



ILLINOIS Focus



John Grys, Executive Secretary



A NEW WORD FOR CHURCH GROWTH

Our tagline confesses, “We exist to grow healthy, disciple-making churches.” It might be asked by serious-minded people, “Do you really?” I would say, this is our highest aspiration. In fact, to combine it with another longstanding echo from the past, it may read something like this: “The glory of God is a congregation fully alive as a healthy, disciple-making people.” What an aspiration indeed!

When the Apostle John completes his letters, his prayer is very specific: “I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers,” (2 John 2). One of the key words in this passage, translated, “prosper,” literally means, “to have a good journey.” I love this translation because it captures the essence of discipleship—a journey. This word, *eudaimonia*, is now used in relationship to what is known as, “well-being” or “flourishing.” This may be what the apostle is getting at when he writes that in “all respects” the recipients of his letter will experience “well-being.” Perhaps, this is where we can focus all of our energy, resources, time and the full spiritual weight of our lives—toward

well-being. Yes, baptism is vital to this process for it is the public expression of a changing direction; and yet, the full life (John 10:10) throughout the full-range of a person’s life may be the highest aspirational goal.

It is in this vein that we speak of “church growth.” Ultimately, church growth cannot be about a number...it must be about that person experiencing the full well-being intended by the Creator; and the pursuit of that full well-being occurs within the context

God can prevail in this post-Genesis 3 environment. Growth can occur. Jacob can wrestle to become Israel. Saul can get knocked off his horse (a different type of growth process) to become Paul. All this remains available today. Growth and well-being, regardless of circumstances, are still available as part of the Church Growth process.

Of course, the begging question might be asked, “So, what does growth actually look like in a person?” While

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ISSUE FOCUS

CHURCH GROWTH & EVANGELISM

of a body of growing people; and that growing body pursues this life together in the larger context of a post-Genesis 3 world. This post-Genesis 3 world described in Genesis 3 by the loving, pain-stricken God may be defined as “hostile.” There is toil, pain, sweat, thorns, thistles, and ultimately...death.

We should not underestimate the power of this environment for the pursuit of well-being. And we must never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to counter these prevailing forces. As demonstrated throughout the testimony of Scripture, the work of

responding to this question would take up pages and pages of a response (is it possibly one of the sidebars of Scripture?), I will start with the obvious as found in Paul’s word to the churches in the Galatia province: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—against such there is no law.” (5.22, 23)

Continued on page 6

How Prayer Continues to Change My Life	4
New Staff Intros	7
34th Constituency Session	8

& MORE

EVERDAY EVANGELIST

Pastor David Ocegüera



If you are anything like me, whenever I hear the word evangelism, I think of the five-week evangelistic crusades my church would hold every summer growing up. The church would hire a professional evangelist, we would mail out invitations to everyone in our city, and at the end of the five weeks we would hope to baptize new believers. I still have many fond memories of those days because I would help to usher people to their seats. I loved being a part of the team. As I reflect on those days however, it always felt as though the professional evangelist was doing all the work. We placed our hope on him to preach a powerful message so that more people would accept Jesus as their Savior.

Many years later, now that I am a pastor, I have come to understand that evangelism is so much more than hiring a professional. There is a story in the books of Acts that gives us a front row seat to Jesus' view of evangelism. In Acts 1, Jesus had a pivotal conversation with His disciples about His second coming and the role the disciples were to play while they waited for His return. Jesus, while speaking with His disciples, instructs them to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit over them. The disciples must have missed the immensity of this statement because they responded by asking Jesus whether He was, at that time, going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). What they were really asking was, "Jesus, is this what we have been waiting for? Will we finally enter into paradise?" It is the question we ask today— will we finally see the fulfillment of Revelation 21 where Jesus promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes, where there will be no more death, no more mourning or crying or pain? They were ready for heaven! Jesus, instead of responding with an emphatic yes, responds by giving them a threefold formula for personal evangelism that we can still use today.

A Promise, a Challenge, and a Sacred Task.

The Promise. Jesus promised the disciples they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit if they waited long enough in Jerusalem. In a day and age when we think hustling is the only way to get ahead, Jesus calls us to stillness. Not stillness for the sake of rest, but stillness for the sake of being filled with the Holy Spirit. All evangelism must begin with this stillness in prayer, asking for the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Especially as it relates to personal evangelism, the Holy Spirit will guide you as you seek opportunities to be a blessing to others.

