

EDITORIAL  
"Impossible Task"

FEATURE  
"Rest and Renew"

NATURE NUGGET  
"The Sora"

# MEMO

INFORMING MEMBERS SINCE 1988

JANUARY 2023



## REST AND RENEW

ADVENTISTS AND NON-MEMBERS COME TOGETHER FOR FALL RETREAT



## A Completed Impossible Task

Several years ago, I was in Africa holding evangelistic meetings. I traveled from Congo (DRC) in Central Africa to Ghana in West Africa. I spent the entire day on flights, clearing customs, waiting in airports and journeying on to the next leg. Completely exhausted, I arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, with a (hopefully) short flight over to Ghana.



Elder Cody Francis

A group of us that were transferring were directed to follow an immigration official to baggage claim. Once we found our luggage, the immigration official led us to a set of double doors and opened them. Stretched out before us was a staircase that seemed to stretch to heaven. This staircase must have gone from the lower level of the airport to the highest level—straight up. We were then told, “Go up there.”

There was a collective groan and loud protestations in multiple languages. How could we ascend this seemingly endless staircase carrying all our luggage? I had two 70 lb. suitcases with evangelistic equipment and my carry-on, and I was better off than most, for the others had multiple bags and boxes. The immigration official would not be deterred but just started up the staircase.

While no one knew how they were going to climb that daunting staircase with all their luggage after an exhausting day, there was only one thing to do—try. As I attempted to lift and balance all 150 lbs. of awkward luggage and take one step at a time, I noticed varying responses of others. Some attempted to gather their belongings and begin the interminable staircase while others gave up in view of the impossible task. Somehow, I made it to the top of that staircase.

As I think of that unending staircase and the seemingly impossible task that lay before us, I am reminded of another seemingly impossible task before us. The task that has been committed to us is to take the “everlasting gospel” to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6). For us here in Michigan that translates to taking Jesus and His message to every man, woman, child here—from the crowded inner city of Detroit to the wilderness cabins of the Upper Peninsula.

All 10-plus million Michiganders need the everlasting gospel. The gospel command doesn’t leave out anyone—from the homeless to the affluent to the incarcerated to the refugees. As we look at this task, it can seem daunting. The biblical literacy of our society has taken a nosedive as the ranks of the “unaffiliated or none” have become the fastest growing religious group.

The diversity is astounding, from Scandinavian descendants in northern Michigan to the Islamic communities surrounding Dearborn, from the summer homes overlooking Lake Michigan to the native American communities scattered throughout the state. When we consider the religious, ethnic and cultural variety along with the sheer number to reach, it can be overwhelming,

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MICHIGAN  
**Memo**

# "Too often, we leave the work of ministry to the pastor, but this is a serious error."

but like the staircase, God will make the impossible possible. We may not know how, but our part is to take one step at a time, while keeping our eyes upward.

I am so thankful for the committed team of pastors that the Lord has brought to our state with the burden of completing the task of taking the gospel to everyone in our territory. When all our positions are filled, we have 103 pastors tasked with leading their respective churches in fulfilling the great commission in their area.

Your pastor is not just responsible for preaching on Sabbath, visiting people in the hospital, and chairing the board meeting. The work of the pastor goes so far beyond those things. Yes, your pastor does those things, but that is just a small part of your pastor's work. Your pastor eats, sleeps, prays and dreams about how to win souls to Jesus in your community. Your pastor visions with your church, laying plans to reach your territory and then leads the battle charge in realizing those plans. I thank God for our consecrated, diligent, and faithful team of pastors who are facing the formidable task before us and meeting the challenge head-on.

As hard-working and dedicated as our pastors are, they cannot accomplish the task alone. If we rely on our pastors alone to finish the work in our territory, the work will never be finished. The "work cannot be done by the ordained minister alone" (The Home Missionary, August 1, 1896). Pastors are charged with leading out in reaching their territory with the everlasting gospel, but they are not charged with doing all the work themselves.

