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TELLING THE STORY

Archives, Statistics,
and Research (ASTR)
Newsletter - Issue #6



Christmas and New Year's Greetings!

In December 1884, Ellen G. White shared that "Christmas is coming. May you all have wisdom to make it a precious season. Let the older church members unite, heart and soul, with their children in this innocent amusement and recreation, in devising ways and means to show true respect to Jesus by bringing to him gifts and offerings. Let every one remember the claims of God. His cause cannot go forward without your aid" (*R&H*, Dec. 9, 1884). Here at ASTR we wish to join with White in wishing you all a blessed Christmas season, one that truly uplifts Christ and His Father's gracious gifts upon all of us, His children, of which the greatest gift is Christ Himself.

In this December newsletter, we have several interesting articles—the story of the Matariah Mercy Home, one of Ellen White's more fascinating visions which occurred on Christmas day focusing on the health message, a statistical nugget on mission offerings, and a report about our members' commitment to Jesus. You'll also read about how some of our forbearers understood the Christmas season and, last but not least, enjoy an interview with Dragoslava Santrac, the Editor of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* which continues to bring many of these stories to life for a new generation.

Again in the words of Ellen White, "Christmas and New Year's should...be seasons when every household should remember their Creator and Redeemer" (*R&H*, Nov. 13, 1894). Let us keep these words in mind as we prepare to enter a New Year that will hopefully return some normalcy to our lives, and may the heritage of our faithful believers that have gone before continue to inspire you!

Matariah Mercy Home

Matariah Mercy Home was an orphanage operated by the Egypt Field of Seventh-day Adventists to provide care for underprivileged village children from 1947 to around 1990. Establishment

Shortly after the World War II ended, the Egyptian government, impressed by the growing educational work of the Adventist Church, requested help in caring for orphans and underprivileged children. In response, in 1947, an orphanage called Matariah Mercy Home was established in Matariah, a suburb in Cairo, Egypt, under the direction of Aldred G. Zytoskee, president of the Arabic Union Mission. This orphanage would be established in what was once the Arabic Union Training School, on the premises of the publishing house that had been operating since 1923. Two weeks before the orphanage opened in 1947, thieves broke in and stole all the beds, mattresses, and blankets that were ready for the children's arrival. This delayed its opening a few days until new equipment was purchased. The orphanage initially received orphans and children between 5 and 10 years of age that came from poor families. It started with a few boys and girls, but the numbers soon increased. At first, an elementary school was opened for the approximately 30 children who lived there; unfortunately, it was closed. Medical assistance was supplied to the children, many of whom had trachoma and other diseases.

Erna Steinmanns, a German missionary nurse, had come to Egypt in 1930 and married Emil Kruger. In 1934, within six months of each other, she had lost both her husband

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and her infant son. Instead of going back to Germany, Erna chose to stay and dedicate her life to mission service. "Mamma" Kruger, as she came to be known, soon had more children than she could have dreamed of as she was put in charge of the orphanage as matron of Matariah Mercy Home.

enlarged with funds from a 13th Sabbath offering, and its capacity was doubled. The new building had two separate dormitory wings, one for girls and one for boys. A kitchen and a large dining hall were also added.

In July 1963, Mokhtar Nashid Yacoub, grandson of the first native Seventh-day Adventist in Egypt, was appointed business manager for Matariah Mercy Home. Plans were laid for a program of vocational instruction, but the program failed to materialize. In 1964, the modernized Matariah Mercy Home was completed and dedicated. The government expressed great satisfaction with the work done by the care home and school.³



Welcoming "Mamma / Mother" Kruger



Staff of Matariah Mercy Home

History

Students from Matariah Mercy Home, after completing primary education, attended a secondary school with Principal Shafik Ghali behind the Adventist church building. In 1953, it was decided to move the Egypt Training School to a place near Cairo. It was relocated to Gabal Asfar, ten miles northeast of Cairo, and is now the Nile Union Academy (NUA). However, before boarding facilities were arranged at NUA, students would stay at Principal Ghali's secondary school. Once the Egypt Training School was ready to accommodate students at its new location, Principal Ghali's secondary school was moved to Zeitoune and operated as an elementary school. To complete their secondary education, students from the Egypt Training School and Matariah Mercy Home attended NUA.²

Over time, the building that housed Matariah Mercy Home and the adjacent matron's bungalow started to deteriorate. Plans were laid to rebuild the orphanage and increase its capacity. Until the rebuilding was completed, a large house in the Zeitoune area was rented to accommodate the children. In 1963, the orphanage was rebuilt and

