

mission

STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

PRODUCED BY
THE OFFICE OF
ADVENTIST MISSION
VOLUME 11
NUMBER 4

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Mission of Friendship



EDITORIAL

Throughout its history, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown rapidly. But most of its growth has been from animists and other Christian denominations.

When Global Mission was voted at the 1990 General Conference Session, its focus was enlarging our mission vision to include the major world religions—most of the world's population.

To help the church more effectively reach out to people from these people groups, Global Mission has established special Global Mission Centers. Their role is to help us better understand non-Christian people groups and find

better methods and models to share with them the good news of Jesus. Today, there are six Global Mission Centers helping us establish new groups of believers among these challenging mission groups.

In this issue of *Mission 360°*, the centers share insights into understanding and witnessing to some of the most unreached people on the globe. Chances are, some of them may be living on your street!

Gary Krause
Director of Adventist
Mission



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Design: 316 Creative

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Silver Spring, MD 20904-6601, USA

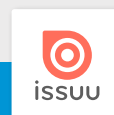
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VOLUME 11, NUMBER 4

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Reaching the Unreached, One Friend at a Time



Kleyton Feitosa
Director, Global
Mission Centers

In a world shaped by diverse faiths and beliefs, we're presented with a unique opportunity to fulfill the gospel mandate of spreading hope globally. Extensive research spanning more than 200 countries revealed that while 85.5 percent of the world's population embraces religious beliefs, only 31.6 percent identify as Christians.¹ This striking disparity underscores the significance of our mission (given by Jesus in Matthew 28:18–20). The question that naturally arises is, how can we effectively reach the vast majority of people across the globe with the message of hope? The answer lies in the simple yet profound act of befriending them.

Amid the perceived differences and barriers that diverse faiths and beliefs present, encouraging data offers valuable insights into addressing this challenge. A research study conducted across 24 countries involving 56,000 individuals from various continents and major religions revealed some heartening insights:

1. The majority of people, 68 percent, are consistently open to engaging with individuals of different faiths or philosophical viewpoints.
2. An additional 23 percent maintain a neutral stance, indicating their willingness to engage.
3. Only one in ten people expressed reluctance to connect with those with different beliefs.

This data reveals that making friends from different religions is possible, and many people are open to it.

Though religion often reflects an individual's worldview, values, and principles, it's vital to acknowledge the common thread that runs through faiths—a commitment to love, empathy, and kindness. These shared values provide a foundation for individuals to forge friendships that transcend religious boundaries.

Such friendships were the DNA of the New Testament church. The disciples, deeply influenced by their master, Jesus, understood that the most effective means of conveying the revelations entrusted to them was through genuine, heartfelt connections with people. Friendship and fellowship were integral to Jesus' ministry in this world. He consistently spent time with people, visited their homes, and shared meals with them (Matthew 9:9–17; Luke 7:36–50). Over time, this approach was embraced by His disciples (Galatians 2:12) and later became the blueprint for the entire Christian movement.

In Acts 2, we discover that these early followers of Christ formed a community devoted to genuine fellowship and the shared experience of life. They lived out their faith through close-knit friendships and interactions. Their example reminds us that friendship has always been the most potent conduit for sharing the gospel with the world.

Yet, two millennia removed from those early days, people are challenged by cultural disintegration and social distrust, creating significant barriers to forming meaningful friendships. All too often, individuals remain strangers in their own communities, disengaged from one another. However, as witnesses for Jesus (Acts 1:8), we're called out of our comfort zones and into the lives of people around us.

Here are some practical suggestions to help you overcome obstacles, develop trust, and reach out to people in your local community:

- Love without hidden agendas. Authenticity is key in friendships. Treat people as individuals, not projects. In a world often marked by divisions and prejudices, the concept of loving without an agenda serves as a powerful reminder of our shared humanity and values, paving the way for them to see Jesus in you.
- Embrace natural opportunities. Our society is full of social distrust. We're easily suspicious of people who "aren't supposed" to be talking to us. Therefore, it's prudent to seek connections within our existing circles, such as our workplaces, neighborhoods, or common-interest events. Engaging with people in familiar settings lowers their cultural defenses, making them more willing to talk.
- Serve people. Serving others is a fundamental Christian principle. By extending kindness and meeting their needs, you give them a chance to reciprocate, facilitating the growth of acquaintances into meaningful friendships. There's no shortage of needs around us, and Jesus' example of serving others is our guiding light.
- Look for repeat exposures. Pay attention to those individuals you encounter regularly, such as your hairdresser, grocer, or neighbor. These are prime candidates for nurturing meaningful friendships. With a touch of intention, we can readily foster deeper connections with those we interact with routinely.

