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Messenger

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Bardsey Island from the hills above Aberdaron on the
Llyn Peninsula, North Wales.

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'Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and
tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the
eagle's. . . .

'For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear
Him.'

Psalm 103:1-5, 11 (NKJV)



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The future of the Welsh Mission

Emanuel Bran, President



I trust that many of us can recall an instance when our decision to make a purchase was based largely on the packaging. It could have been the same biscuit, detergent or flowers, but we were swayed in our choice simply because we liked the packaging. This is precisely why businesses spend millions every year in advertising and redesigning the same products we purchase and use in our everyday lives.

In like manner we can see how, over the years, we have 'repackaged' the Gospel. It's the same great commission, the same commandments, the same principles of love: yet the aim has been to present it in a way that is engaging and pertinent to this generation. God will never change, but the way in which we relate to Him is constantly changing, and the fact that we have to refresh the ways we encounter God says more about us than Him.

The Welsh Mission doesn't share the world church's statistics on retention, but we do struggle to motivate young people to engage in a meaningful spiritual relationship. We also differ from them in other areas, since we do not have large numbers of economic migrants, making our growth more natural. With around 35% indigenous members, our aim is to engage and integrate into the local community.

Over the past three years we have had this mission statement: 'Seeking and serving to make God known! Clearly defining why our church exists has helped to focus our efforts and limited resources. Our vision statement reminds us all of what we are trying to achieve: 'The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Wales and the border counties places people first, because of the revelation of God we see in Jesus Christ. As a diverse and united community, we pledge to unconditionally accept people, respecting their diversity, encouraging them to grow in communion with God and with each other, through inspiring, peace, joy, hope and sacrifice.'

In recent months, our focus has been to adopt and implement two General Conference strategies: iCOR (intergenerational, intercultural and inter-social-class Church of Refuge) and GROW Your Church. These two initiatives blend well and complement both our vision and our mission.

iCOR emphasises an inclusive approach that welcomes all generations, cultures and social backgrounds. This is rooted in the conviction that we all need each other in order to grow. Our personal growth is structured in four main areas: relationships, spiritual growth, mission and empowerment. iCOR also uses the cities of refuge mentioned in the Old Testament as a model. The key idea is that the church is a safe haven that provides protection, mediation,



justice and long-term nurturing care – a spiritual refuge. GROW Your

Church is an evangelistic strategy based on the agricultural soul-winning model taught by Jesus in Luke 8: prepare, plant, cultivate, harvest and preserve. With GROW we aim to train and equip local churches to include active ministries in each essential phase of the disciple-making process.

2020 is a year dedicated to equipping our local churches and members. Starting in January, we officially launched iCOR and GROW Your Church with training programmes in the south and the north of our territory. This training will continue over the next few months under the auspices of the Personal Ministries Department, who are running training sessions twice a month under the banner, 'School of Evangelism'.

The foundation of any future planning, however, is the young people, and our resource allocation reflects this belief. The Children's Department is currently recording a second Bible study series designed by the Adventist Discovery Centre, entitled *The Why Series*. We envisage that over 100 children will again be engaged in studying the Bible in an interactive and fun way. In the last three years, we have doubled the number of Pathfinders and Adventurers' clubs to six, and for the first time, in collaboration with the TED and the BUC, we have the Year in Mission project running in Wales as part of the Centre of Influence project in Swansea.

Like every small entity, we hope for greater resources, but we know that countless blessings don't come from having more, but from how we use the little that we have.

For the next couple of years, together with our pastors, sponsors and local church leaders, we hope to see these principles and strategies implemented across the Welsh Mission, helping local congregations repackaging the good news of the Gospel – the hope of a soon-coming King – in a way that is enticing and engaging to those whom we meet, for we 'seek and serve to make God known'!

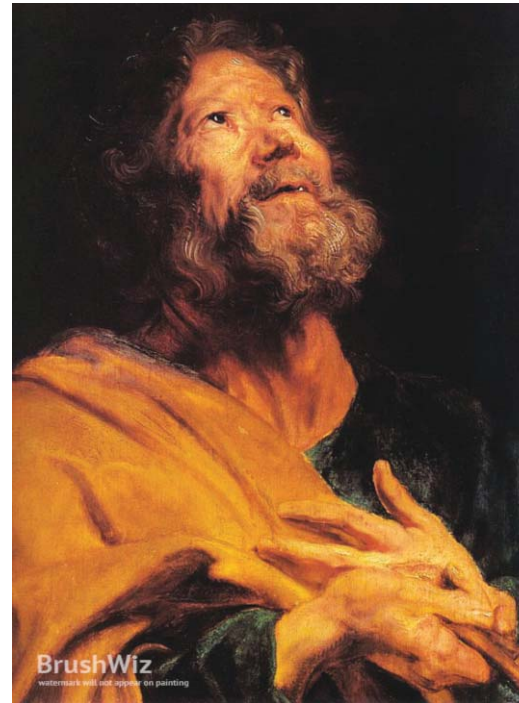


David Neal, Editor

'And guide us when perplexed . . .'

Part 2

Luke 24:32-35



John Wesley on 24 May 1738 tells the story of his journey.

*'In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street (London), where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.'*²

Hold that there for a moment, because Luke just keeps this story going. To make sure he doesn't lose the reader for a second, he relates the disciples' sense of urgency: *'And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem'* (Luke 24:33, ESV). Fired up with amazingly good news, the best news ever, they moved into 'We have to get back to Jerusalem and tell the

We ended our time together last time just as 'the Stranger' appeared to Cleopas and his friend. Over their shared meal they suddenly recognised Jesus in their presence: JESUS! And in that moment He disappeared from their sight. With a half-eaten meal (one commentary suggests the meal was untouched),¹ they are again in a state of excited shock, coming to terms with this amazing turnaround of events, now overwhelmed in a state of almost ecstatic joy.

In that dark, shadowy room, I imagine them getting up from their reclined meal position, looking at each other bewilderedly, checking with each other to confirm their thoughts. 'Did you see what I saw? The Stranger? It was Jesus! I knew it, I knew it!' exclaimed Cleopas.

'They said to each other, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"' (Luke 24:32, GNB.)

What happens to a person on a journey, growing in the realisation that Jesus is more than an interesting figure in history? What happens when the story of this fully God and fully human Person – His life and His teachings, and His ability to conquer the thing most of us fear the most (death) – makes an impact on our lives, both intellectually and emotionally? What happens when the light goes on? What is that fire . . . ?

others' mode. Waiting until morning to make the seven-mile return journey was not an option. Anyhow, had they stayed overnight in Emmaus, would they have been able to sleep, knowing what they knew?

'And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together' (24:33 continued, ESV).

If you think the Gospel has already shone its brightest in this story, I would have to admit to a 'yes, but': because, as I shared last time, the three words, 'He is risen', are the answer to every question; but what Luke hasn't yet shared is what 'He is risen' means. Read background commentary articles on Luke and how he writes, and some authors say that the way he writes suggests that he has a theological agenda. So what if he does? Because it's the most beautiful agenda in the history of the universe! A more dispassionate view is taken by Donald Guthrie, who points out in his *New Testament Introduction*, 'No one would deny that Luke's purpose is theological,' but 'it is truer to say that Luke brings out the theological significance of history.'³

Unlike Paul's letter to the Romans, Luke is not sharing a theological treatise. He's telling a story, and it is in this next line of the story that we find yet another unexpected twist and turn – demonstrating the meaning of the resurrection, with the theology of the Gospel

shining as bright as it ever can.

'The Lord has risen indeed . . .' (Luke 24:34, first part, ESV).

It's a great line in itself, but still not complete. As thrilling as those words are, there is still the 'so what?' element. What's the big deal? What difference does it make?

'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' (Luke 24:34, ESV.)

Did you read what I just read? '*. . . and has appeared to Simon?*' Shaky Simon? Really? The foul-mouthed fella who denied Jesus?

Why does Luke even dare to mention the cocksure, blunt-speaking northern fisherman from Galilee who didn't have the courage of his convictions? 'All mouth and no action,' some would say: a good enough excuse, if one were needed, to erase him from the story. Let him get lost in history – not least as the failed disciple! Among the disciples gathered in that Jerusalem room, would some have cause to wonder if Simon would be the next Judas?

As Mark's gospel records the story of the resurrection (Mark 16:1-8), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome encounter the 'young man' sitting in the tomb. He tells them, *'He [Jesus] has risen'* – but, astonishingly, here again Peter is singled out for special mention:

'But go, tell his disciples and Peter' (Mark 16:7, ESV).

If ever there was a grace note in history, it is here! Luke and Mark had every good reason to erase Peter from the story. What an embarrassment! But they could not, because 'the Stranger' who walked on the road to Emmaus, who explained the Crucifixion story from the 'law and the testimony', went to the Cross for Peter! And the meaning of the Gospel is – make sure Peter knows that!