During orientation, we tell every pastor that they are called to be an evangelist with their communities as their evangelistic territory, their local church the evangelistic ministry, and church members their evangelistic co-workers. As gifted as your pastor is in leading people to Jesus and sharing His end-time message with them, he needs our help for the mission to be accomplished.

Too often, we leave the work of ministry to the pastor, but this is a serious error. "It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister... All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men" (Desire of Ages, p. 822). While the task before us is daunting, if we, as church members, do not unite in the work of soulwinning, the task truly will be impossible. "The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers" (Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 116). When pastors and churches unite in their

efforts to reach their territory with the Three Angels' Messages, God blesses and people are won to Jesus.

During the coronavirus pandemic, one church had the idea to offer grocery delivery to the community. One man responded to the posters put up in his trailer park. The church came together to deliver groceries to this man and others. As he saw their kindness, he wanted to know more. Soon not only were they delivering groceries, but Bible studies, too. It wasn't long before the man was ready to make a commitment to Jesus and be baptized. Praise God for the united efforts of church and pastor and creative outreach that led this precious man to the Seventh-day Adventist message!

Another pastor shared with me how many of those recently baptized in his church came to the Lord. When someone walks into the doors of the church, the members greet them and make them welcome but has a much broader vision than that. It is their goal that every non-member who comes through the doors is engaged in Bible studies by one of their Bible worker teams. The church doesn't have any paid Bible workers. The Bible workers are the church members that have been organized and trained to give Bible studies to others. So, the goal of the church is to connect with everyone that enters the church and get them into personal Bible studies with other church members. The Lord has blessed their efforts with multiple people making decisions for baptism. When we unite to work as a pastor-church team in soulwinning, God always blesses!

The task before us is formidable and, in our human wisdom, it may seem like an impossible task. According to the sure word of prophecy, this apparently impossible task will become a completed impossible task—through the power of God. God's work will be finished! His message will triumph! "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations" (Matt. 24:14).

Every inhabitant of this earth will hear the message. Every person in Michigan will have the gospel brought to them. Every person in your community will have the opportunity to give their lives to Jesus. How will this apparently impossible task be accomplished? By pastors and church members uniting together and taking one step at a time up the daunting staircase with our eyes fixed upward to our Heavenly Pastor. May we each do our part that this glorious triumph will soon be a reality! 🙏

Elder Cody Francis is the Ministerial director of the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

# Prayer Focus

Every Monday morning, the Michigan Conference staff meets for worship and prayer. Please join with us as we pray for these churches and ministries.

## JANUARY 2

Manistique/McMillan Northwoods/  
Sault St Marie  
Pastor David Austin  
Bessemer/Greenland/Houghton  
Pastor Sean Brizendine  
Bluffview Christian School

## JANUARY 9

Menominee/Wilson  
Wilson Junior Academy

## JANUARY 16

L'Anse Co/Marquette/Munising  
Pastor Tony Ludwig  
Marquette Seventh-day Adventist  
School

## JANUARY 23

Iron Mountain/Iron River  
(No pastor currently)  
Escanaba/Riverside  
Dick Bullock  
Escanaba ACS & Food Pantry

## Rest and Renew

Adventists and non-members come together for retreat

Melinda Smith and Linda Finn were drawn to attend Rest and Renew because of its relaxing environment. They received that and more after partaking in a “spiritual feast” and being filled with a renewed spirit. “It felt like God wanted me to be here,” Finn said after the retreat.

Their experience echoes what many others have said about Rest and Renew, a retreat held at Camp Au Sable, October 27-30. Rest and Renew created a relaxing environment to recharge, while also engaging those interested in meaningful Bible study and spiritual renewal.

But there was a catch—each person who registered had to bring at least one non-Adventist friend along.

Kameron DeVasher, director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries for the Michigan Conference, explained that the reasoning behind the event was to allow people to taste and see that the Lord is good. “It’s gone from a theory you might have heard in study, or in a local church, to something we apply,” he says. “It’s basically an introduction to Adventism.”