Erna Kruger worked at the home from its inception, and it closed shortly after her retirement in 1989, when she returned to Germany.⁴ After Erna Kruger departed for retirement in Germany, Matariah Mercy Home received few newcomers. The orphanage was turned into a school for students from the neighboring community and needy Egyptian and Sudanese Adventist youth, who were given free accommodation on the property. A trust fund under Kruger's name was managed by the Egypt Field to continue helping needy Egyptian students, and this continued well into the 1980s. Matariah Mercy Home provided the basic education for those who would become ordained Adventist pastors, university professors, nurses,

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psychiatrists, business managers, translators, and editors who served and still serve the Adventist Church and its institutions in Egypt and around the world.

Nabil Mansour, adapted by Dragoslava Santrac

For more articles, see the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (online at encyclopedia.adventist.org)

¹ Gary Land, "Historical Dictionary of Seventh-day Adventists, No. 56," in *Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements*, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 90.

² C. V. Brauer, "Activities in Egypt Today," *ARH*, July 16, 1959, 21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Heather Brannan and Nabil Mansour, "Erna 'Mamma' Kruger Dies in Germany," *Adventist News Network*, November 1, 1999, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/1999-11-01/erna-mamma-kruger-dies-in-germany/>.

Ellen White's Christmas Day Vision at Rochester: A Vision of Hope and New Territory to Conquer

While in family worship Christmas day, December 25, 1865, Ellen White was taken off in vision. This vision ranks with the Otsego vision of June 6, 1863, in unfolding the significance of health reform within the third angel's message.

The Otsego vision opened up the integrated system of health principles that the Lord wanted the Adventist Church to adopt. The Rochester vision emphasized how feeble had been the response of most church members and gave even more explicit information as to how the church was to coordinate health reform with the gospel message. Ellen White wrote out the vision the next day and gave the document to James. For months they had been wondering why they had seen no progress in his recovery. They now knew why and what they must do about it.

The key points of the vision were:

It was God's will that they went to Dansville, for otherwise they could not have learned what had to be known "in so short a time."

The Dansville home is the "best health institution in the United States ... yet, the leaders there are but men, and their judgment is not always correct."

When people who have suffered much "are relieved by an intelligent system of treatment ... they are often led to conclude" that their physicians who treat them are also "right in matters of religious faith, or at least cannot greatly err from the truth."

God could not glorify His name by answering the prayers of His people for the Whites while at Dansville, for "the physicians there would have taken the glory which should be given to God."

Through this experience God was "fitting up" James to be a stronger leader in health reform, in that he and others could speak more effectively regarding the "relation which eating, working, resting, and dressing sustain to health."

"God requires all ... to place themselves in the best possible condition of bodily health" to attain a "healthy religious experience," and that the Lord will not "do for them that which He requires them to do for themselves."

James had let fear and anxiety overwhelm his faith and that, by the power of his will and trusting in God's power, he would regain his health.

Church members had been "negligent in acting upon the light which God has given in regard to the health reform": that such work "had scarcely" begun.

"Few ... understand how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their characters, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny."

"God's people are not prepared for the loud cry of the third angel. They have a work to do for themselves which they should not leave for God to do for them."

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Seventh-day Adventists must develop their own health institution. This institution would be "the means of introducing our faith in new places and raising the standard of truth where it would have been impossible to gain access had not prejudice been first removed."

This health institution should provide a home for (1) "the afflicted," and (2) for those "who wish to learn how to take care of their bodies that they may prevent sickness."

This institution must be financially independent, not to be "embarrassed by a constant expenditure of means without realizing any returns."

"The great object" of this institution "is not only health, but perfection and the spirit of holiness, which cannot be attained with diseased bodies and minds."

The sick are to be taught that "it is wrong to suspend all physical labor in order to regain health."

"The greatest danger" would be for the managers to depart "from the spirit of the present truth, and from that simplicity which should ever characterize the disciples of Christ ... in order to help the feelings of unbelievers, and thus secure their patronage."

The Beginning of Adventist Health Institutions

The implications of this Rochester vision were broad; the principles set forth are still valid. In practice, this vision provided Ellen White with a course of action to help her feeble husband in his slow recovery, a plan to spend the winter of 1866-1867 in northern Michigan. Further, this vision became an electrifying call to the young church to advance and establish an Adventist health institution. On one hand, such a thought seemed preposterous; on the other, it was the next logical step in fulfilling God's plan through the Adventist Church.