These simple strategies offer a few avenues to transform acquaintances into cherished friendships. However, the cornerstone of this journey lies in prayer. Begin each day with a prayer for divine appointments, trusting that God will guide you to those whose hearts He has prepared. Remember, God often works in people's lives long before we cross paths with them. Through prayer and willingness to befriend those whom God places on your path, you can foster authentic connections with the potential to impact lives for eternity.

1. Einar H. Dyvik, "Share of Global Population Affiliated With Major Religious Groups in 2022, by Religion," Statista, October 13, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/374704/share-of-global-population-by-religion/#statisticContainer>.

Hinduism

AT A GLANCE

Hinduism is the third-largest world religion and the one most practiced in South Asia. It has no historical founder; its authority rests upon sacred texts and gurus. The terms Hinduism and *sanatana dharma*, meaning “eternal way of right living,” are often used interchangeably. There is no one definition of what makes someone Hindu; individuals determine what they believe. A person can be a Hindu without believing the Hindu scriptures or in any of the religion’s 33 million gods.

Some Hindu Worldviews

Hindus generally believe in:

- *Samsara*, where the soul experiences a continuous loop of life, death, and rebirth
- *Karma*, a universal law in which good or bad actions determine in what body a person will be reborn
- The soul experiencing spiritual growth through continuous lifetimes
- *Moksha*, the goal of every soul to be freed from impurity and *samsara* and emerge into a supreme being

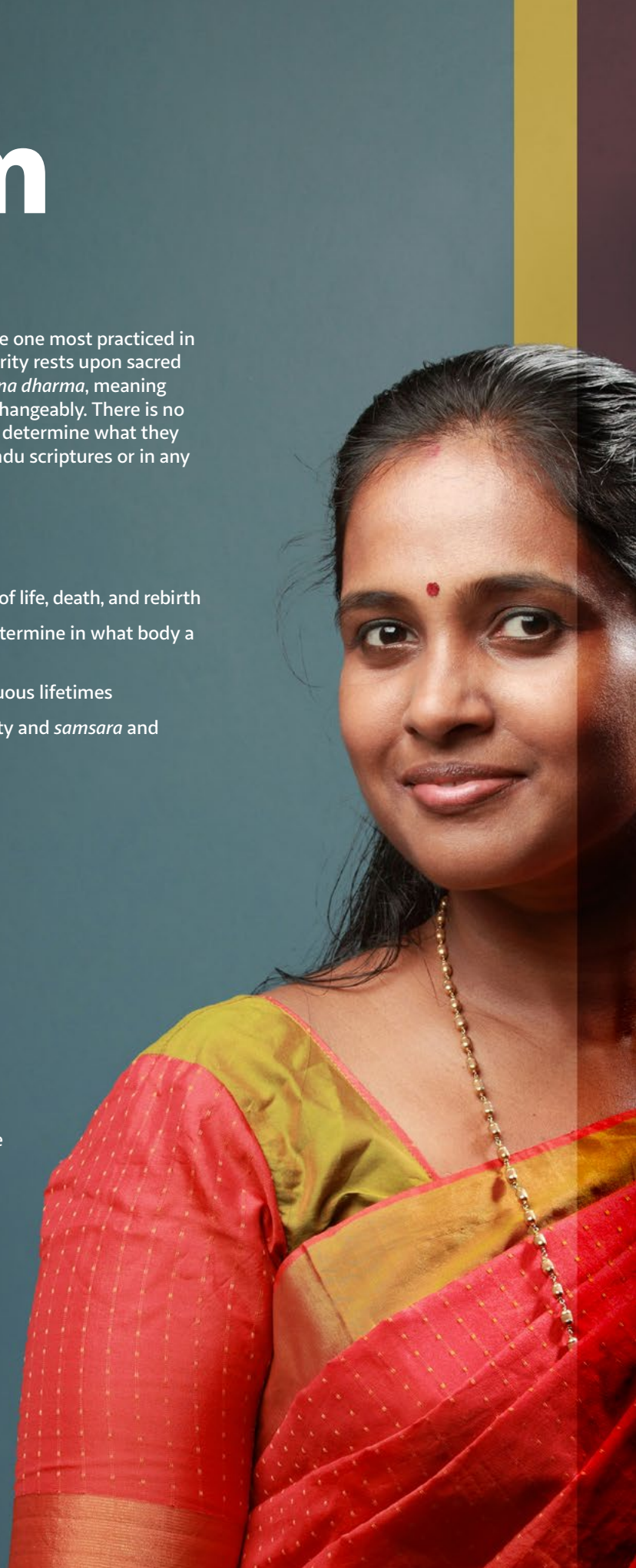
Common Ground

Hindus, like us:

- Desire a spiritual walk with God
- Engage in daily worship and prayer
- Place a high value on family
- See sin as a barrier to salvation
- Tend to be vegetarians

Tips for Making Friends With Hindus

- Learn their names
- Visit people in their homes. Many South Asians believe that having visitors brings them blessings
- Pray with them, especially for health and family issues
- Converse on everyday topics such as health, family, and children’s education
- Share a meal
- Tell your testimony, especially stories of healing from sickness
- Introduce our health message and vegetarian lifestyle.





