**Grace Ayoo**  
Ottawa Church

## PHILADELPHIA’S WATCHMEN AT THEIR POST IN PANDEMIC

It’s almost night. Are the watchmen at their posts? Yes, in the midst of a pandemic, you can find them on the streets sounding the alarm — “Jesus is coming soon!”

Members of Philadelphia Personal Ministries have been going out every Sabbath, serving as faithful watchmen even in this pandemic.

One Sabbath morning, they approached Paul: “Sir, Jesus is coming. It’s time to go home. Are you ready?”

“Home,” Paul sighed. “Where is that?”

Without a beat, they responded, “Heaven, of course.”

“But I’m already in heaven. I have everything I want here. I can take my father to the doctor for free,” said Paul.

This prompted a dialogue about heaven and the coming of the Lord. Paul needed to hear it. He was worried about his elderly father’s health in the face of COVID-19.

The watchmen comforted Paul. He accepted a copy of *Steps to Christ* and agreed to pray with them. His heart filled with joy, and tears rolled down his cheeks; no one had ever prayed for him before.

COVID-19 has undoubtedly changed the way we do many things — for instance, we interact with people only outside their homes and on the street. However, we continue our street and door-to-door ministry. We distribute literature like *Signs of the Times* and *Steps to Christ*, and like we did with Paul, we offer to pray with others.

The watchmen have not left their posts. Watchmen! Yes, you — what of the night?

**Debra Taitt-Johnson**  
Secretary, Philadelphia Personal Ministry



Photo by Robert Kooreny on Unsplash

## ROBERTHA GREENAWAY

Robertha Greenaway did not always want to be a teacher. She was set to enter nursing school, but God had other plans for her. Unforeseen consequences closed that door, so she applied to and was accepted by a teacher's college.

After graduation, Robertha worked as an elementary teacher and taught English at the secondary level in Guyana for six years before migrating to Canada.

Robertha never envisioned becoming a school principal, but when the retiring principal of Ottawa Adventist School recommended her, she accepted.

Despite some initial hesitation, her outgoing colleague's faith in her gave Robertha the confidence she needed.

For 23 years, Robertha ministered at Ottawa Adventist School. To her delight, in 2017, the school relocated from a small, two-classroom building to its current facility, in collaboration with the Ottawa Church.

The unexpected shift to virtual learning due to COVID-19 presented a steep learning curve, but God saw Ottawa Adventist School through, culminating in a beautiful graduation.



Throughout her teaching journey, Robertha was empowered by these quotes: "To teach is to touch a life forever" and "If you can't teach them, love them. Love will teach them." She concludes, "I pray that I've touched my students' lives in ways that will reap rewards for His Kingdom."

## ONTARIO CONFERENCE SAYS GOODBYE TO THREE OF ITS OFFICE STAFF



On October 20, 2020, Ontario Conference office staff hosted a virtual farewell for Ada Nichols, administrative secretary; Fernando Norte, property custodian; and Daniel Carley, interim superintendent of education. Guests played games, watched videos and shared laughs as they celebrated the retirees' combined eight decades of service at Ontario Conference.

Eduviges Adalgisa (Ada) Nichols, who served Ontario Conference for 31 years, was described as gracious, well-organized and committed. Lila Oliveira, human resources officer, remembered Ada for kindly orienting her to the conference. Pastor Jakov Bibulovic, executive secretary, thanked Ada and her husband, Pastor Derrick Nichols, former president, for embracing him and his family when he began pastoring in Ontario. Alvin Ram, Trust Services director, revealed Ada's humorous side. Dr. Edwards, Ontario Conference president, concluded, "Ada, we'll remember your warm personality. You always had a



joke and a way of bringing the sunshine to an overcast day."

Fernando Norte started at the conference 10 years ago as the new building was being constructed. Having contributed to its construction, he was honoured to be its first property custodian. Kevin Benta and Gillian Pitt, Property and Risk Management staff, remembered his cheerful nature, tenacity and love of recounting his many adventures. Alvin Ram recalled a quote from Fernando: "Make sure you invest in Jesus. Because Jesus saves." Finally, Dr. Edwards thanked Fernando for his commitment to the Lord's work and his application of various handyman skills to the conference building.