That's the story. No more twists and turns to Luke's story. In the complexity, confusion and despair of the moment, Luke provides the hope we are looking for. To be sure, hope is to be found in the Word of God: but, far from dry, ancient words, the story is a redemptive one. Who of us has not had 'Shaky Simon' moments? Who of us in recent times has not struggled to take to heart the frequent 'fear not' words of Scripture?⁴ Is anyone confused and perplexed in trying to solve the current complex life issues we face? And yet it is because of the resurrection, and what it means – and the singling out of Peter – that we have the potential to turn difficult and complex and disturbing issues into a deep-rooted calm. For me they are summed up best in four words from a line of a familiar hymn:

**'Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.⁵
Three cheers for God – the fire within still burns!**

¹Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary on Luke 24:33: 'Without tasting the food before them, they left immediately' – vol. 5, p. 884

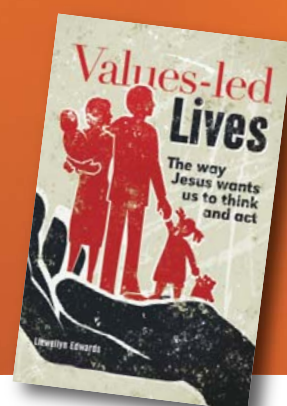
²The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley, vol. 1, p. 102

³Donald Guthrie, 'Luke's Gospel', *New Testament Introduction*, p. 94

⁴<https://www.soulshpherd.org/fear-not-365-days-a-year/>
⁵Third line of the hymn by Henry F. Lyte (1793-1847), 'Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven' (*Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, number 4)



In this excerpt of Values-led Lives, Pastor Llew Edwards provides further illustrations of how secular organisations can teach faithful Christians how to go the extra mile in serving each other.



Part 7: Stories of value

A Google search under ‘customer satisfaction stories’ and ‘company value statements’ could fill this article with links and give you hours of reading. Let me share a few that impressed me.

Some of my favourites come from Nordstrom customers. Nordstrom is a retailer of quality footwear, clothing, jewellery, home accessories and other goods, a company that claims to be the number-one in customer service. (See *The Nordstrom Way* by R. Spector and P. McCarthy, John Wiley & Sons, 1995.) By the way – empowering staff with responsibility is the reason there are no ‘complaints departments’ in the Nordstrom organisation – each employee is the customer complaints department!

A woman in a North Carolina Nordstrom store lost a diamond from her wedding ring while trying on clothes in the store. Naturally, she began to search for it on her knees, scouring the floor. A store worker saw her, and, after finding what she was doing, joined her on his knees, searching for the diamond. After some time the worker asked two other workers to join them in their search. One of them suggests that the floor will have been

cleaned, so they open up the vacuum bags of two machines that were used and find the missing shining jewel. That is another happy customer whose loyalty to the shop has been strongly encouraged.

Here is another story of a man in Portland who wanted an Armani tuxedo for his daughter’s wedding. Unable to locate one, he finally tries Nordstrom. The attendant takes his measurements and the next day phones to say that they have found the tuxedo and that it will be ready the following day. The attendant had had the tux altered for free, and the man found that it fitted exactly. The impressed man quizzed the attendant to find out how she had accomplished it. She explained that through connections she had located the tux on the other side of the country in New York and arranged, via a number of connections, to have it delivered and altered for the customer. So what is really so amazing about that service? Nordstrom doesn’t sell Armani tuxedos!

But it’s not only Nordstrom that impress with their customer service: here are a couple of stories that show service involving children.

Go to ASDA or Tesco and you will find tiger bread, but not in Sainsbury’s, where it is called giraffe bread. Why? Here is the story. In 2013, three-and-a-half-year-old Lily Robinson was shopping with her mother in Sainsbury’s when she noticed that what her mum called tiger bread (named after the pattern on the bread crust) looked much more like the skin markings of a giraffe. Lily’s mother agreed and encouraged her to write to Sainsbury’s, asking why it was called tiger bread instead of giraffe bread.

Chris King, who was on the store customer service team, responded to Lily’s letter as follows: ‘Renaming tiger bread “giraffe bread” is a brilliant idea – it looks much more like the blotches on a giraffe than the stripes on a tiger, doesn’t it?’ Lily’s mother posted the letters on her blog, and some time later they became the topic of thousands of comments on Twitter and Facebook. Sainsbury’s changed the name of the bread and received hundreds of posts and calls commending them on a great piece of customer service.

As noted in the previous chapter, Southwest Airlines is a

US-based airline that leads in customer satisfaction. Commentators on Southwest claim that they lead with the fewest complaints of any airline and the highest customer loyalty. Why? Southwest considers itself a customer service business that happens to be in the flying business. Integral to that is a conviction that love of fun, or ‘luv’ of fun, as they call it, combined with the freedom for staff to take responsibility in the way they treat customers, gives their employees the ability to make a flight an enjoyable experience.

For example, when a group of students travelling together on a Southwest flight asked to help, the hostess saw an opportunity to make their flight an enjoyable and memorable one. The stewardess allowed them to serve the peanuts to the people on the plane. One of the students explained who they were and his classmates joined in serving the passengers, who enjoyed the students’ attention. The crew were pleased to have them help. The pilot awarded them all with ‘wings’ and they had their pictures taken with the staff, and it goes without saying that the students will never forget their experience.

Stories abound – many outstanding and many simple. Here is one from Joseph A. Michelli’s book, *The New Gold Standard* (McGraw-Hill, 2008), in which he ‘... reveals the specific leadership behaviours that produce Ritz-Carlton Hotel’s exemplary corporate culture, exceptional staff empowerment, and extraordinary commitment to its customers’ (page 2). It is a simple story, but one that illustrates the service attitude of this organisation. ‘A guest was getting ready for an early morning meeting that was to happen in a matter of hours when the guest realised he had forgotten his

formal dress shoes. The man asked Mark [the hotel concierge agent on duty] if there was any place that he could get a pair of shoes at that hour. Mark advised that no stores were open prior to the start of the guest’s meeting. As Mark searched for a solution, he found out that the man’s shoe size matched his own. Mark offered to bring the guest a pair of formal shoes that he had worn only at his wedding. When the guest accepted the offer, Mark raced home and brought the shoes back to the hotel.’ (Page 197.)

To enjoy more such stories, take the time to visit the

Ritz-Carlton website (www.ritzcarlton.com) and click on its ‘Memories ...’ tab.

Let me finish this section with another Nordstrom tale.

A businessman travelling between cities damaged his suit jacket and needed it repaired at short notice. Unable to find a repairer who could have it ready the next day, he recalled his wife’s advice to ‘go to Nordstrom’. The man had never shopped at Nordstrom before and got to the store shortly before it closed, only to be told that there is usually a 24-hour turnaround for such repairs. Nevertheless, the service attendant says he will try to have

it the next day. At 9am the next morning the man arrives at the store on his way to the airport to find that the jacket is not there. The attendant makes arrangements to mail it to his home. The man catches the plane to his next destination, goes about his business appointments, then finds the hotel he is booked into. On entering his room he finds the suit plus a shirt and tie and a note from Nordstrom saying they had contacted his wife, found the hotel address and forwarded the suit to him – the shirt and tie were complimentary. The man ends his testimony by saying that he is now a Nordstrom customer.

TUNE INTO GOD’S WORD

Reflections on my ‘Boris walk’

Pastor Ian Sweeney, President, British Union Conference

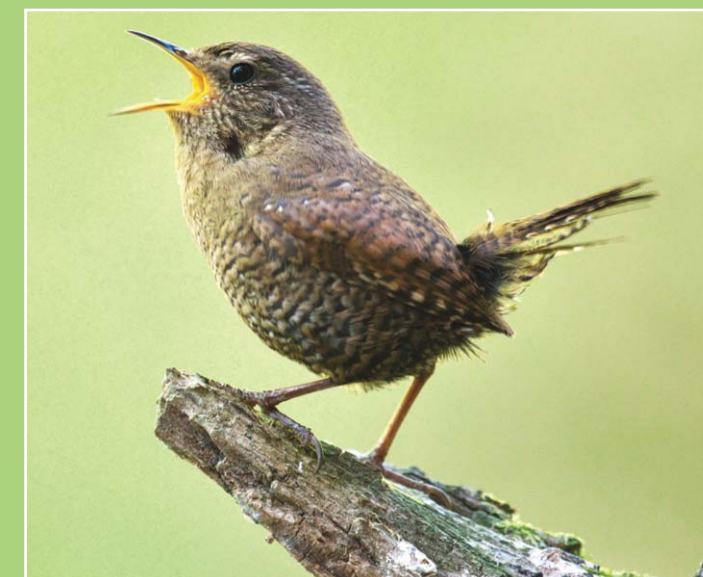
Being something of a news junkie, I welcomed the availability of news channels broadcasting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Oftentimes I would have a news channel playing silently on my phone, as I did not want to miss any significant news story that was occurring across the globe – that was, until COVID-19.