The US has the world's **9th-largest** population of Hindus.

In India, **458,000** villages have **no known Christians**.

Please pray for the one billion South Asians who mostly live in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and outside South Asia in countries such as Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States.

The Sower and the Sewer

The author's name has been withheld to protect his ministry.

When Naresh and his wife, Rita, moved to a South Asian city, they prayed for ways to sow seeds of faith and plant a church. And they added, “Lord! Help us reach out and bring change in the community.”

Moving into any new neighborhood can present challenges, but through prayer, Naresh’s first challenge became an opportunity. In front of their new home was an open drainage ditch—a sewer—and it was blocked. This blockage resulted in a terrible stench that all the residents hated. However, no one wanted to do the disgusting work necessary to clean it out. As Naresh and his wife prayed for ways to reach out, they were impressed that they needed to clean out that sewer.

The next morning, the husband and wife woke up at five o’clock. They surveyed the sewer’s drain area to look for the blockage but couldn’t find the source. The next day, Naresh woke again at five o’clock and searched on the opposite side of the drain. This time, he found the blockage.

Immediately Naresh started unclogging the sewer, taking out the garbage that kept it from draining. While he was working, a community elder began yelling, “Why are you pulling out all this garbage? You’re creating more mess, and the stench is worse!” But Naresh kept cleaning. Finally, the sewer was unclogged, and the smell disappeared.

Afterward, the neighbors started noticing the clean surroundings—and Naresh and Rita.

They said, “We saw you in the morning cleaning the sewer! Who are you? Why are you so concerned about unclogging and cleaning the drain?” Similar questions came from other curious neighbors. “Around ten o’clock each day, you dress up and go to work. Then, in the late evening, we notice you praying. Who are you?”

Naresh and Rita smiled as they understood that through a clogged sewer, God had opened the way for them to minister in this community, sowing seeds of faith. They invited the neighbors to join them for evening prayers.

A family invited Naresh and Rita to pray for a man named Raju, who was paralyzed. Naresh prayed for Raju regularly, but he didn’t stop there. He also visited Raju and gave him massages. After three months of prayer and massages, Raju recovered muscle strength.

Raju’s wife was overjoyed about this change! She told all her friends and relatives what was happening. One day, 30 women came to Naresh and Rita’s house, requesting prayer for their families. More doors of ministry opened!

Naresh and Rita continue to serve the people of their neighborhood through small prayer groups and health programs. They conduct online and onsite prayer meetings every day, and they worship on Sabbaths with small groups. Forty people attend a weekly prayer meeting. Naresh and Rita are there to stay until they develop a house church that is ready to multiply.

Please ask God to continue blessing Naresh and Rita’s incarnational ministry.



Secularism and Post-Christianity

AT A GLANCE

Secular people reject anything related to religion or spiritual matters. Post-Christian people intentionally reject Christian culture, including its beliefs and many of its values. Secular and post-Christian people groups are made up of nonreligious, unaffiliated, atheists, agnostics, and those who don't espouse any religious faith or tradition. Approximately 1.2 billion people worldwide (1 in every 7) identify as "religiously unaffiliated." Post-Christianity is a phenomenon sweeping across the West, especially the cities. Secularism is now a reality affecting all major world religions.

Some Post-Christian Worldview Issues

Most secular and post-Christians believe there is no objective truth and that individuals decide what is true and false, right and wrong, good or bad. They think life has no inherent purpose, are skeptical of authority figures, and are cynical about religion. They feel that integrity in all areas of life is important; are concerned about the environment; desire to be involved in good causes, value creativity and life experiences; are global in their outlook; and want to experience belonging to a group before they believe what the group teaches.

Common Ground

Secular and Post-Christian people like us:

- Have concern for social issues and people, especially those who have experienced discrimination, are struggling economically, or are victims of abuse
- Value interaction with people from many cultures
- Appreciate genuine friendship and hospitality, including an invitation to experience community as part of the church
- Need authentic, personal experiences