Dan Carley began his ministry as a theology teacher at Crawford Adventist Academy. After some time in British Columbia, he returned to Crawford Adventist Academy as vice-principal and guidance counsellor. Dan later transferred to College Park Elementary School as the principal. In 2016, he



was appointed as assistant superintendent of education. Before the COVID-19 shutdown, Dan became the conference's interim superintendent. Among his achievements over 41 years is serving as a resource person for educational technology in Ontario Conference and steering our schools through the early days of the pandemic. He was described as caring, creative and a great storyteller by colleagues in the conference and his former schools. Finally, Don McIntyre, former superintendent of schools, expressed his gratitude for Dan's support and resourcefulness.

### Future Plans

All three will be spending more time with their spouses, children and grandchildren. Additionally, Fernando will continue serving his local church, and Dan will live out his dream of being a horse farmer.

Thank you, Ada, Fernando and Dan for your years of excellent service!

## DONALD COLEMAN

Donald Coleman began working in education after decades of serving as a youth and family counsellor, first in Edmonton, then in his hometown of Toronto. During a job transition, friends encouraged him to substitute teach at Crawford Adventist Academy.

He thought he would teach for only two weeks, but 20 years later, it is clear to Donald where God has led him. Donald became a single father of two young sons, Jamahl and Durell, when his wife, Marcia, passed away at age 28. Working at Crawford allowed him to be closer to his boys as they attended school while offering him a needed career change.

Donald is grateful for his time teaching physical education and social studies, and serving for a few years as a guidance counsellor. He says,

“Teaching provided opportunities to share God’s love daily in classes, enjoy the sports I loved with students and help them develop and improve their skills.” He reflects fondly on the long-term relationships he has developed with his students. He also remembers colleagues for “go[ing] way beyond their work to make a difference.”

He is at peace with his decision to retire because it will “allow younger and different minds and voices to get involved.” Currently, he enjoys spending more time with his family, which includes his wife, Dawn, whom he married while working at Crawford, their five adult children and 10 grandchildren. When asked about the future, Donald says, “Who knows what tomorrow will be? God does, and He’ll take me where He knows is best for me.”



## CARTER STANLEY

Pastor Carter Stanley’s route to ministry was circuitous. He left school after eighth grade to help his parents support their large family. However, as his grandparents were some of the first Adventists in Georges Brook, Newfoundland, he carried on their legacy by becoming active in lay ministry.

In the 1980s, after years of serving as a local church head elder/acting pastor, Pastor Stanley was convicted of his calling. Pastor Ron Halverson’s messages at a camp meeting in Woody Acres, Newfoundland, inspired him to pursue pastoral ministry. He completed high school when he was in his forties and moved with his wife, Marion, to study theology at Canadian University College in Alberta.

The entirety of Pastor Stanley’s 20-year pastoral career occurred in Ontario, including the areas of Haileybury/Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie/Iron Bridge, Bracebridge/Parry Sound and Thunder Bay. Of his and Marion’s achievements, including their churches’ extensive community involvement, Pastor Stanley is proudest of the 40-plus baptisms in which he participated.

This fall, the Stanleys relocated to Alberta, where two of their three sons and six of their 10 grandchildren live. They work with their son, a contractor, in Calgary a few days a week. Finally, Pastor Stanley continues to live by the motto, “To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to share Him.”





## SAFETY OF ABIDING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High  
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress;  
My God, in Him I will trust."

Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
And from the perilous pestilence.  
He shall cover you with His feathers,  
And under His wings you shall take refuge;  
His truth shall be your shield and buckler.  
You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,  
Nor of the arrow that flies by day,  
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,  
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noontday.

A thousand may fall at your side,  
And ten thousand at your right hand;  
But it shall not come near you.