I am not advocating that we ignore the news by burying our heads in the sand, or pretend that lives are not being lost and families are not in deep mourning, but I found that the relentless negative news coverage of COVID-19 with daily rising death tolls and infection rates was having a detrimental impact on my emotional and mental health. We cannot ignore the coronavirus and its devastating effects upon all aspects of our life – we have nearly become prisoners in our own homes – but continually focusing upon COVID-19 news does not lend itself to positive thinking or a more positive outlook on life.

Since the UK lockdown announced by the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson (24 March),¹ we are now permitted to leave our house for one form of exercise per day! I now no longer take for granted the opportunity to get outside and take what I call my ‘Boris walk’, whether early morning or late evening.

I thought I might have been imagining things, but it seems to me that God’s creation is welcoming the changed circumstances presented by COVID-19. As I head out for my walk, I can certainly hear sounds that were once drowned out by the din of traffic and aircraft, such as the singing of birds. My suspicions were confirmed when I listened to the BBC podcast of *Farming Today* this week (28 March 2020), which highlighted that birdsong is now being heard for the first time in years in many parts of the UK; and, beyond this, certain species of birds have moved away from the noise of cities and towns to places where their songs can be heard. Now that the UK and Ireland are a little less noisy, some of those birds may come to a neighbourhood near you.

As my ears have become attuned to what I can only describe as the joyful singing of the birds, my eyes have become more observant of the beauty of God’s creation. On Sabbath, Jennifer and I, while walking through a quiet industrial estate, saw a European green woodpecker, which was the first time in 54 years of life that my eyes had ever seen such a beautiful bird (I know which bird it was courtesy of Google). The next day I saw one of the shyest of animals, a muntjac deer, just a mile



from my home. On our evening walk we observed bats (I know it may not be our favourite creature right now), foxes, toads – and, lifting our heads, we noticed one of the brightest of all stars in the night sky, called Sirius.

It is by being in God’s nature that I have come to appreciate a little more Psalm 104, which in verse 24 reads (GNT): ‘LORD, you have made so many things! How wisely you made them all! The earth is filled with your creatures.’ God has created a wonderful world – so, while we have the chance, let’s get out into His creation and sing along with the psalmist, ‘May the glory of the LORD last forever! May the LORD be happy with what he has made!’ (Psalm 104:31, GNT.)

So let’s turn off the news and tune into God’s Word and His most wonderful creation. It will certainly aid in lifting our spirits.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

London Ghana women's COVID-19 prayer battle 'goes viral'!

Lockdown or no lockdown, women at the London Ghana church engaged in a spiritual battle on Friday 27 March.

Capitalising on what the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, calls 'the wizardry of modern technology', the prayer warfare lasted from 6am to 6pm.

Women of all ages, from different spheres of life, used their mobile phones to unite with one accord and reached out to the most high God every hour concerning the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has not only attacked many nations around the world, but has also resulted in all social gathering venues being shut for business, including all churches.

Mrs Betty Dwomoh of London Ghana Church, popularly known as Auntie Betty, the current Women's Ministries director at London Ghana, found herself in the position of fighting the virus on several fronts. As an NHS professional, not only is she directly fighting the virus physically at the hospital where she works in London, but also, as a wife, a mother and a grandmother, she can relate to the challenges which this dreadful virus is causing other women and their families within their local communities.

Speaking in her usual passionate style, Auntie Betty said during a telephone interview, 'This is not the time for us women to wallow in self-pity or fear. I sometimes feel that fear alone is probably going to claim more lives than the pandemic itself, due to panic! Desperate times call for desperate measures, and I believe that setting aside a whole day where we can all tune in to intercede for each other, while also following practical advice on hygiene, is far more productive than panicking unnecessarily.'

Prayer topics included intervention for healing for the sick around the world; protection for the elderly and vulnerable members of society, families, different sectors of the community, and all types of leaders, including both grassroots leaders and world leaders; and protection for clinicians, key workers and volunteers who are directly or indirectly coming into contact with the virus in order to help others.

Despite the urgent call to prayer, some women also highlighted the importance of giving thanks and acknowledging some of the wonderful things happening – like the thousands of people who have recovered from the virus, despite having experienced symptoms over the past few weeks, and the hope that this brings to everyone.

Ms Felicity Konama was ecstatic when I spoke to her about her experience of the 'prayer battle' on the phone. 'Wow! I'm buzzing right now! I feel so encouraged and refreshed! London Ghana is my home church, but it has been tough commuting to London over the past few years since I moved to Norfolk, while also having tough shifts as a forensic psychiatric nurse. I found it really special that I didn't need to be physically in the church building to be able to take part in this very spiritually uplifting exercise.'

In an attempt to ease the pressures of being stuck indoors with restless children and husbands who have no access to sports and other means of 'active leisure', Auntie Betty and her team are determined that the 'prayer chain' activity should not be a 'one-hit wonder'. They are actively working closely with the Adventist Young Ladies, the younger sisters of the London Ghana Women's Ministries Department, to introduce a series of web-based programmes to engage with women while they are stuck at home.

Mrs Foriwaah Ntiamoah Amponsa, a member of the UK social work force, is one of the 'young ladies', and she will take an active role in ensuring that different dynamic topics, which will have a positive impact on women and their families, are introduced on a variety of social media platforms. 'We don't want women to feel isolated and left out just because they find themselves in a bad situation through no fault of their own. We will work with a variety of professionals, such as educators, social workers, caterers, health practitioners and others, in conjunction with our communications teams, to give tips on different topics that will engage with children and the entire family to keep them focused during this period of lockdown.'

The proposed initiative is music to Mrs Bernice Asamoah's ears. Currently on maternity leave, she has four children in total, and

definitely understands the challenge of being indoors with children and young people of different age groups. 'Well, I can't wait for these videos and other web tips to pop up on my phone! I'm a teacher, and even I have found this lockdown not easy at all, so I can only imagine how other women from diverse backgrounds are feeling.'

The past few weeks have definitely shed new light on what it means to 'keep the faith', and only time will tell, in the coming weeks and months, what the results of these new initiatives will be.

ROBINA FOSUA ARTHUR

Grantham news

Hello everybody, I thought you might like to receive a bit of local church news so that you don't lose touch with what's going on. Please share your news; I'm sure it won't be all doom and gloom!

When the Archbishop of Canterbury suggested that we light a candle of hope and put it in our windows each evening, I did that. It was just one candle of hope – telling of a trust in God. I wonder how many candles were lighting up the darkness this week? I know my neighbour lit hers! The children were asked to put 'rainbows' in their windows – rainbows of hope. We've seen quite a few as we have taken our one piece of daily exercise! Our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ, so:

- Keep looking up: our God is still the same today;
- Keep looking up: He will not fail you, come what may;
- Keep looking up: the darkest clouds will roll away;
- So do not doubt, but keep on looking up!

GOD BLESS YOU ALL – ESME AND JOHN SUTTON

Sunday breakfast for the homeless

It was difficult to acquire the necessary supplies to feed our clients last week, but with God's help we managed to find all that was needed. We also managed to find enough volunteers to man the operation. Our special thanks to Pastor Solon, Dee, Elisabeth (Carnell), Caryn and Cat Garner and/Duane Till: most of our regular volunteers were 'self-isolating'.

Rather than the usual 'sit-down' meal, we provided a 'take-away', like the other Passage venues in the town, to protect our volunteers and clients. We provided egg mayonnaise sandwiches, a hot veggie sausage, and a couple of hot hash browns. We also gave a yoghurt, a hot cross bun, a Kit-Kat biscuit, a banana and sachets of sugar for their hot tea/coffee, which was in a take-away cup.

As the bags were being made up, Andy Maddison arrived clutching a bag of Linda McCartney sausage rolls that the local butcher had given him, so those went into the oven to be cooked and distributed.

We had prepared enough food for 24 people, as we had been informed by other Passage co-ordinators that numbers were down, so we didn't know what to expect. In fact, we served 17 very grateful people.

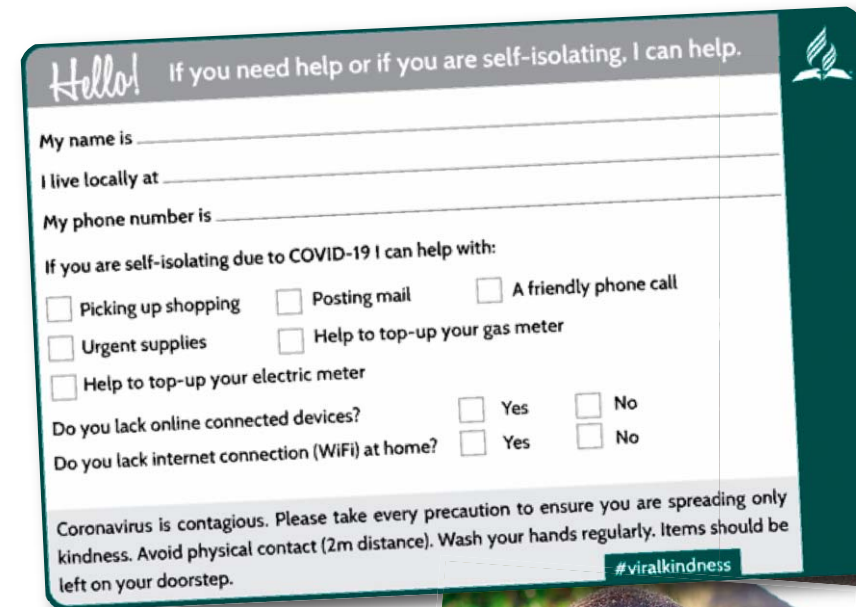
On Monday evening we stopped all activity following the Prime Minister's announcement. We are concerned for our clients, especially the rough sleepers. It seems that on early Tuesday morning 'A' was picked up by the police – he was just wandering around. He was very hungry. He was treated kindly! It seems that pressure was placed on the council, and they have opened a disused house for some of our rough sleepers. They have moved the beds that were used in the 'Church Ark Shelter' into the building. Hopefully they will be warm and dry, and with a Food Bank voucher they will have some food to eat. Please pray for them all for their well-being, mental and physical. At present we can do no more; we trust God to provide for their needs.