Making Friends With Secular and Post-Christian People

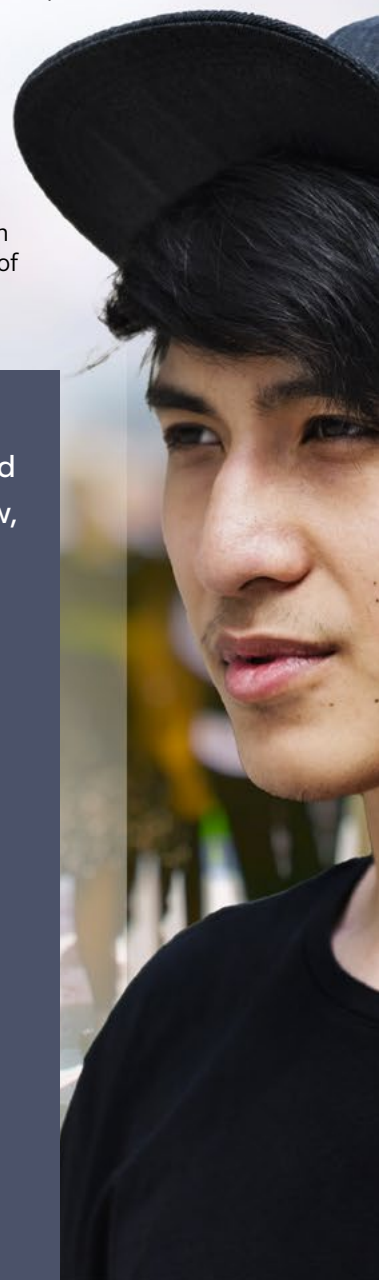
- Talk about current events
- Listen to their viewpoints in a nonjudgmental way
- Be respectful as you exchange ideas
- Ask about what is meaningful to them
- Share your spiritual journey
- Invite your friend to join you in fellowship or worship, but before you do that, invite them to your home so they can experience firsthand the life of a follower of Christ

In the United States, **25 percent of the population** has embraced a secular/non-religious worldview, including atheists, agnostics, and the rise of the "nones," the religiously unaffiliated.

Asia has become home to **5 of the world's 10 least religious countries**. Japan has the fourth-highest number of atheists in the world, with 80 million.

Only **2 percent** of the Swedish population attend church regularly.

More than **30 million people** in sub-Saharan Africa affirm they don't follow any religious faith.



Please pray for the 1.2 billion secular and post-Christian people of our world.



Cero Church



1



Andrew McChesney,
Office of
Adventist
Mission

It's not your traditional Seventh-day Adventist church.

A vibrant church plant in the heart of Spain's capital, Madrid, welcomes 70 people, 20 percent of whom aren't Seventh-day Adventists, to its weekly Sabbath worship services.

But its biggest sermons take place outside of the building in the form of visits to children in the hospital, feeding the homeless, and outings with children.

It's the community outreach, not the preaching, that draws people to church and wins hearts for Jesus, said Jonathan Contero, the 34-year-old pastor of the Cero church.

"We believe that the best way to impact the community in a postmodern [post-Christian] society is to live and practice what you preach," he said.

The Spanish word *cero*, which means "zero" in English, was chosen as the name for the church because "you have to start from zero when you work with secular people who don't believe in anything," said Contero's wife, Abigail, a nurse and teacher who works closely with him.

Cero is ready to start from zero with anyone. Its origins go back to 2015 when Jonathan Contero had a dream to plant a church in highly secularized Madrid.

"In Spain, we are losing all our youth," he says. "If we continue to go this way, we are going to end up with a church of immigrants. We need to do something with the Spanish people."

Building a Church

Contero's first step wasn't to try to fill a church building. Instead, he and his church members

sought to make friends through community service. They organized craft-making and other activities at the hospital and invited young people to join them.

The initiative struck a positive chord in the community, and soon, a sizable group of young people were accompanying the Adventists to a growing number of activities.

As relationships grew, the Adventists welcomed their friends into their homes for small-group discussions. After that, Bible studies were offered at the church.

"When they are ready, we bring them to church to study the Bible," Contero said. "But the Bible is not the first step. In Spain, people will reject the Bible if they hear about it first."

Later, people were invited to Sabbath worship services, which Contero likened to TED-style talks. After that, they were offered deeper Bible studies and an opportunity for baptism. Those who are baptized receive mentorship on how to disciple others.

Stories of God's Power

Contero said he has witnessed God's transforming power in Madrid and told the story of Sylvia, 34, who learned about Cero through a Facebook advertisement. Sylvia, who had no Christian background, spent a month debating whether to contact the church. Then, she visited regularly for four or five months and immigrated to the United States. There, she was baptized.

"We are happy for her," Contero said. "She started with us."

While social media can be effective, new contacts usually are made by word of mouth as people invite their friends, he said.

Many of those who attend Sabbath worship services are under 40. Among them is a movie actor who shares what he is learning from the Bible with his 200,000 followers on Instagram.

In addition to the 20 percent non-Christian churchgoers, 40 percent are Adventists, and 40 percent were born in Adventist homes and returned to the church through Cero.

Cero's model can be implemented in any secularized country, said Kleber Gonçalves, director of the Global Mission Center for Secular and Post-Christian Mission. "When people see that we have a heart for the community, they want to get involved. This is an opportunity to invite them to Bible studies."

He noted that 67 postmodern-sensitive congregations have been established in South America alone over the past seven years.

Church member Violeta Campello, 30, said she found it easier to invite people to Cero than to other Adventist churches. "I've invited more people in one year to Cero than I invited in my whole life to the Adventist church." Some ten people have attended worship services through her efforts.