Every meeting, breakout session, and activity was optional. “We don’t have name tags and required meetings. It’s us playing the host and letting them relax.” At the same time, participants were encouraged to participate in the morning and evening worship, as well as Bible study, painting, and community service breakouts. “I wanted them coming away, wherever they were on the spectrum of personal religious experience, saying, ‘Okay, I’ve learned something more here. What’s something I can take away from this and integrate into my life?’”

Rest and Renew was first held in 2019 in the wake of Jesus on Prophecy. After the evangelistic campaign concluded, the Evangelism department at the Michigan Conference had an idea. “The idea was to have some sort of an opportunity to take people who were interested but had not yet made a decision... and bring these folks to an event where they can explore this relationship further with an Adventist friend,” DeVasher says. The event was a success, drawing in over 200 people.

The event was put on hold in 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Rebooted in November 2022, the event drew in over 100 guests, with at least half being non-Adventist. “This one was detached from a big public series like Jesus on Prophecy, so it was a smaller event. Local churches do public evangelism though, and we still wanted to give them that outlet for follow up.”

Each day began with breakfast and a morning meeting. After these preliminaries the “secret sauce” of Rest and Renew was strongest—open free time and optional breakouts. “We wanted that personal ministry aspect to be really highlighted. It’s an opportunity for Adventists. Yeah, you’re going to get a free weekend retreat out of it. But the goal isn’t for you to just relax, it’s also to deepen the connection between that person and, of course, Jesus,” DeVasher says. Throughout the retreat, a series of optional breakouts were available, including: two

group Bible studies, led by Ariel Roldan, pastor of the Cadillac and Lake City churches; sessions on how to have devotions and the habits of highly successful Christians; and a fall painting class.

In addition to the breakouts, several activities were available to participants. These included canoeing, guided nature walks, horseback riding, wagon ride tours of Camp Au Sable, and more. After every evening meeting, participants were also able to attend a bonfire beside the lake. Each bonfire featured a sing-a-long time, adding to the laid-back atmosphere.

Each day, participants experienced morning and evening worship with guest speaker David Wright, Sabbath School and Personal Ministries director for the Carolina Conference. Wright focused his messages on the plan of salvation. In each session, he passionately laid out the biblical Great Controversy between good and evil in an easy-to-understand way.

“God is not hiding, he’s knocking...longing for entrance into your heart,” Wright told the participants during the final appeal. “God longs to give us the best of life and what it has to offer. When you open the door and let him in, the hardships will not just disappear, but you’ll be given strength from on high to meet those challenges.”

Wright urged everyone to make a renewed commitment to Jesus and take a stand for

“Each day, participants experienced morning and evening worship with guest speaker David Wright.”



Him. “This doesn’t mean you’ll understand every outcome, but you’ll be given a peace because God holds the final outcome.” In response, several accepted the appeal and indicated that they wanted to make a renewed commitment to living their life for Christ.

Laura Boughton attended Rest and Renew with her daughter. She said that the retreat gave the pair time to refocus their relationship, while also growing spiritually. “I’m on a new journey with Christ through my daughter and my son...this was an opportunity to spend much needed time together with God, without the distractions of the world. It’s been wonderful.” Boughton especially appreciated the evening and morning messages. “Getting away from everything changes your perspective on what your life is about, and what’s going on. Some of the messages were very powerful and moving. It changes your perspective on your own life.”

For Smith and Finn, the retreat was a “wonderful gift.” “I’m really thankful to have been here. I feel like the teaching was wonderful, and God was present through all of it. He was worshiped and honored. There was a really wonderful combination of activities, free time, and teaching. It wasn’t haphazard... there was structure, but flexibility,” Finn said. “The breakouts allowed us to get to know other people in a more intimate way,” she added.

As for Smith, she says she could not have had a bigger blessing from the retreat. “The two of us talked about how it was a wonderful experience. There just needs to be one more day of this!” 🙏



Samuel Girven is a member of the Cadillac Church.