ESME AND JOHN SUTTON



The new reality for the South England Conference

by Pastor Sam Davies (SEC Communication Director)



Pastor Clifford Herman



Hanwell 'grab and go' packs

'When are we going back to school?' my children asked. That may represent what many children are asking their parents, following guidelines from the Government for everyone to stay at home because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The situation has created a new reality for how we do church and reach out to the community in the South England Conference. Social media use has escalated among our church members as a means for sharing words of encouragement, praying for one another, holding meetings, and holding church services via digital means.

I had the opportunity to preach via Zoom on the most recent Sabbath to the Reading West church, and was impressed with the number of families who joined the digital worship programme. Sixty-five devices were connected, with an additional 14 on YouTube. This mode of worship is now the new norm for many churches within our Conference, in response to the Conference President's call for pastors to continue engaging with their congregations. Members and worshippers are using Zoom and other media to conduct prayer meetings, Sabbath school discussions, and departmental meetings.

Just before the lockdown, SEC pastors discussed the implications at a workers' meeting held at Newbold. Topics included staying connected with church members, the opportunity to make a greater positive impact on local communities, and using alternative ways to return tithes and offerings. Conference President, Pastor Emmanuel Osei, has also stayed connected by providing regular weekly video updates to all constituents within the SEC.

Churches throughout the SEC have been responding to the needs of local communities during the coronavirus crisis. In area 6D, Hanwell offered 'grab and go' packs to vulnerable individuals and families. In

Area 1, Plymouth's youth and pastor distributed cards, volunteering help to those who are self-isolating, and have assisted in several ways, including prescription collections.

This year's Youth Week of Prayer for the past two Sabbaths was led by SEC Youth Director, Pastor Anthony Fuller, and was streamed live by SEC MEDIA on YouTube and Facebook, while churches including Stanborough Park streamed theirs via their website.

SEC Pathfinder Director, Pastor Clifford Herman, launched online sessions for Pathfinder honours and Adventurer awards, which can be earned from home.

Pastor Mario Phillip of Willesden Church shared how new opportunities have come about with the current situation. He now makes a daily motivational video to keep his church members inspired and connected. As the coronavirus is no respecter of persons, some in his congregation have been affected, and the church has been supportive in helping the self-isolating and shut-ins. They have a prayer line that brings more people together for a midweek prayer meeting than the traditional method did. He added that, though the current situation makes physical visitation difficult, members have been asked to contact each other, which has been effective at gelling the church together.

Dogs and biblical interpretation

Dr Jeff Brown

From April to June, Adventists around the world are engaged in a series of Bible studies about how to understand and interpret Scripture. As an introduction to help *MESSENGER* readers connect with this theme, Dr Jeff Brown gives ‘seven principles for handling interpretive challenges’. Readers of this article who are dog lovers (not least the editor) may find what the Bible says about dogs to be distressing. But, as the author points out, understanding the ‘context’ is so important if we are to interpret the Bible with integrity. Putting it bluntly, when it comes to interpreting Scripture, ‘context’ is not a dirty word, but a critical discipline!

The question was from an 11-year-old. It came to me on Hope Channel’s Bible Helpdesk via Instagram, a page moderated by the young person’s mother: ‘I read the story of Noah, and how God saved two animals (male and female) from every type. When Jesus comes back, will He take animals to heaven too?’

Hard answers?

I had to answer a difficult question, and I did the best I could.¹ Truth can be trickier when the matter concerns someone or something close to you: like your beloved pets. No wonder that best-selling animated movie of three decades ago declared, ‘All dogs go to heaven.’ Dogs have been called man’s best friend. Many people love them. Yet some societies, including from Bible times, have had unflattering words for dogs. Consider this slap: ‘Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs’ (Rev. 22:14, 15, NKJV); leading one writer to declare, ‘No dogs go to heaven.’²

How they see it today

What more does society have to say about dogs? Rather unpleasant things sometimes. In 1992 a prolific African-American female writer, Terry McMillan, authored the novel, *Waiting to Exhale* – later made into a movie that caused a public stir, especially among single men and women. Some viewers lamented McMillan’s negative characterisation of men as consistently degrading, abusing, and eventually destroying women, all summarised in the derogatory metaphor of men as dogs. In response, McMillan maintained that her story had no such hostile intention, but merely reflected how her personal experiences with unfulfilling and sometimes explosive relationships inspired her writing. One aggrieved male author reacted to McMillan’s work with a demand that the scales be balanced. His book response bore a title long enough to express his objection somewhat sarcastically to the metaphor grouping him with dogs: *If All Men Are Dogs, Then Women Are Dog Groomers*.³ These contentions over a metaphor only expound more perfectly on the paradoxical truth that dogs are both loved and

hated among us, adored and despised, cherished and detested.

How the ancients saw it

Scripture passages such as Revelation 22:15 – ‘outside are dogs’ – bring biblical scholars into the conversation about dogs, obliging them to shed what light they may on our emotional dilemma so charged with moral implications. Despising an animal or cherishing it as a member of the family is an emotional thing, but identifying dogs as companions of sorcerers, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters, and liars, in contrast with righteous-robed saints eating from the tree of life, is a distinctly moral matter.

We are free to pick and choose our house pets. For love of our kids, our selection may depend on which animals they most favour, even when the selection may be one that provokes allergic reactions in us – and even in the kids themselves. We take antihistamines to help our spasms of sneezing, rather than deprive our precious child of a puppy: but, when it comes to moral matters, we cannot conscientiously pick and choose our



principles to live by or trample upon; so we seek a word from the Lord that may guide our understanding of His repudiation of dogs. Why does He leave the dogs outside His holy city?

The answer requires a class in culture for Westerners hard-pressed to fathom the negative allusion to dogs. A glance at pet insurance plans shows savings of more than £10,000 for a dog’s gallbladder treatment – surgery, X-rays, hospitalisation, and medications – if we take the correct insurance plan.

We need to be open to hearing new things that the Spirit may be saying.

By contrast, the Eastern world of Jesus’ time would not likely understand about canine health insurance plans. Egypt’s god-dog Anubis was not the norm. The norm was hungry and feral dogs wandering through both urban and rural territory, scavenging on dead bodies and other offal. Ahijah sends King Jeroboam’s wife home to inform her husband: ‘Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city’ (1 Kings 14:11, NIV); and Jehu ben Hanani delivers a similar message to Baasha, who discharges God’s assignment to wipe out the house of Jeroboam, only to follow the same idolatrous practices of his predecessor; so ‘dogs will eat those belonging to Baasha who die in the city’ (1 Kings 16:4, NIV).⁴

‘Dog’ was what you called your enemy (Ps. 22:16, 20); if you felt treated with disrespect, you asked people if they thought you were a dog – as Goliath asked David (1 Sam. 17:43) and Hazael asked Elisha (2 Kings 8:13). Dogs were ritually unclean animals. They could have no place inside the Holy City, where nothing unclean is allowed to enter.

How to see it right

These remarks about dogs highlight significant differences in perspective between Eastern first-century and Western twenty-first-century readers. Instead of competing perspectives and clashing conclusions, we may get more

out of Bible study by respecting seven guidelines for interpretation, built on the acronym, C-O-N-T-E-X-T.

C is for cultural awareness.

The fact that we are called to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) implies that there is a possibility of doing it wrongly. Everyone views Scripture through some particular cultural lenses: but, as with Moses in the wilderness, we need to approach the Word of God with awe, taking off our cultural shoes, because the ground on which we stand when we come to the Holy Scriptures is holy ground (see Ex. 3:5).

O is for openness.

We need to be open to hearing new things that the Spirit might be saying (Isa. 43:19; 1 Sam. 3:9). Ellen White unites her acknowledgement ‘that we have the truth’ with a major caution: ‘we must not look with suspicion upon any new light which God may send.’⁵ Progress in the truth is no threat to longer-established truth.

N is for the New Testament.