"Cero is what happens when you combine mission-minded young Adventists with Christ's method of ministry," said Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission. "As these young adults mingle in the community and serve others, they win confidence and bring people to Jesus—and it's happening in a large secular European city."

Update

Jonathan Contero and his family will soon begin working in the highly secular country of Switzerland. Symbolically, they are following in the footsteps of J. N. Andrews and his children. They went to Switzerland in 1874 as the first official missionaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The 150th anniversary is being celebrated in 2024. "Our goal," Jonathan says, "is to pour ourselves into enlarging the church and strengthening the mission."

- 1 Pastor Jonathan Contero preaching at Cero Seventh-day Adventist Church
- 2 Pastor Contero singing during song services at Cero Seventh-day Adventist Church
- 3 Food provided by Cero young people lying near the feet of a homeless man
- 4 Cero young people feeding homeless people in Madrid, Spain

Photos: San Suvankham



Cities

It's Where the People Are!

The Cities at a Glance

The population in our cities is exploding. In 1900, 14 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas, and only 12 cities had more than one million inhabitants. Today, more than half the world's population lives in cities, and that number is expected to rise to at least 70 percent by 2050. More than 500 cities in the world have a population of 1 million or more. More than 37 megacities have populations of more than 10 million.

Urban People Have Needs We Can Meet

- They're busy and need the rest the Sabbath can bring
- They're stressed, often struggling to cover living expenses and care for their families
- Long commutes to work add anxiety and fatigue to the workday—they need rejuvenating fellowship and recreation
- Loneliness leaves individuals looking for relationships with people they can trust
- Many need access to fresh fruit and vegetables
- They need hope

In the following pages, you'll find tips for how you and your church can follow Jesus' method of ministry to help those living in a city near you.

Christ's Method of Ministry

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 143.

Please pray for the billions of people living in our world's teeming cities.

68 Percent

Today, there are about 8 billion people in the world. Some 5.5 billion¹ of them aren't Christian. That's the population of the United States more than 16 times over! According to the Joshua Project, 87 percent of all Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists have limited, if any, contact with a Christian.²

The 5.5 billion non-Christians make up 68 percent of the world's population. Can we really reach the world?

One approach Ellen White proposed was, "If we were quick in discerning the opening providences of God, we should be able to see in the multiplied opportunities to reach many foreigners in America a divinely appointed means of rapidly extending the third angel's message into all the nations of earth. God in His providence has brought men to our very doors and thrust them, as it were, into our arms, that they might learn the truth, and be qualified to do a work we could not do in getting the light before men of other tongues" (*Evangelism*, p. 570).

The principle here could apply to church members in any country receiving refugees, immigrants, or other international guests. Show hospitality and friendship to people who have recently arrived, are far from friends and family, and may face multiple challenges. Share your faith as you share your friendship, and let *them* share what they've learned with their networks back in their homelands!

Seven Ways to Reach Out to Refugees, Immigrants, and Other International Guests

Terri Saelee, Adventist Refugee and Immigrant Ministries coordinator, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists



1. Search online for ethnic groceries and restaurants. Visit them to meet people from the groups in your area and ask them about their food and culture to get acquainted.
2. Help immigrant children with their homework/education. One of the areas in which refugees and immigrant parents feel most helpless is finding tutoring and good role models for their children.
3. Invite an international student or refugee family to your home for a meal. "75% of international students will never enter an American home while in the United States."¹ It's not much different for refugees, asylum seekers, and other persecuted guests. Help change that statistic.
4. Offer to volunteer with a refugee resettlement agency welcoming new refugees. (Google "refugee resettlement agency" in your city.) Ask how you can help.
5. Volunteer for the Literacy Council, or start a language or citizenship class. You don't have to be a trained teacher. Just share what you know and be a friend.
6. Invite a refugee to share their experience with a small group of friends from your church. One of the things refugees and international guests crave most is friendships with people from their host country.
7. Pray that God will lead you to a refugee/asylum seeker/international student or guest whom you can welcome.

These "random" divine appointments are often the best! Ellen White wrote, "All heaven is in activity, and the angels of God are waiting to cooperate with the human agent who will devise plans whereby the souls for whom Christ died may hear the glad tidings of salvation."²

1. "Religion: Christianity," Joshua Project, accessed October 19, 2023, <https://joshuaproject.net/religions/1>.

2. "Has Everyone Heard?," accessed October 19, 2023, https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/has_everyone_heard.

1 <http://www.isionline.org/GetInvolved.aspx>

2 Ellen G. White, *An Appeal to Our Churches on Behalf of Home Missionary Work*, Pamphlet 007 (n.p.: International Tract Society, 1896), 13.