Ellen White's Sabbath sermon at the General Conference session in Battle Creek, May 19, 1866, emphasized, perhaps for the first time publicly, the instruction given her in the Rochester health reform vision. Within days, the leadership responded to the call for a health institution,

though with trepidation. J. N. Loughborough, president of the Michigan Conference, recalled: "When this testimony was read to our people, the question arose, 'How can we, in our condition of limited means, obtain and control a health institution? ... The committee ... prayed over the matter, and said, 'We will pledge to the enterprise, venturing out on what is said in the testimony, though it looks to us like a heavy load for us to hold up.'"

Within days, property was bought and tanks installed on the roof for hydrotherapy treatments. By September 5 the Western Health Reform Institute was ready for patients under the medical care of Drs. H. S. Lay and Phoebe Lamson. Yet, many were the perils that lay ahead. The counsel of Ellen White saved the institutional management from making serious errors, especially in regard to the purpose of the institution: (1) The object is not primarily for "gain," although it must be financially independent, not drawing on other denominational funds; (2) Standards must not be lowered in order to "patronize unbelievers"; (3) The institution, though not to be a place for "diversion or amusement," will create an environment free from "diseased imaginations," "dissatisfied feelings," and "discontented repinings"; (4) The institution is established to "improve the health of the body that the afflicted may more highly appreciate eternal things"; (5) The institution should not expand any faster than adequate "skill, experience, and finance could be provided."

Even more amazing, in addition to establishing a medical institution, was the decision to publish *Health Reformer*, a periodical that Dr. H. S. Lay would edit. Shortly after its introduction, Ellen White wrote: "The *Health Reformer* is the medium through which rays of light are to shine upon the people. It should be the best health journal in our country. It must be adapted to the wants of the common people, ready to answer all proper questions and fully explain the first principles of the laws of life and how to obey them and preserve health."

Originally from Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* 3rd ed. (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), pp. 302-304.

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2020 Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook

Remember that you can find a list of all Adventist organizations and institutions around the world in the Adventist Yearbook from General Conference Divisions, Unions, and Conferences to Educational Institutions (excluding primary schools), Food Industries, Healthcare Institutions, and more! Find all these in the Adventist Yearbook. Purchase your copy of the 2020 Adventist Yearbook, in printed form or electronic file, at [PacificPress.com/SDAYearbook](https://www.PacificPress.com/SDAYearbook). Don't miss out on this extraordinary source of information!

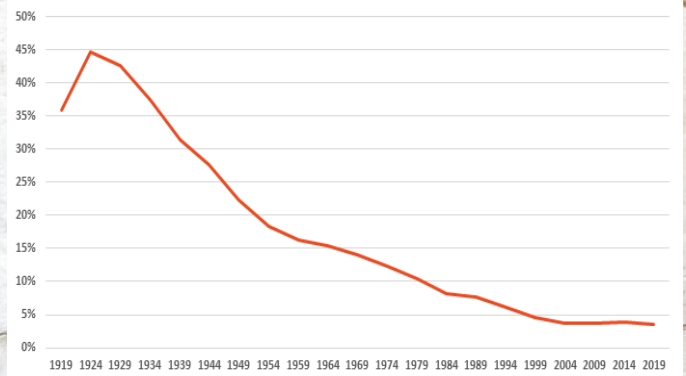
<https://www.PacificPress.com/SDAYearbook>



Statistical Nugget: Mission Offerings versus Tithe

Seventh-day Adventists have long understood the tithe God requires of us to be one tenth of an individual's income. We return tithe, but how generous are we in offerings? The best way to answer this is by considering the relationship between tithe and mission offerings. The chart below considers the relationship as far back as 1919.

World Mission Offerings as a Percentage of Tithe



It is striking how committed our predecessors were to mission. Even during the Great Depression, mission offerings were equivalent to more than 30% of tithe. But for the last thirty years mission offerings have been less than 10% of tithe. In the 1920s the church began an extraordinary period of mission expansion in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific. For comparable progress to be made in the 10/40 Window in the 2020s, we need church members to see stewardship as including generosity in offerings, as well as faithfulness in tithing.

For more statistics, please see our latest ASR [here](#).