N is for the New Testament, which explains much that otherwise would not be clear to students of the Old Testament, even the prophets who received and recorded Old Testament revelations: while they ‘spoke of the grace that was to come . . . [they] searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow’ (1 Peter 1:10, 11, NIV). The nexus between prediction and fulfillment is not always obvious. One reason for this is the conditional nature of some divine predictions: for example, of boon or disaster, dependent on Israel’s behaviour (Deut. 28:1-68; Jer. 18:1-10).

Another is the nature of biblical typology, in which people, places, things, actions, descriptions, and institutions all hold meaning beyond their immediate historical occurrence. By way of illustration, Babylon – first a tower (Babel), and then an ancient Mesopotamian city, nation, and empire – comes to represent the sum total of earthly institutional rebellion against God and all He stands for (Rev. 17).

T is for textual analysis.

Scripture’s literal and non-literal meanings deserve to be understood. One sound practice in that direction is studying all uses of any word or term in a given book – and, beyond this, to its every other occurrence throughout the Bible – before concluding on what it signifies.

E is for eisegesis.

Imposing one’s own interpretation onto the

text is called eisegesis. Scripture is not to be subjected to private interpretations (2 Peter 1:21). The existence of objective guidelines is evident from the interchange between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Like his Master before Him, Philip opened scripture after scripture and showed his student Jesus (Acts 8:30-35; Luke 24:27).

X is for exegesis.

Exegesis is drawing out a text’s meaning in accordance with what the author most obviously intended. When one use seems more easily explainable, it may often be used as an aid to grasping its uses in more obscure places and passages, a better aid than consultation with secular dictionaries and literature. Any light from those is best sought after intrabiblical study has communicated all insight on meaning that it has to offer. The Bible, God’s book, deserves God’s explanation. It does an excellent job of being its own interpreter (2 Tim. 3:16; Isa. 28:10).

T is for trust and prayer.

No matter our level of experience or expertise, we always need to approach the Word of God with humility, assuming the posture of a learner: God ‘guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way’ (Ps. 25:9, NIV). ‘Those who prayerfully study the Bible go from each search wiser than they were before. Some of their difficulties have been solved; for the Holy Spirit has done the work spoken of in the fourteenth chapter of John: “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” [John 14:26, KJV].’⁶

Seeing the big picture

In your Bible study, don’t ever lose sight of the big picture: it’s all about Jesus (Matt. 6:33; John 12:32; Col. 1:20). Simple text or complex metaphor, it’s always all about Jesus: Jesus for you, and for you to share with the world. Tell everyone, dogs included, how much Jesus has done to get them all inside the Holy City.

¹www.hopetv.org/shows/biblehelpdesk/episode/ml/-/episode-for-september-4-2019/september-4-2019/

²www.patheos.com/blogs/religionprof/2012/12/revelation-2215-no-dogs-go-to-heaven.html

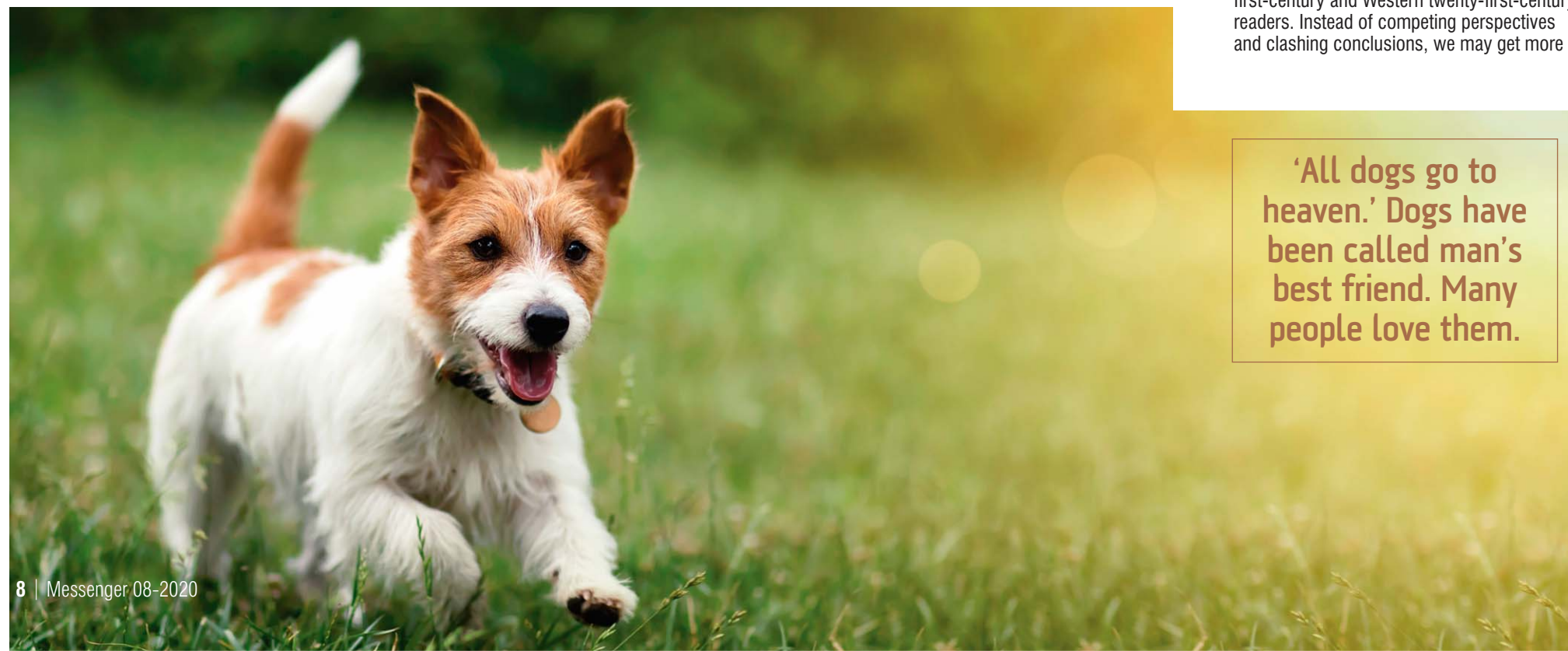
³Isaac Newton, *If All Men Are Dogs, Then Women Are Dog Groomers: Debunking the Myth and Rethinking Relationships* (Freeport, Trinidad: H.E.M. Enterprises, 2003)

⁴See also 1 Kings 21:19; 22:38; 2 Kings 9:10, 36; Jeremiah 15:3; Psalm 59:6

⁵Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), p. 33

⁶Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1930), p. 259

This article first appeared in the online edition of *Adventist Review*, 2 January 2020. Originally from Birmingham, England, Dr Jeffrey O. Brown is the associate editor of *Ministry* magazine at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland. Used with permission of the author.



‘All dogs go to heaven.’ Dogs have been called man’s best friend. Many people love them.

Newbold Church discovers the 'great things God has done'

by Victor Hulbert, Communication Director, Trans-European Division

How much do you know about the person sitting near you in church? Unless they are family or a close friend, possibly little beyond polite pleasantries and the odd comment during Sabbath School. All that has now changed for a church that, for the past year, has chosen to share individual conversion stories at the start of Sabbath School each week. Those stories have now been published in a book.

To Veselinka Bečejac that is all a bit of a surprise. She took over as a reluctant Sabbath School superintendent at the beginning of 2019. 'I thought, why not ask three or four people just to share their stories, maybe once a month,' she said. However, she filled every Sabbath in January and found the testimonies so powerful that she decided to make them a central part of worship throughout the year.

'The church is spellbound; we are breathing like a real family; we know so very much more about each other, and value each other far more now that we know the paths we've travelled,' she confessed.

'It has been really powerful and moving,' agrees Patrick Johnson, Trans-European Division Ministerial Association Secretary. Part of his portfolio also cares for Sabbath School. 'I've seen great emotion, crying, laughter and lots of hugging. We don't realise how powerful stories really are, and how they can bring people together.'

'We need to recognise that God is at work in our midst, just as He was in the world of the Bible characters,' adds Newbold's senior pastor, Marcel Ghioalda. He has become passionate about the project, confessing, 'As we listen to each other's stories, we identify God's fingerprints. There is no proof of His existence greater than one's personal story.'

Working tirelessly, Bečejac has collected together 48 of the 2019 testimonies and published them in a book, *Great Things God Has Done*. 'It is a labour of love,' she says with a beaming smile. 'I just want to pass on the blessings my fellow members and I have enjoyed this year.'

While incidentally demonstrating the highly diverse, multicultural nature of Newbold's membership, readers find themselves captivated by stories of a Hindu living in South America who finds release from a harsh life when a friend introduces her to Christianity, or a young French girl who turns against God as a teen, but who rediscovers Him when she moves to London, where a friend and a dream slowly and patiently draw her back.