1

Bulgarian Friendship Bread



Earley Simon,
Office of
Adventist
Mission

Editor's note: Since this story was written, the Trapezata center of influence discontinued its bakery services. It still offers a variety of activities for the community to engage in.

In the early mornings, while it is still dark, flour and water meet. They rise with yeast and are shoved in an oven to be transformed by heat. The aroma fills the air, sending an irresistible invitation to mouth-watering delights.

One by one, people come to order, to socialize and laugh. Every day, people of all ages and different ethnicities line up at this bakery, eager to savor delicious bread.

Making bread takes time and patience. It takes loving hands to mix ingredients and press them together until the dough is ready to rise and grow. So it is with people; it takes time and patience to cultivate trust and friendship, to warm their lives and invite them to follow Jesus.

At the Trapezata Global Mission urban center of influence in Bulgaria, staff members offer visitors

more than food. Here, people find room to interact and participate in various courses and activities. As they make new friends, visitors are invited to become volunteers themselves. This way, they can give back and help others too.

One regular volunteer, Dimitur, found purpose in Trapezata by tutoring math. "There are good people here, and I developed good relationships with different people," Dimitur said. "So, I want to give my best to others. I feel a strong desire to learn more about God and the Bible. I have this idea that I have to help, and if I can, I am going to do it. I am not a math teacher. I'm an engineer, but here I help kids with math."

Dimitur travels more than six miles every day, sometimes on foot. He started as a customer, then he became a volunteer, and now he is a baptized Seventh-day Adventist. Like Dimitur, many people who come to Trapezata find the Bread of Life.

The owners of Trapezata have seen how centers of influence can work as a platform to engage the community and form friendships.

The bakery's owner, Christo Kudinov, said, "God gave us this place to keep us close to people. He showed us that we needed a place where people felt accepted and at home. . . . That's why we established a bakery: it smells like home. In Bulgaria, people eat a lot of bread. . . . This is how Christ worked. He was close to people; He offered them the Bread of Life, healed them, and took care of them. And we want to do the same."

The leaders at Trapezata invite you to pray for this growing group of new believers. Please pray for this urban center of influence and many others around the world who find creative ways to befriend people and introduce them to Jesus.



2



3



4

- 1 Customers eagerly purchase their favorite treats
- 2 A sample of Trapezata's savory breads
- 3 Dimitur started as a customer but is now a baptized volunteer
- 4 Visitors make new friends engaging in a variety of activities
- 5 Guests enjoy an assortment of fresh baked goods



5

Looking for a way to serve your city?

Urban centers of influence (UCIs) offer a space for friendships to take root, for the love and care of God to be made visible, and for new groups of believers to be planted. Have you ever thought of starting a UCI? Here are some ideas!

3 Great Places to Start a UCI



Near a university—
F5 Climbing Center
m360.tv/i25012



Near a famous tourist destination—
Butterfly Paradise
m360.tv/s2033



In a busy mall—The Art Space
m360.tv/i26041

3 Ways to Start a UCI When You Have Limited Funds



Start a micro-UCI,
such as a micro-pantry
or a miniature book house.



Start in a classroom, lawn, or parking lot
already owned by your church.
m360.tv/s2225



Use a public property,
such as a city park.
m360.tv/s19312

3 UCIs members Started by Using What Was in Their Hands



Members in Guatemala City
started offering bread, cereal, and
juice—God provided a large house
for ministry to unhoused people.
m360.tv/i26021



A pastor in Cleveland saw some cold
people standing at the bus stop—
and started a breakfast ministry.



Members in Finland, in faith,
found €85,000 to purchase an 83-
acre property with 26 buildings—
and are now renovating it into a
Lifestyle Center.

Aya prayed, in expensive Tokyo, for a place to reach kids. God provided a large house. m360.tv/s21111



Jannie prayed while searching for a building in Hanoi. God provided a seven-story building.



Youth in Asunción prayed for a specific building. God helped them get it at a good price.



3 UCIs Made Possible Through Prayer

Create a mobile grocery and take it into food deserts— Mobile Market

Photo: Oakwood University



Build a faith-building exhibit and take it on the road to schools— King Tut Roadshow and Expo Sanctuary

Photo: South American Division



Operate a Mobile Shower Van for Unhoused Residents— Showers of Blessings



3 Mobile UCI Ideas for Your City

Offering a “pay what you can afford” model—One Bistro

Photo: Kettering Health News



Reaching people through music lessons— Peace Music Academy



Providing an after-school program for kids—El Monte Adventist Church



3 Remarkable UCIs to Inspire You

To read or watch stories of these and other successful urban centers of influence, visit missiontothecities.org/urban-centers-of-influence.

To learn about funding available for urban centers of influence, visit <https://urbancenters.org/funding>.





Judaism

AT A GLANCE

Judaism is comprised of the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people. It's a monotheistic religion that began with the patriarch Abraham some 4,000 years ago. There are five main forms of Judaism: orthodox, conservative, reformed, reconstructionist, and humanistic. The largest population of Jews lives in Israel, with nearly 7 million; approximately 6 million live in the United States.