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Our Commitment to Jesus Christ

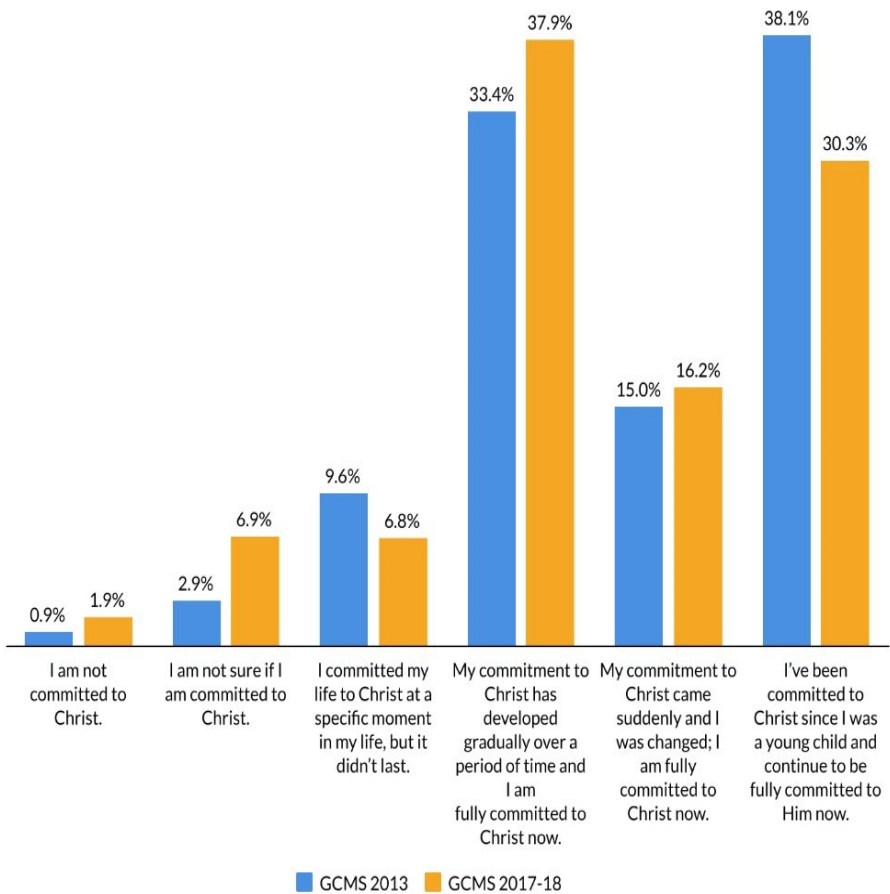
Jesus tells us in John 14:6 KJV, "... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." This statement is especially important when it comes to our decision to follow Jesus Christ.

Why do people want to follow Jesus Christ? How do we get to the point in our lives where we decide to follow Christ? "... Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions ..."¹

The Holy Spirit introduces us to Jesus, primarily through the Scriptures. He may also use people and specific circumstances to introduce us to Christ. Therefore, we all come to a point in our lives where we either commit our lives to Jesus Christ or not. And then, if committed, the Holy Spirit also works with us to improve and grow in our relationship with Christ. As part of both Global Church Member Surveys (GCMS 2013 and GCMS 2017-18) participants were asked about their commitment to Jesus Christ. At first glance, the graph below looks encouraging. We can see that an overwhelming majority in both surveys (86% in 2013 and 84% in 2017-18) are committed to following Jesus Christ. Alarming is the increase in the overall number of those not sure or uncommitted about their relationship with Christ.

A closer look at the numbers shows that the percentage of the participants not being committed to Christ and participants not being sure if they are committed to Christ increased during the 5-year timeframe between the surveys by around 5%.

Which of the following best describes your commitment to Jesus Christ? (Mark only one response).



GCMS 2013 Q3.39, n=22,871 GCMS 2017-18 Q32, n=58,086

Should we be concerned about a smaller percentage of people committing their life to Jesus Christ in the 2017-18 survey? Let us consider a few follow-up questions. Is this a new trend? If so, what are the reasons for this trend, and how can we change it for the better? How can we encourage the people in our lives to follow Jesus? Do we share God's love and our experiences with Him with others around us? For more on this topic read our [research blog](#) titled "Worldwide Views on the Commitment to Christ."

Manuela Coppock

¹Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Our Beliefs, 10 The Experience of Salvation*. Retrieved on 11-18-2020 from <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/salvation/the-experience-of-salvation/>.