Retired pastors and professors also share their secrets. Dr Harry Leonard, a much-loved former head of Newbold's history department, shared that he was brought up with no

Christian background at all. Nobody in his small village cared about church. His questioning started when the younger brother of one of his school friends died at age 12. Leonard went to the funeral, and then felt impressed to seek out a church. The only one he knew of was the Adventist church – the church his former piano teacher attended. He went there, immediately felt he belonged, and, despite his passion for Saturday cricket, never looked back.

'We live in a world where sharing personal stories is powerful yet neglected at the same time,' Pastor Ghioalda states. 'Taking the time to share them during the Sabbath School programme, as well as capturing them in a book, is a corporate testament of God's presence in the life of the Newbold community. This anthology of Divine Presence is something which binds us together as a faith community.'

Read the first chapter and you know that God can change even the worst of lives. Slavko came from a highly dysfunctional family with a drunken, violent father. As he grew older, Slavko was no better, and brought fear to the village. Civil war gave a focus to his hatred . . . yet, through the ministry of an old lady, his life was miraculously changed – and his baptism in a local river brought a crowd of disbelieving spectators, astonished at how such an evil person could be transformed.

Such stories are powerful, and the book is already making an impact. One of Newbold's oldest members is now very frail in hospital. He was so thrilled with his copy that he is telling all the staff about it. He asked for several more copies so that he could share them.

Another lady, who is going



Veselinka with a copy of the book



Veselinka, front row, third from right, with some of the authors



Veselinka, centre, with some of the authors

through extreme difficulties, phoned Bečejac to tell her that she 'felt so much better reading the experiences and was lifted up'. That kind of response is commonplace.

'There are stories displaying God's powerful intervention in people's lives through healing, encouragement, support, rescue, guidance, difficulties, and more,' Ghioalda states. 'There is a story for everyone.'

As the project continues into 2020, he sees the power in capturing such stories. 'It will be wonderful if our initiative continues to inspire others; to recognise, celebrate and encourage one another through storytelling.'

In a church of around 1,000 attendees, life can become insular. Newbold had already been working on a successful photography project, 'Humans of Newbold'. The Sabbath School department and this new book are now taking it a stage further.

Great Things He Has Done is available for purchase from Newbold Church for a donation of £5.00 or more, plus postage. To gain your copy, email: veselinkasekabecejac@yahoo.com. All profits are donated to support programmes for Newbold Church community youth.

To find out more about Newbold Church, visit their Facebook page. The church is an integral part of the campus of Newbold College of Higher Education.

This story first appeared in *TED News*, 9 March 2020.

Returning tithes and giving offerings under lockdown

South England Conference

Account details

Sort code: 40-45-28/Account number: 11014153

Returning by cheque: cheques are payable to South England Conference.*

Returning by card payment: call the SEC office on **01923 232728**.

*To assign your donation to your local church, write the name of your church on the back of the cheque, and include your Gift Aid number if you're a Gift Aider.

Weekly local church text giving

70100 – £1 | 70300 – £3 | 70500 – £5 | 70575 – £10

To give £20, text 70750 as a one-off donation, NOT weekly. The donation will be added to your monthly bill or deducted from your pay-as-you-go balance.

'I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your faithfulness and generosity in supporting the church during this very difficult time. Please rest assured, the coronavirus will pass. May the Lord bless you and keep you safe.'

Emmanuel Osei, President

North England Conference

Account details

Sort code: 60-80-09/Account number: 84598816

Returning by cheque: cheques are payable to North England Conference.*

Returning by card payment: call the NEC office on **01623 361156**.

*To assign your donation to your local church, write the name of your church on the back of the cheque, and include your Gift Aid number if you're a Gift Aider.

Online donations can be made via the Conference's own website: <https://nec.adventist.uk/contact-us/donate/>. Simply follow the instructions given on each area of the page, and ensure that the North England Conference is your choice for where the donation should go.

'In seeking to fulfil the commission of Matthew 28, it is my desire that each congregation within the North England Conference should be an integral part of its community. Our congregations should be the place that our communities look to in times of storm, in times of crisis, in times of happiness and in times of celebration. Our congregations should be the place where refuge can be found, because we have demonstrated to them that all it takes to bring calm to a situation is a word from the Master, who never sleeps. Thank you for your continued faithfulness.'

Richard Jackson, President

Irish Mission

Northern Ireland account details

Sort code: 40-45-28/Account number: 60476188

Republic of Ireland account details

Sort code: 93-32-95/Account number: 14012054

IBAN: 1E74 AIBK 9332 9514 0120 54

Returning by cheque: cheques are payable to Irish Mission.*

Returning by card payment: call the Irish Mission treasury office on **+44 (0)1923 672251**.

*To assign your donation to your local church, write the name of your church on the back of the cheque, and include your Gift Aid number if you're a Gift Aider.

'This crisis has taken us by surprise, but not God; He's still in control, and, at this time, may we all continue to entrust our lives and means into His care. Thank you all for your faithfulness and support in ensuring that the Church continues to fulfil her mission and carry out her ministry of care, nurture, and love. Blessings and good health to you all.'

Dan Serb, President

Scottish Mission

Account details

Sort code: 16-33-45/Account number: 12318997

Returning by cheque: cheques are payable to Scottish Mission.*

Returning by card payment: call the Scottish Mission treasury office on **01923 672251**.

*To assign your donation to your local church, write the name of your church on the back of the cheque, and include your Gift Aid number if you're a Gift Aider.

'Thank you to all our members for making God first a way of life for all times and in all circumstances. I think for all of us this is a non-negotiable and irreducible minimum of our Christian faith. He is faithful and remains our "Jehovah Jireh" – the Lord our Provider.'

Paul Tompkins, President

Welsh Mission

Account details

Sort code: 40-45-28/Account number: 70854085

Returning by cheque: cheques are payable to Welsh Mission.*

Returning by card payment: call the Welsh Mission treasury office on **01923 672251**.

*To assign your donation to your local church, write the name of your church on the back of the cheque, and include your Gift Aid number if you're a Gift Aider.

'Often, it is in times of great anguish that we are able to see more clearly the goodness of God. Let us continue to be faithful and true, for we are confident that even though we walk through the darkest valley, God is with us; He will never leave us and never forsake us.'

Emanuel Bran, President

For returning tithes & giving offerings in the **Irish, Scottish or Welsh Missions**, email: abarki@adventist.uk, including the breakdown of T & O, the name of the church, and your Gift Aid number. The local budget offering will be credited into the church deposit (trust) account and later transferred to the local church bank account, upon the request of the treasurer.

Official opening of LifeSource Christian Bookshop

It was an eventful day on Thursday 12 March for the Watford Adventist Book Centre (ABC), based in the premises of the British Union Conference (BUC), Stanborough Park, Watford, Herts. Recognising the need to be more present in the local community and to ensure that its name be easily identifiable, the rebranding of the ABC to LifeSource Christian Bookshop was officially recognised.

The formal opening ceremony commenced with UK Sales Manager, Trevor Johnson, sharing his vision of LifeSource with those in attendance, representing the BUC Executive Committee, BUC support staff and departmental directors, field presidents and staff from the Stanborough Press. Johnson spoke of the need to engage more with the local community, providing services that extend beyond the remit of the Adventist Church. With LifeSource now being the only Christian bookshop in Watford, Johnson spoke of the opportunity to become the primary source of meeting spiritual needs through Christian literature, music, games, Christian resources and vegetarian food. Johnson also highlighted the new LifeSource online resource website, which was launched a week later. The new website is now ensuring that their services extend nationally, as well as globally, as we move into a globalised commercial network of opportunities.

The BUC President, Pastor Ian Sweeney, gave the formal address, mentioning the importance of Christian literature, and that, despite the digital world we live in today, books are still relevant and as popular as ever for people desiring to gain information and inspiration. With the symbolic cutting of the ribbon by Pastor Sweeney to officially transfer the new name, Stanborough Press staff members Elisabeth Sangüesa (General Manager) and Victor Pilmoor (Chief Financial Officer) both expressed words of appreciation for those in attendance, highlighting how the Press has moved forwards by embracing change and recognising the need to become more relevant in a changing world.



Lockdown, but . . . not out!

ADRA-UK promotes community outreach by Total Member Involvement throughout the COVID-19 crisis

Lockdown!

Your church has now moved from the building to a virtual space. Sabbath School, sermons, Bible studies and prayer meetings are all held on computers, phones and tablets. The world of sitting in buildings for worship has now moved to our sitting in bed, on sofas and at tables.

So how can we continue to connect with the community in this environment while on lockdown?

Pray

On a daily basis, each of us can offer prayers. Why not pray for the homeless, those living in abusive relationships, or key workers who are suffering at this time? Think about praying for the Government as they make decisions; and, of course, pray for those suffering from COVID-19. Why not create a prayer journal and document your prayers with relevant scriptures?

Connect

Social isolation has caged us into our own spaces, which in turn can spawn frustration, anxiety, low moods and depression. Why not make contact the old-fashioned way, by letter? However, what might be more appropriate in these times is a call or text, just to ensure that

neighbours, friends, and family have someone to talk to, even just for a good old natter! WhatsApp groups are useful for connecting with family and friends, as are FaceTime, Zoom and Skype meetings.