Top: Pastor David Wright speaks during an evening worship.  
Middle: Attendees pack emergency kits in collaboration with Adventist Community Services.  
Bottom: Attendees enjoy an evening bonfire after an evening worship service.

## Public Campus Ministry: Developing Missionaries



Missionary Training Program students at the CAMPUS house.

According to General Conference statistics, 90 percent of Adventist young people attend non-Adventist universities. Another well-known statistic is that youth leave the church during college years. It is logical to assume that there may be a correlation between the two statistics. For this reason, public campus ministry (PCM) works with college students on public university campuses across Michigan.

In 1998, Michigan was the only conference with the vision to work with public campus students, according to Israel Ramos, director of Public Campus Ministries for Michigan. This vision led administration to start a Missionary Training Program (MTP) on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Ramos was part of that first program, which launched in 1999. In 2011, the program transitioned from the University of Michigan to Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing.

The MTP invites students to take a year off and work exclusively with students on public campuses. Missionaries take courses taught by PCM staff, including Principles of Public Campus Ministry, Philosophy, Education, and Hermeneutics (How to Study the Bible). Other courses are Ethics, Leadership, Character Development, Adventist Doctrines, Media Ministry, and Principles of Biblical Spirituality. "They take our courses in the morning," says Ramos, "then they do outreach on the campus [in the afternoon]."

Outreach includes personal Bible studies, planning and executing programs for students, and small groups. All the outreach on campus is planned by missionaries. "They serve as a lab for Michigan's Public Campus

Ministries—for what works," explains Ramos. "They are testing aggressive and subtle ways of creating relationships, contacts, and ministries."

One successful program they developed on their own was planning a community movie night. They rented a big screen, hired an Adventist vegan chef to cater, and watched a health movie. According to Ramos, 50 to 60 people from the community attended.

Another time, missionaries set up a table in a public area on campus with a sign that read, "If you can prove from the Bible that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday, we will give you a check for \$1,000." As a result, many students have taken Bible studies and become practicing Adventists.

The MTP program, of course, serves to minister to the students on campus. The main goal however, says Ramos, is to "redefine what a missionary looks like in the modern context." He explains that when one thinks of the mission field, they usually think of countries overseas, but the world we live in today is different. For example, MSU, where the MTP is currently located, has a large influx of international students. "The world literally comes to our campuses," he says. Not sending missionaries to public campuses would be wasting the world next door, leaving a mission field untouched.

The program seeks not only to reach the world next door, but also help students realize that they can be missionaries. "There are two reasons why people are not missionaries," says Ramos, "fear and...indifference." Some students may fear failure, losing their scholarships, or their parents disapproval. Whatever it is, Ramos wants to help them conquer fear. "Fear will

constantly manifest itself in life," he says, "It's not just a problem that a young person faces." Fear not only prevents students from being missionaries, but successful adults as well.

Indifference is the second main issue.

"There's indifference to the needs of the world, to the people needing to know Christ," Ramos says. "Frankly, we don't care as much as we should." Our fear and our selfishness causes us to turn a blind eye to those around us who need Jesus.

That is why the MTP program is designed to address indifference and fear, by "helping young people come face to face with who they are, by learning to know who God is, and to trust Him," says Ramos. The program is designed to eliminate fear and indifference from the lives of young people.

By addressing fear and indifference in the life and character of the missionary, the MTP is focusing "on the missionary, and not just the mission field." PCM's primary goal is "to help the missionary develop the character they need that will serve the biblical mission of the world church," Ramos says.

The MTP is a part of CAMPUS (Center for Adventist Ministry to Public University Students), a division of PCM. CAMPUS is a highly subsidized program that is funded through CAMPUS partners—people who contribute financially to support the ministry. Most of the donors, Ramos says, are public university alumni.