The Challenge. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been taught to look for the signs of the second coming of Jesus. It seems that sometimes we get so busy looking for the signs that we forget Jesus has called us to a sacred task. Jesus, in His own words, tells us that it is not for us to know when God will restore and renew all things. The challenge Jesus gives us today, is when it feels like the world is coming apart, will you put your faith and trust in Jesus? There are a lot of things you cannot control in this world, but you can always choose to put your trust in Jesus.

The Sacred Task. Jesus gave the disciples one clear task: "To be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). The key to personal evangelism is to be willing to be a witness to those in your area of influence. We are witnesses of Jesus when we are a blessing to others. Sometimes the blessing someone needs is food, a listening ear, or prayer. By blessing others, you are being like Jesus. Countless times in the Gospels, we see Jesus bless those who were in the direst of circumstances. Yet, we never see Jesus begin with a Bible study before He healed someone. Instead, Ellen White reminds us that "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with people as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He invited them, 'Follow Me,'" (MHH 73.4). If you are willing be a witness of Jesus, the Holy Spirit can use you in mighty and powerful ways.

Continued on page 5



LOS PUENTES CONECTAN, LAS BARRERAS SEPARAN

Pastor Nolberto Barrueta Alvarado

Narra una ilustración que dos hermanos por mucho tiempo habían vivido en granjas contiguas. Después de 40 años tuvieron un conflicto. El hermano menor desvió el arroyo que quedaba entre ellos.

Una mañana un carpintero llamó a la puerta: estoy buscando trabajo. Sí, le dijo el hermano mayor a aquel hombre. Construya una cerca de 2 metros de alto, para no ver nunca más a mi hermano. Luego se fue al pueblo por provisiones. Cerca del atardecer, este granjero regresó a casa. Se quedó perplejo por lo que vio. Un puente que unía las dos granjas a través del arroyo. En ese momento, su hermano menor, vio desde su granja, y cruzando el puente abrazó a su hermano. Con los ojos llenos de lágrimas, le dijo: Eres un gran hombre. Gracias por construir este hermoso puente después de lo que te he hecho. Gracias y perdóname.

Ganar a una persona para Cristo requiere la habilidad de establecer puentes. Vivimos en un mundo permeado de prejuicios. Nos detenemos en el color, la raza, el país, la clase social. Escaneamos a las personas antes de pensar en ellas. Antes de reconocer que no importa la apariencia, seguramente, esa persona necesita del amor de Dios. Necesita ser sanada, perdonada o salvada.

Recuerdo una serie que miré cuando niño, en ella había un hombre que asesinaba a personas que él consideraba no gratas para la sociedad. Y les colocaba en uno de los dedos de un pie: "el hombre de la etiqueta". Muchos cristianos vivimos etiquetando a las personas. En vez de mirarlas con compasión, nos detenemos ante nuestras etiquetas.

Acompáñame a San Juan 4. Jesús va a Samaria y allí llega una mujer de la ciudad a sacar agua: y Jesús le dijo: dame de beber (v. 7). Hay un elemento común para ambos: el agua. Él establece un puente. Un puente es algo que conecta, que enlaza. Para conectarnos con alguien, debemos establecer puentes de amistad. Un tema, una canción, una afición. Algo que sea común para la persona a alcanzar. Cuando tendemos un puente, se abren oportunidades.

Pero aún, la mujer alcanzada en un punto en común, sigue teniendo prejuicios. ¿Como tú siendo judío, me pides a mí de beber, que soy mujer samaritana? Porque judíos y samaritanos no se tratan entre sí (v. 9). Un prejuicio separa personas, naciones, religiosos. Se evita a las personas, cuando los ves con prejuicios.

¿Cómo enfrentó Jesús el prejuicio? Él evitó el "conflicto". Esquivó el prejuicio, las barreras. No necesitaba tener la razón, sino ganar el corazón. Necesitaba brindarle algo mejor, más sublime. Y despertar en ella, un anhelo de algo más elevado que los prejuicios y barreras religiosas. Jesús usó el principio de la sabiduría. No respondió la pregunta para contender. Respondió preguntas para crear interés. Para despertar la razón, la conciencia.

Cuando tengas la oportunidad de acercarte a un católico, evangélico, un no cristiano, no tengas el ideal de "ganar la batalla del conocimiento teológico o doctrinal". Ten el amor de Jesús. Manifiesta compasión ante lo que las personas aún desconocen.