Volunteer

There may be people in your community whom you have never met but who are in walking distance of where you live. You can connect through www.nextdoor.co.uk, a website where you can find out the needs in your community, and also post any needs that you might have. If your local church has a community outreach initiative, get involved, keeping safe as you go.

Give

'In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"' (Acts 20:35, NASB). Sometimes, all we can give is money – and even the smallest amounts given can go a long way in supporting community outreach. You can donate money for community outreach and international development (which is actually community outreach overseas) at www.adra.org.uk.

During your lockdown, sure, you need to stay at home, but our presence needs to be 'out' there, through your prayers, through connecting with friends and family, through volunteering in your local community or by giving money to assist the work being done.

"By our churches there is a work to be done of which many have little idea, a work as yet almost untouched. *"I was hungry,"* Christ says, *"and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."* Matthew 25:35, 36 [NKJV]. Some think that if they give money to this work, it is all they are required to do, but this is an error. . . . It is right to give our means, and many more should do this; but according to their strength and opportunities, **personal service is required of all** (Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 189, emphasis supplied).

CATHERINE ANTHONY BOLDEAU



Nichola Lauder, coordinating the food distribution programme for Edmonton

Tribute to a centenarian – Brother Levi Lawrence, 1919-2020 and beyond

On 16 November 2019, Stoke Newington Church celebrated as one of its members reached the wonderful age of 100 and received an official congratulatory letter from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the first member of this church to do so.

Church members and relatives gathered for a high day in Zion to celebrate with Brother Levi Lawrence. The occasion had special renditions from Brother Lawrence's daughter and an array of heartfelt tributes from an array of pastors who have served the 'Stokey' church. A rousing service of praise and thanksgiving rang through the rafters as we gave praise to God for blessing Brother Lawrence with an abundance of years.

The speaker for the day was Pastor Perry, whose sermon was, 'Who can find a valiant man?' It focused on Brother Lawrence's dedication, love and faithfulness to God as a valiant warrior for God.

Brother Lawrence hails from the land of wood and water (Jamaica). He has been a 'Stokey' member for decades, and is well-known and loved by all for being a father, brother, counsellor, poet, singer, theologian and teacher.

God has indeed fulfilled His promise in Psalm 90:10 by blessing Brother Lawrence to far exceed threescore years and ten!

May his days be long upon the land which the Lord has given us.

JOHNNET HAMILTON



'Thank you for helping me on my journey' – Florica Tomos

December 16, 2019, was a very special day for Florica Tomos, for on that day she graduated from the University of South Wales with her PhD. Her thesis was entitled, 'The impacts of learning and digital platforms & ICTs on the success of women entrepreneurs in communities of practice in South-east Wales'.

Florica came to Wales in 2003 after marrying Clifford Tomos (then of the Rhyl church). She had previously been a staunch member of her church in Romania. Florica had a BSc in Economics before coming to Wales, but wanted to further her education, so she gained a GCE in English Literature, an AAT diploma, a PGCE in Further Education, and now her PhD. It has been a hard struggle, but, during the years Florica has been doing her doctorate, she has had many papers published, including a book – *Women Entrepreneurs and Strategic Decision-making in the Global Economy* – of which she is the lead editor and contributor, with three others.

Also, Florica has presented papers at many annual international conferences, the latest being in Malta, Greece, Italy and Romania, dealing with women in business. Wherever Florica has found herself, she has taken every opportunity to witness for her Lord, of what He has done for her, and of His soon coming.

Florica would like to thank, through the *MESSENGER*, all those who have supported her in many ways, not least of all through their encouragement and prayers, and that all of us will be ready to meet our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, when He comes.

CLIFFORD TOMOS



Single & special

Earlier this year, *MESSENGER* reported on the North England couples' retreat at Stratford-upon-Avon. The report below is also an NEC ministry retreat report – this time held in Coventry, and for singles.

The NEC 'Single & Special' banquet, held on 1 March, was special indeed. The red carpet was laid out at the Village Hotel Coventry for our singles to walk on, stylishly dressed in their formal attire, into a well-presented banquetting suite. The singles arrived looking smart and well-groomed, and they came in their numbers (70-plus) to enjoy the occasion. The banquet was hosted by Beulah Plunkett, Women's Ministries Director, and Pastor Paul Liburd, Family Ministries Director. This was the first singles' banquet organised by the Women's Ministry team. Much work was put into making it special.

From the start of the event, the singles were blessed with wonderful live music from Mark Bunney and his wife LaDonna Bunney, beautiful singing and amazing saxophone sounds. This was followed by a get-to-know-you icebreaker led by Beulah Plunkett, and a talk from Pastor Paul Liburd. After a beautiful meal there was time to mingle, followed by a mini concert with more live music and singing from Georgina Morrison, Mark Larman and the Bunneys. There was even a special rendition of the poem 'Love Letta' by Beulah Plunkett, which brought laughter and great surprise – delivered in Jamaican Creole! Many new friends were made, and we are looking forward to more singles' events and gatherings.

'Singles' Sundays' were started by Beulah Plunkett, providing opportunity for single male and female Adventists to meet and build friendships.

The purpose of the 'Singles' Sundays' and banquet and other such events is to give Adventist singles from far and wide the opportunity to meet and build friendships, the foundation of good long-term relationships.

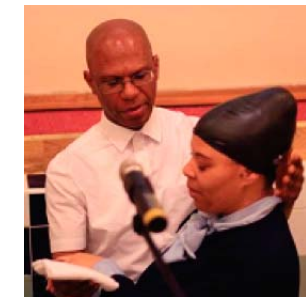
Singleness is a part of all of our lives at some point in time. Singleness also comes into our lives through bereavement and loss. We need to keep in mind how we can best meet the needs of the singles in our churches, and plan how to continue to support all our singles so that they feel loved and included in the life of the church. Let us all – married and single – journey towards the kingdom of God together as we care for all in the 'household of faith'.

BEULAH PLUNKETT, WOMEN'S MINISTRIES AND SABBATH SCHOOL DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATE ADVISOR, PEACE, NORTH ENGLAND CONFERENCE

'Elishama'

Stoke Newington Church witnessed the baptism of Elishama Harvey on 29 December 2019. 'Elishama' is a biblical name meaning 'God has heard'. The biblical Elishama was a son of David, born in Jerusalem, mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:16. We welcome Elishama Harvey (already a member of the church choir) into the membership of the 'Stokey' church family. May God continue to bless her and keep her and her family in His care.

JOHNNET HAMILTON



Easter in the time of COVID-19

by Weiers Coetser

On 16 March this year, just as the reality of the coronavirus started to bite into ordinary life, David Briggs died peacefully at the age of 102.

Who was David Briggs? Here is what his grandson, Ben, wrote about him:

'He was the last surviving chorister in the first ever broadcast of *Nine Lessons and Carols* from King's College,

Cambridge, in 1928. He later became a progressive headmaster of the same school for nearly two decades. He turned one of the country's most established boys' schools co-ed and abolished corporal punishment well ahead of his time. Despite being a conscientious objector, he insisted on serving as a medic alongside his brothers on the front lines, and was very nearly court-martialled and shot for refusing to bear arms against his fellow man. He was at Dunkirk and D-Day, and helped set up a field hospital where he also founded a choir to entertain injured soldiers.'

I heard about David Briggs when his daughter, novelist and journalist Anne Atkins, spoke movingly on BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* about the difficulties of arranging his funeral as the extent of the coronavirus lockdown became more and more apparent. She says, 'First we followed his careful plan put together over years: an orchestra, choir, four tributes from offspring, two clergy sons-in-law. Then we scaled down to a chamber group and half a dozen singers. Then just a soloist and family choir. Then cancelled altogether. But we still hoped to visit the empty



David Briggs at 100 ©MrArmstrong2

church by the time appointed tomorrow with our daily exercise allowance, five in a family who lived together . . . readings and prayers, a cappella singing. Yesterday the vicar rang, apologetic: "You can no longer use the building."'

As in almost all things communal these days, the final tribute moved to cyberspace. More than thirty individual musicians recorded themselves singing an anthem that Anne had written to commemorate her parents. In a masterpiece of audio and video editing, a family member combined these individual voices and instruments together to create a mellifluous musical masterpiece, which can be viewed online. (Look for 'Anthem for Mary and David' – a link is also available on the Exeter Church website.)

I write this reflection as Easter draws near, the time when we remember the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. How do we interpret the Easter story in the time of COVID-19?

Perhaps we can draw a comparison from the

commemoration of David Briggs' life. Social distancing is an unnatural and painful state of alienation that causes distress to many. Is this a good way to think of the distance that existed between God and all of humankind? There was a yearning for God, but the gap seemed impossible to bridge.