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Christmas as a Global Celebration of God's Love

Our Adventist pioneers, most of whom at first lived in the United States, were nevertheless very aware of their heritage from many more distant lands. Alongside other articles describing the global origins of many Christmas customs, in *Keynote* Vol. 19, N. 12 (Dec, 1956) p.2-3, Ester Yost described the international origins of several American traditions concerning Christmas observance:

CHRISTMAS U.S.A.

Who knows what a truly American Christmas is? Whether our home is in Maine or California, to most of us Christmas means snow, deep and glistening; church with Christmas hymns and the repeating of the old, but ever new story of our Saviour's birth; home with a fire in the fire-place, stockings hung by the chimney, an ornamented and lighted evergreen tree, gifts gay and mysterious, the laughter of children, the festive board for family and friends.

But how come this Christmas heritage? American families have come to think that Christmas cannot rightly be celebrated without a Christmas tree, but credit is given to our German forebears for this delightful custom.

Many an American family welcomes the eve of Christmas with a family dinner and the opening of gifts, but again this is not an American but rather a Scandinavian custom.

We have adopted from the Swiss home-to-home caroling, and on Christmas eve, in hamlet and city ageless carols fill the chill night air with the warmth of the Christmas spirit.

The giving of gifts and the sending of cards, are they not the American way of being generous and friendly? They are, but others went before us. The giving of gifts first started in Italy, and with a London artist was born the idea of the Christmas greeting card.

From Central America comes the poinsettia, brilliant and red, now an accepted symbol of the Christmas season. Christmas cakes and cookies, with strange sounding names, yet familiar to us all, first came from the hearths of France, Germany, Scandinavia, Austria, and other European countries.

What Mexican child within our borders is not happy that the Christmas custom of breaking the pinata still lives with him in America? Truly American is the extent to which we carry our outdoor decorating, but the nativity scenes on home and church lawns belong to others.

Christmas in America is all of this and more, too, It is a composite picture of the free peoples of many lands, united on this day, in an expression of their faith in God and man....



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Employee profile: Dragoslava Santrac



This Winter, we're pleased to interview our Editor for the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (ESDA), Dr. Dragoslava Santrac. We thought we'd ask Slava a few questions about herself, and learn what exactly her duties are here in her service for ASTR.

Q. Hello Slava, so where are you from? Share a little about your background with us.

A. I was born in Dijon, France. I grew up in an Adventist home with my parents and two younger siblings. When I was 9, my family moved to Serbia, to my dad's family estate in one of the most beautiful and richest parts of the country. Moving from a big city in France to a rural area in Serbia brought a huge change not only in terms of the living environment, including the language and cultural shifts, but also of the spiritual setting. In Dijon, we were members of a large Adventist church. In our new place in Serbia, we were the only Adventists. The change, however, proved to be a true blessing to us. As children, my sister, brother and I experienced life in the countryside and freedom that nature provides. Today, my children enjoy listening to my childhood stories how I picked blackberries and wild strawberries (100% organic and free!) on my way to school, milked cows, drank water from a creek and spent entire days building fortresses with my friends in the forest, because, for them, they sound like Heidi's adventures from Spyri's famous novel. I believe

that period has shaped my faith and brought me closer to God. I remember reading aloud Psalm 121:1 ("I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help?") and listening to the echo coming from the mountains as if God Himself was answering me. Little did I know then that one day I will write my doctoral dissertation on the Psalms and a volume about the Psalms for the *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*. As we were the only Adventists in the area, my parents sought to reach people with the gospel message and taught me and my siblings to be witnesses for Christ. Later, when we moved to a new place with an Adventist church, the valuable memories and experiences motivated us to continue serving God and love His people.

Q: Could you describe your early faith life? What was it like to choose Jesus where you grew up?

A. When you ask me how it was like to *choose* Jesus, I honestly do not know how to answer that question. I have always had a feeling that Jesus is in my life and that He chose me and called me to His ministry. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in theology from Belgrade Theological Seminary, Belgrade, Serbia. There I met my future husband, Aleksandar, a fellow student. The South-East European Union fully sponsored our master's studies at Andrews University, Michigan, USA. I majored in Biblical and cognate languages with a minor in Old Testament. A few weeks before our graduation in 1999, Serbia was going through a very difficult period, being bombed by NATO. The country had been already economically drained by sanctions and providing refuge to thousands of Serbian and other refugees coming from war zones in the ex-Yugoslavian republics. Humanitarian and spiritual needs were enormous. Immediately after graduation my husband and I returned to Serbia where we were given various responsibilities in the church. Among other duties in our diverse ministry, I was the registrar and professor at Belgrade Theological Seminary and the editor of the union magazines. Aleksandar was the academic dean, public evangelist, and editor.