Some Judaic Worldviews

Judaists believe in one God who revealed Himself through prophets, God created the world, the Ten Commandments were handed down by God to Moses and are the rule for life, and God rewards people for good deeds and punishes evil. Most believe the Messiah is yet to come.

Common Ground

Judaists, like us:

- Reverence the Hebrew Bible
- Believe in Bible prophecy
- Observe the biblical seventh-day Sabbath
- Believe in the necessity of atonement for sin
- Believe in the judgment and resurrection of the dead
- Adhere to the Levitical dietary laws

Tips for Making Friends With Jews

- Learn their names
- Invite them to your home to enjoy refreshments or a meal
- Talk about current events, but avoid controversial topics
- Listen to stories about their spiritual journey
- Discuss the beauty of the Psalms or the love of God as found in the Torah

Although Jews make up only **0.2 percent of the world population**, they have won **28 percent of the Nobel prizes** for medicine.

Please pray for the more than 15 million Jews who are found mostly in Israel, the United States, France, Canada, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Russia, Germany, Australia, and Brazil.

Ruben's Journey

The author's name has been withheld to protect his ministry.

Praise God for Ruben,* a Jewish man who was recently baptized. As with most Jews who join the Adventist faith, the decision wasn't easy. But two factors helped make it possible for Ruben.

Ruben's wife was terminally ill. His Adventist coworker, Barbara, had a son who was battling bone marrow cancer. What Ruben saw in Barbara's life was a source of strength and comfort, and this directed his mind to the *shalom* that only God can give. When Barbara invited Ruben to come to church, he accepted the invitation because he desired to know the secret of her walk with God. Her life of faith was factor number one.

Although Ruben began attending an Adventist church and received Bible studies, he still couldn't take the final step to become an Adventist. He thought that doing so would cause him to forfeit his Jewish identity. Then he learned about a Jewish Adventist congregation in his city—factor number two. This congregation and its leadership helped him take the final step and fully enjoy a new life of faith and love for God and the Messiah—Jesus—as an Adventist and as a Jew. He is now one of our most enthusiastic members, eagerly sharing the good news not only by words but also through a vibrant life of faith and love.

* Names have been changed



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Islam

AT A GLIMPSE

Islam is the world's second-largest religion with some 2 billion adherents (25 percent of the world's population). Muslims believe that Islam, a monotheistic religion, began in 610 when their prophet Muhammad began to receive revelations. *Islam* is an Arabic word meaning "submission" because obedience to God is a central theme of the faith. Muslims seek to live their lives by fulfilling the traditions of their prophet. Islam is the official religion of 26 countries in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. Most Muslims live outside the Middle East, in countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Some Islamic Worldviews

Muslims believe in:

- The oneness of God—no distinction within the Godhead
- Muhammad was God's last prophet
- The Qur'an is the verbatim word of God revealed to Muhammad and all that we need to know from God
- Jesus was a prophet and born of the Virgin Mary

Common Ground

Muslims, like us:

- Believe in the second coming of Jesus (Isa al-Masih)
- Don't drink alcohol or eat pork
- Place a high value on family
- Believe in angels
- Believe in resurrection and judgment
- Tips for Making Friends With Muslims
- Learn your friend's name.
- Show hospitality
- Talk about current events—many Muslims realize that the last days will bring the judgment of God, and they want to be ready
- Be respectful of differences when discussing spiritual topics
- Ask about your friend's family and be willing to share about your own
- Ask questions about their culture and share about your own
- Be open about your Adventist identity

Islam is the world's **fastest-growing major religion**; the Muslim population in North America is **projected to double by 2050**.

84 percent of Muslims are not aware of ever meeting a Christian.



Please pray for the 2 billion Muslims who live in such countries as Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, and the Middle East.



Tragedy Opens Doors

Khalid dreamed of learning Portuguese, an unusual goal for an Arabic-speaking Middle Easterner. But he wanted to be a tour guide, and a foreign language is a professional asset. That's how I first met him.

Khalid was excited to sign up for the free Portuguese classes I taught. He was an ambitious student and driven to learn. Khalid liked to stay after class and visit. I assumed he just wanted to sharpen his conversational skills. It didn't take long, though, for us to become friends.

Our conversations were long and engaging. Occasionally, we'd go out to eat together. I began praying for a way to talk with Khalid about deeper life issues or even spiritual truths.

That opportunity appeared the day he messaged me, "My sister has been killed tragically."

Khalid learned she was crossing the street after finishing her university classes for the day when she was struck by a car and killed instantly. He and his sister had been close; Khalid was devastated. I reached out to him, but he disconnected. For a while, we had no contact.