CAMPUS is strictly missionary work, while PCM oversees the 13 major university campuses in Michigan, focusing on student organizations and Adventist student groups. Some campuses have churches attached, which is important. "The Adventist student," says Ramos, "has to have a way to connect to the church."

Public university students' spiritual needs are underestimated. At an Adventist university, students are constantly connected to the church, unlike public university students. That is where PCM plays a significant role. PCM administrators assume the role of dean of students or advisors, as well as a pastoral role. "We provide spiritual care for these young people," says Ramos.

PCM believes in what has been named a cross-platform ministry model. "Every event we hold, we treat evangelistically," says Ramos. "At every event we teach biblical Adventism. We are very open that we are Seventh-day Adventists. We don't hide." Every event, whether it is a MTP outreach or a Camp Au Sable retreat is open to non-Adventists. "We just share what we believe," says Ramos. 📌

Judy Ringstaff, Communication



*Pastor Danny Rodriguez poses with Maher.*

## From Iraq to Michigan: The Journey to Adventism

**M**aheer grew up in Baghdad, Iraq, with his father, mother and four sisters. He remembers playing with friends, enjoying school and playing soccer. Life was good. One day that all changed. In 2003, the U.S. military invaded Iraq, and memories of tanks, bombs, grenades, and being held at gun point replaced the joy of his early childhood. Maher was six-years-old. Before the conflict, he says, "Everyone was friends. My best friend was Christian although I didn't know what that meant."

In 2006, another conflict arose—this time between the Shia and Sunni, the two largest groups in Islam. Maher's uncle was killed by Shia radicals because he was Sunni. They came looking for Maher's father, but he was able to escape. It was a very stressful time.

Three years later, his father succumbed to leukemia.

Around this time, Maher's mother discovered she had cancer in her neck and kidneys. Treatment opportunities were few and finances were tight. She applied to go to Jordan, but her visa was denied. Through the help of a local friend, they were finally able to secure a visa. They left in the middle of the night, unable to say goodbye to any friends.

While in Jordan, Maher and his family applied for and received visas to the U.S. from the United Nations. They arrived in Michigan in 2012. They moved to Ann Arbor, and he started school with his sisters. His mom was doing well for the most part. Then his mom started getting sick again. She sent a letter to the Mosque asking for a family to take care of her children if she passed away.

Another Arab family took care of them while his mother received treatment at the University of Michigan Hospital. The Imams came

to visit Maher and tried to help him. One day he received a Facebook message with condolences for his mother's passing. He didn't even know she had died. The family never told him.

Losing his mom was devastating. Life became difficult with the family he and his sisters were staying with. They threatened to give Maher and his sisters to the government and told them they would be placed with different families. An American family who took Maher and his sisters to appointments with a social worker offered to take all of the children so they wouldn't be separated.

Maher's first introduction to Christianity was not positive. In October 2021, Ronald, a best friend from high school, began talking about Christianity with Maher. He began by telling Maher that Mohammad was not a prophet and shared videos by Doug Bachelor showing that the prophet was false. Maher was angry but listened. After watching a movie about Jesus at Ronald's place, Maher began to wonder if Jesus was real.

Maher had an interesting conversation with a cashier at the supermarket. The cashier encouraged him to pray in the name of Jesus. Maher was still living with his sisters but decided to go in his room and pray. "If you are real, if you are God, please prove it to me," he said. Soon after he had a dream. He was in a dark place with evil people chasing him. Maher saw three people from his country, two women and a man, in a store. When he ran to ask for help, they laughed at him. One of the evil men with a knife tried to cut his throat but a force grabbed him and threw him into the sea where he was swallowed by a black and white whale. Soon the whale spewed him in the air where he saw a very bright light for five seconds and then woke up. He knew it was not just any bright light. He

knew it was Jesus.