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Q. We're very happy to have you here with us in ASTR, but you've spent time other places. Where are they, and what other work experiences have you had?

A. My family and I have been blessed to live and serve in four world church divisions. After Serbia (TED), we lived in Paris, France (EUD) where Aleksandar was a pastor. Our second daughter Emily Grace was born in Paris. Her older sister Nastasia Nadia was born in Belgrade. Next, our family of four lived in Trinidad (IAD) for five years where Aleksandar and I were professors in the School of Theology and Religion at University of the Southern Caribbean. I was honored to serve as the university's church elder. Lastly, we moved to the United States (NAD), first to New Haven, Connecticut, where my husband was a research fellow at Yale University, and then to Maryland after my husband was appointed chair of the Religion department at Washington Adventist University. I served there as adjunct professor of religion. I should also mention that in 2003 I obtained my Ph.D. degree in Old Testament from Greenwich School of Theology, United Kingdom (affiliated with North-West University, South Africa) along with my husband who obtained his second doctorate. Each place has tremendously enriched us. I believe we've gained a broad, global perspective of diverse cultures and the many different ways people live and think. We've also learned that there is much more that connects us as God's people than separates us. Many of our former students are now pastors, conference, union and division administrators, professors, and scholars worldwide. I am proud to say that we have a huge international family. I am not surprised that our daughter Nastasia, a high school senior, wishes to pursue a career in international affairs.

Q. So when did you join ASTR, and what are your special duties here? What do you enjoy most about being here, and what are you most looking forward to in the future?

A. I joined the ASTR in May 2018 as the new managing editor of the [Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists \(ESDA\)](#). I had already been affiliated with the GC as the associate editor of the *Seventh-day Adventist International*

Biblical-Theological Dictionary since 2016, a project directed by the Biblical Research Institute. In a nutshell, the managing editor manages and guides a team of editors and authors worldwide and the processes and functions required to develop, launch, and further develop the Encyclopedia. The ESDA was successfully launched in July of this year (visit the ESDA website [here](#)) and continues to grow in content and quality. I enjoy being part of the excellent ESDA team and the caring ASTR family. Working on the ESDA has opened a whole new world to me. I say "new" world because only after I started working on this project have I realized that there is much more to Adventist history than what I learned in my Adventist history and heritage classes at the university. Seeing a broad picture of God's leading in history helps us see our place—and not only for the present; it gives us hope for the future. We may be uncertain of what the future holds but we are certain of the One who holds the future. Therefore, I look forward to many wonderful things in the future for I know the Lord has good plans for me and my family and His Church.

Thank you, Slava, for sharing a little about yourself and your work! We're very glad to have you here with us, and it's very nice to learn about how your work, both past and now with ASTR, assists the Church in its mission to advance the Gospel around the world.

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As always, remember to help us Tell the Story!

As a reminder, our purpose here at ASTR is to tell the Adventist story. We want to inform and inspire church members toward a renewed commitment to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by sharing our history.

You can help us to tell the story in two ways:

First, help us to preserve the story: your stories and the Church's story! Letters and other documents, memoirs, photographs, tape recordings, audio and video cassettes, films, and historic books and magazines: all enable us to recover the story of how, in the words of Ellen White, "the Lord has led us . . . in our past history" and of how God has worked in the lives of individual church members. They are the raw materials from which Adventist history can be researched by scholars and without which parts of that history will be lost. So please, [contact us](#) about sending your family's documents, photographs, and other historic materials to us so that they can be preserved and used to help the great Second Advent Movement fulfill its prophetic mission.

Second, help us to conserve and to share the story—to pass it on to the next generation. Historic Adventist photographs and movies allow us to connect with our past in a way nothing else can, because we look into the eyes of those who sacrificed to make this Church. We want to digitize those precious resources, scanning them electronically so they can be accessed by everyone. We especially want to connect with young people. By digitizing photos and movies, we can help them to understand "the way the Lord has led us and His teaching in our past history"—we can help them to connect with our pioneers and be inspired to service.

Haven't received your Newsletter? Sign up [HERE](#). For previous issues visit our [website](#).



Your gift of at least \$25 could:

- Digitize 100 feet of film = five minutes viewing time, or
- Conserve, digitize, and publicize one historic Adventist photograph from our collection of thousands, or
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