I respected the space Khalid needed; I knew how confusing grief can be. Then, after a week, I messaged him. In fact, I began messaging him often. Each time, I told him I was praying for him and his family. Khalid responded briefly at first and then more openly. One day, his message was clear: "I am depressed. I have no more desire to do anything, to go anywhere, even to eat."

I messaged Khalid back, asking him to meet me somewhere, anywhere, just so we could talk a bit. I was surprised when he suggested a small restaurant nearby.

His younger brother joined us, and the three of us talked easily about life, sports,



As told to **Kathie Lichtenwalter**, Middle East and North Africa Union

Photo is for illustration only.



language learning, and university classes. I was grateful that in this simple setting, we could laugh together a lot, eat a little, and strengthen our growing friendship. It was only when we took a walk after the meal that the two brothers began talking about their sister and the pain of their family's loss.

Khalid shared how, in his worldview, he wasn't allowed to grieve. Khalid had grown up believing that feeling depressed was evidence of spiritual weakness. "But I *am* grieving, I *do* feel depressed, and I'm *supposed* to accept this tragic loss as the will of God." Tears came to him as easily as the guilt that overwhelmed him. The conflict between what he had been taught about life and what he was experiencing in life was hard to watch.

As we walked, I began sharing how I had discovered that God understands me and cares about how I feel. I was able to tell Khalid about God's love and how He shows it to us freely. I shared with him how grief is a normal emotion that we all experience when we meet loss. I shared what I'd learned in my university training about dealing with overwhelming grief. We talked about how God is in control even when painful things happen. In the end, we stood there along a busy street in the shadow of a highway ramp and prayed.

That walk was the beginning of many more visits together. Khalid invited me to his home, and I began visiting him weekly. That regular time together has given us many opportunities to talk about life. Each week, we usually play a game of soccer, eat a meal, and then have a spiritual discussion. He is dedicated to his religion, and we both openly talk about our view of God, but each week, Khalid respectfully waits for me to pray before our meals in his home.

As our friendship grows, I sense God has given us a foundation for more spiritual conversations. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to offer Khalid the comfort He has for him and for the privilege of opening to Khalid the blessings that are waiting for him as well.





Buddhism

AT A GLANCE

Buddhism, based on the teachings of the Nepalese prince Siddhartha Gautama, is the fourth-largest world religion and the fastest-growing religion among Western post-Christian people.

There are two main groups of Buddhism: Mahayana and Theravada. Buddhists believe that every good deed has a good result, and every evil deed has an evil result. This belief motivates them to do good deeds to get merit.

Some Buddhist Worldviews

- Buddhism doesn't have a supreme god or believe in a corrupt human nature; it's a system for improving oneself.
- Buddhists believe the *Four Noble Truths*:
- Existence is *dukkha* (suffering and emptiness)
- *Dukkha* is caused by cravings and desires
- One can escape *dukkha* and the cycle of death and rebirth by achieving *nirvana*, a state of peace, perfection, and enlightenment
- *Nirvana* is realized by following the *Eightfold Path*: *right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration*

Common Ground

Buddhists, like us:

- Strive to live morally
- Try to live in harmony with the world around them
- Desire peace
- Want to experience wellness of mind, body, and soul
- Seek an experiential religion relevant to daily life
- Care for the environment

Tips for Making Friends With Buddhists

- Be a genuine, long-term friend
- Invite them to activities with you and your Christian friends
- Invite them to your small group where you pray and encourage each other
- Offer to pray for God to bless them
- Express how God is currently changing your life
- Ask God to show them that He is real and cares for them
- [Facts for graphics, pullouts, etc.]
- One in 14 people in the world is a Buddhist
- China has the largest number of Buddhists—244 million

Please pray for some 600 million Buddhists who live mainly in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Northern India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Republic of Kalmykia (Russia).

All It Took Was a Smile

The author's name has been withheld to protect his ministry.

I knew nothing about Jesus or Christianity until my life hit rock bottom in a refugee camp in Thailand. My life there was pointless and frustrating.

One Sunday, I strolled aimlessly around the camp. I walked past a church during a worship service and heard singing. I also saw a few girls standing in front of the building. As a young man, I started looking in their direction. Then, one of the girls walked toward me with a smile and invited me inside. Not wanting to embarrass her by refusing her invitation, I followed her. After the service, she introduced me to her mother, who invited me to their home for lunch.

One Sunday after another, I returned to the church with that family. While they nurtured me with physical food after the worship services, I received spiritual food from attending church regularly. Gradually, my faith increased, and God answered my many prayers. I gave my life to Jesus. Later, I became a Seventh-day Adventist.

Christ's method starts with simple mingling. I'm convinced of the priority of relationship building as a prerequisite to sharing listener-adapted messaging. Acts of kindness, simple forms of hospitality, ministering with genuine love and care, and time investments in friendships cannot be skipped any more than the walls of university classrooms can go up before a solid foundation is poured.



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General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
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