"I knew that Jesus was real and felt that He was God in my heart. I accepted that He died for my sins, but I didn't know a lot," Maher says. While sitting in his room alone, he reflected on the fact that Jesus died for his sins. Feelings of shame, sadness and guilt came over him as he reflected on sins he had committed. He thought about how Jesus forgave the men who were persecuting Him; he thought about what he was doing to hurt God by not respecting the sacrifice that Jesus made for him. He wept. Suddenly he felt that he was different, like a new-born baby. Someone had entered his heart.

As Maher began comparing his Muslim roots to his new-found faith in Jesus, he says, "I realized that Muhammad is not a prophet. I never saw him saying love one another, pray for your enemy. He never mentioned that God is love. Muhammad just taught that it was about what I do: praying, keeping Ramadan and Eid...it was all false."

Ronald, who was not attending church at that time, introduced him to the Ann Arbor Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Maher began to attend as a visitor in January 2022. He was impressed with the godly people, music, sincere prayers, and faith. He began to attend regularly.

He started studying the Bible with Pastor Danny Rodriguez every Sunday, learning biblical truths as taught by the Adventist Church. It was hard for him grasp that God was three in one: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

His chauffeuring job required him to work on Sabbath. He refused to work after sundown on Friday one time, but other times he was pressured to work on Sabbath. In one evening, Maher could make anywhere from \$800-1000. But in his own words, "Money does not save me." He chose to take a stand for the Sabbath. There were times when he didn't have enough money for rent. But finally, through faithful perseverance, he was able to get sundown Friday to sundown Sabbath off. He continues to grow in faith.

He recently connected with Saad Elias, a fellow Iraqi from the Warren church, who encouraged him. Daniel Duffis, an Adventist interfaith facilitator, counseled with him and helped in his walk with Jesus. On September 3, 2022, Maher was baptized at the Ann Arbor Seventh-day Adventist Church. 🙏

*Alanna Rodriguez is a member of the Ann Arbor church.*

**There's more! Visit [www.misda.org](http://www.misda.org) for other news and inspirational stories from this month's Memo.**



# Seventh-day Adventist® Church

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

## NATURE NUGGET

# The Sora

Last week, while leading a birding tour in Southern California, we encountered two species of rails. Rails are small chicken-like marsh birds, which live in cattail marshes. They are called "rails" because of their size - they are very thin, so when they look straight at you, there's not much to see.

Rails spend their time sneaking around through the thick cattail marsh, so being thin makes their life easier. This is where the phrase "...as skinny as a rail..." comes from! Rails are also very vocal and loud, and they often will answer back if you play a recording of their call.

Google "Sora" (waterbird of the rail family) and listen to their songs and calls. When a Sora makes its "whinny" call, it puffs up its body while taking in as much air as possible and lowers its head towards the water (photo below). The sound is so loud because the water's surface acts as a reflector. You have maybe experienced this while paddling a canoe on a calm lake - sound travels very well, and you can hear someone talking in another canoe a long way off!

Just like water reflects the sounds made by the Sora, God wants us to be reflectors of Him. Through our thoughts and actions, others can see God in us. But we can't be good reflectors on our own. We need to ask God to transform us into the best reflectors we can be. And by the way, the Soras will be back in Michigan marshes next spring. I hope you get to hear one. 🐦

*Dr. Gordon Atkins is the Nature Director at Camp Au Sable.*



www.misda.org

## MONTHLY CALENDAR

### January

- 1 Office Closed (New Year's)
- 8 Women's Ministries Board
- 13-15 Teen Snow Outing | Camp Au Sable
- 14 Women's Ministries | GLAA
- 16 Office Closed | Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- 23-26 Ministerial Retreat
- 25-29 GLAA Home Leave
- 27-29 Man Camp | Camp Au Sable
- 27-29 Pathfinders Area Coordinators Retreat | Camp Au Sable

### February

- 3-5 Adventurer District Retreat | Camp Au Sable
- 4 PBE Area Level
- 12 VBS Workshop
- 17-20 CAMPUS Winter Retreat
- 20 Office Closed | Presidents' Day
- 22-26 GLAA Home Leave
- 24-26 Teen Impact | Camp Au Sable