Then Jesus came to earth, and, by entering the suffering of the world, He bridged the gap. Through His death and resurrection, He brings us together. He offers a new way of conducting relationships. He calls us, from disparate corners, into a new, loving, Christian community. The grief might still be there: but separation is no longer an issue. He has found a way to unite us as a single household of God. I hope that, instead of feeling lonely and isolated this Easter, you will experience the call and reassurance of God, and know that we are still part of a life-giving community of faith.

'David Briggs's father, G. W. Briggs, was a hymn writer. At least one of his hymns, 'God hath spoken by the prophets', is in our Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal.

Heather Margaret Robertson (1933-2020)
d. 16 February.



Heather Margaret Robertson was the eldest of five children born to Victor and Kathleen Wastling in Hull on 13 October 1933. Margaret (Margo) spent her early life in Hull, and for a short time during the war she was evacuated to Halifax with her brother Geoffrey. Afterwards she lived with her Adventist grandma in Hull, until she went to Newbold College in her late teens. It was there that she developed her talent for singing and met her future husband, the late Francis Robertson. As a married couple they returned to Hull. During their time in Hull they were very hospitable and served as Community Service leaders in the church.

Francis worked in the local psychiatric hospital and qualified as a nurse. Margaret worked there also. Eventually, Francis received promotion to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading, as a nurse training director. They attended the Reading church, with Margaret serving as leader of Community Services, and eventually she was asked by the South England Conference to be Community Services Director. At first she was responsible for the provinces, after which the London churches were added. Her husband, Francis, gave her the full support she needed. Community Services was her life, and she put her whole self into serving her Lord by meeting people's needs.

During her last two years Margaret lived with her past

memories rather than the present. We are grateful to all those who looked after her – neighbours and carers. Margaret passed away peacefully in her sleep after a short spell in hospital. As always, even during her last week, she was thinking of others, and was concerned when she was given a drink and her visitors had none.

Pastor Ron Clemow, whom she knew from Community Services weekends at Broomhill Conference Centre, conducted the funeral service. Our sympathies go to her brother Geoffrey and her sister Brenda, who is in Australia, as well as her son Ian and three teenage granddaughters, Jasmine, Amelia and Sophie.

MARGARET AND GEOFFREY WASTLING

Letters to the editor

Walking the walk

Dear Editor

I couldn't help noticing the public response to Prince Charles's flight of 125 miles from High Grove to Cambridge in

the Queen's helicopter to give a speech on aircraft emissions. He encouraged scientists to 'act quickly to rescue this poor old planet'. However, his flight caused carbon emissions of 2.5 tonnes, used hundreds of gallons of aviation fuel and cost at least £12,000. A trip by train would have cost a mere £100. One person commented, 'He wants to play the role, but not walk the walk. His view seems to be that it's one rule for him and one rule for us.'

This article reminded me so much of the importance as royalty of our Heavenly Father to be walking the walk while on this planet.

How can we . . .

- Invite weekly attendance to prayer meetings or church services and events, when we ourselves are not present or on time?
- Encourage the returning of tithe and giving of offerings, when we do not return or give a full amount ourselves?
- Refer to dressing modestly, when we do not dress modestly ourselves?
- Talk about keeping the Sabbath holy, when within the sanctuary across our churches we share conversations that are not exhortations, but rather full of slander and secular topics?
- Decry the music of our young people, when, at occasions within or outside of the church, those of the older generation gyrate and move to the same or similar sounds?

Let's return to the waymarks that develop confidence for onlookers about what we believe, say and know to preserve God's credibility as Christians – followers of Christ.

It's important that we walk the walk!

ANNE PHILLIP

¹Prince Charles flew 125 miles in a helicopter to give speech on aircraft emissions', Patrick Hill, 1 February 2020, <http://www.mirror.co.uk>

Dear Editor

It was such a blessing to read your *MESSENGER* editorial from 19 July last year, 'Denomination or movement?'

The 'compare and contrast' section in blue under the title/theme 'The Church' caught my eye instantly. It is so refreshing to know that I am not alone in my views of the church. You are a person after my own heart!

A few years ago I asked a local church congregation, 'How many of us believe that the church membership can double by this time next year?' The church on the whole agreed by the showing of hands. I then asked, 'How many think we can do this by the way we conduct our church now?' Hardly anyone could support this. Then I said that the church has a problem. We believe it is possible, but the way we do church now makes it impossible.

How refreshing and reforming it would be if we were a mission-driven church, attractive to visitors and full of the Holy Spirit.

It is my unshakable belief that our God can swell the numbers of members/disciples throughout the BUC, and within less than five years the current membership can increase by 100% . . . not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of Christ working individually and collectively more effectively than ever before. Instead of going round and round in circles, repeating the same thing in a more uniform manner, the church needs to be restored.

Is this not the time that we should return to the biblical model of the church of the New Testament?

ALRIC M. PRENDERGAST

Ulceby – is anyone listening?

Dear Editor

I can't recall the date, but you will be able to quickly find it – you published an article from me on Ulceby last year. [Editor's note: 'From Hull, Hell and Halifax, God preserve us' was published in *MESSENGER* 16 August, p. 14.] In that article I made a challenge to the BUC, the NEC and the SEC as to what they are going to do to save the church from extinction. However, as of today, a little more than six months since, we have heard nothing from any of them.

You may wonder why I gave the challenge to all three Conferences, for some would say that, as an NEC church, it is the responsibility of the NEC to deal with it – but, as we all know, Ulceby is our first church building, one of our first churches in Britain, and as such has a rich historical connection with our church, even today. It was established before there was any conference, when Britain was a mission field staffed by pastors and Bible workers, particularly from the USA. As such, it therefore belongs to *all* of us – BUC, NEC, SEC and the Missions – and, as such, it is our responsibility, if possible, to save it. Therefore I ask again: what are *we* going to do about Ulceby Church? Isn't it time that the BUC set up a panel from each section of our Union who can work together to come up with a viable plan to save our history, and, most importantly, keep the church alive (if possible) in this part of the British Isles? I await news from our Conference leaders.

PAUL HAWORTH

Prayer Matters

For those who are seriously ill, and who are having to face their final moments of life in isolation, there is added grief and pain beyond what is expected. Let's remember in prayer those who are particularly vulnerable to the life-threatening effects of the virus, and also their loved ones, in distress that they are unable to spend precious moments together. In addition, pray for those unable to hold funeral services, as is traditional at such times.

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Sunset

Sunset times are reproduced with permission from data supplied by HM Nautical Almanac Office.

	Lon	Card	Nolt	Edin	Belf
Apr 3	7.38	7.50	7.44	7.56	8.05
10	7.50	8.02	7.56	8.10	8.18
17	8.01	8.14	8.09	8.24	8.32
24	8.13	8.25	8.21	8.39	8.45

From the Scottish Mission Newsletter

Isolation Activities for younger *MESSENGER* readers!

Scottish Mission leaders have generously opened up this competition to all young *MESSENGER* readers across the Union. Enjoy!

As supplied, errors and omissions excepted

As supplied, errors and omissions excepted

SCOTTISH MISSION PERSONAL MINISTRIES & PATHFINDER DEPARTMENTS
ANNOUNCE AN ISOLATION ACTIVITY

**CREATIVE
COMMUNITY'S
ADVENTURE
BEHIND
DOORS**

**1 CHURCH
9 AGE GROUPS**

**19 PRIZES
TO BE
WON**



THEY ALSO WERE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS...

**PICK A SCENE FROM ONE OF THESE
BIBLE PASSAGES:**

EXODUS 12:1-28, JOHN 20:18-29,
ACTS 12:1-17, GENESIS 7:16-17, JONAH 1:17
AND CRAFT IT IN YOUR OWN WAY.

**USE WHATEVER MATERIALS YOU LIKE;
CRAYONS, PENCILS, PAINT, TEXTILES,
YARN, CLAY, WOOD, CARDBOARD ETC..**

**MAXIMUM DIMENSIONS OF YOUR WORK: 50 CM²
1 ENTRY PER PERSON AS WELL AS PER FAMILY**

**PICTURE PRESENTATIONS WILL BE PUBLISHED ON
SM FACEBOOK PAGE FORTNIGHTLY, STARTING
FROM 3RD APRIL.**

**PLEASE SEND PICTURES OF YOU/ YOUR FAMILY
"IN ACTION" TO IVANA@ADVENTIST.SCOT**

**HAND YOUR WORK TO YOUR LOCAL
PASTOR BY 30TH JUNE 2020. WRITE YOUR
FULL NAME, AGE GROUP, AND CHURCH AT THE
BACK OR LABEL YOUR WORK OTHERWISE.**

**26TH SEPTEMBER: SCOTTISH MISSION DAY OF
FELLOWSHIP - DISPLAY OF ALL SUBMITTED
WORKS AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF WINNERS.**

AGE GROUPS:

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| A. 1-3 | D. 9-12 | G. 21-49 |
| B. 4-5 | E. 13-15 | H. 50+ |
| C. 6-8 | F. 16-20 | I. A whole family project |

**LET'S USE THE TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING
CREATIVELY AND STAY CONNECTED.**