El objetivo es acercar a las personas a Cristo. Ellas pueden tener sus vasijas vacías. Pueden estar escondiéndose del juicio de los hombres. Pueden tener sus ideologías incorrectas. Pero después de todo, hay un Cristo que las quiere encontrar. Las quiere liberar.

HOW PRAYER CONTINUES TO CHANGE MY LIFE

Pastor Frendell Reyes



Throughout my life, I have experienced the power of prayer. When I finally surrendered to God's calling for me as a pastor and told my parents about my decision, I was surprised that my mom was praying that God would call me to be a pastor even before I was born. I've often joked with her that I really wished she prayed that I would be someone wealthy instead. At the beginning of my ministry, I was surprised how hard it was to find prayer partners. People always told me they were praying for me, but to find someone who would do so on a consistent basis and to do so in person was a lot harder than I expected. I am praying that this article would change that dynamic.

Paradigm Shift in God's Communication

The Old Testament model of vision casting is first God speaks to prophets, the prophets speak to the priests or king, and then the king speaks to the people. It's a top-down paradigm of communication. Many churches still follow this model and wait for God to speak through the pastor, the conference, or other leaders.

The New Testament gives us a different paradigm right after Pentecost. Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, everyone had access to the wisdom of God. When reading the book of Acts closely, you see that groups of people gathered because of the Holy Spirit. When Peter stood

up to speak, he didn't speak alone. This wasn't a case of him getting an idea and impulsive Peter just speaking without thinking, like he had done in the past. The verse says, "He [Peter] stood up with the eleven" (Acts 2:14). This is a unified sermon by the eleven disciples who chose Peter to speak for them and the Holy Spirit used that sermon to convert 3,000 to the church in one day. This is why some of the biggest issues of their time were solved in unity. The issues on food or circumcision were solved quickly and in unity. They didn't need a theological study or three General Conference sessions to discuss it. The Holy Spirit was their leader and they obeyed Him. The reason they had the Holy Spirit was directly connected to their commitment to pray together.

PRAY TOGETHER AT ALL COSTS.

Prayer

Thom Rainer made it his life work to study churches that are growing or dying. On his book, *Anatomy of a Revived Church* (2020), he says, "I have yet to see a sustained church revitalization that was not undergirded by a powerful movement of prayer (p. 71). He makes the point that every vibrant church has at least one prayer warrior and his definition of a prayer warrior is "someone who not only believes in the power of prayer but who also seeks to mobilize others to fight in the spiritual battle (p. 73).

Continued on page 5

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

In another book, he makes the distinction that dying churches may have people that pray or believe in prayer, but they do not do it together. The early church “were continually devoting themselves to prayer,” Acts 1:14.

Ellen White mentions that one of the strongest characteristics of the early church was that “the disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness . . . that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37).” In one of her letters she says, “The promise (of the Holy Spirit) is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love for God and for one another,” (*Letter 32, January 28, 1903*, p. 5, addressed to Brother and Sister Farnsworth).

Today, I have found people in my district who commit themselves to pray with me every day. It would take me hundreds of articles like this one to tell you the difference it has made in all our lives. However, the purpose of this article is not to tell you how God has changed our churches because of prayer, but in hopes that God will use it as a catalyst to have more churches step out in faith, and pray together at all costs, so we could share stories on how the Holy Spirit has transformed our churches because we prayed together.

CONTINUACIÓN DE LA PÁGINA 3

Quiere darle nueva vida. Establece puentes. Alcanza a la persona en un punto común. Encuentra algo que te permita alcanzar la conexión. Y luego, se abrirá la oportunidad de la testificación.

Y cuando encuentres una barrera, un prejuicio social, religioso, político, evita el conflicto. Responde con sabiduría. No necesitas ganar una discusión. Necesitamos ganar la simpatía, la atención, el corazón. Y a medida que, alcanzamos el corazón, el Señor Jesús podrá salvar a la persona.

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You may not be a professional evangelist. You may never have preached a sermon or given a Bible study, but if you are willing to be a witness of Jesus, you already are an evangelist. Through your faithfulness many people may be drawn to Jesus because of your example and witness. While I am grateful for the professional evangelists, it is my hope and prayer that you will accept the call of Jesus to be His witness, in your home, your neighborhood and wherever God leads you.

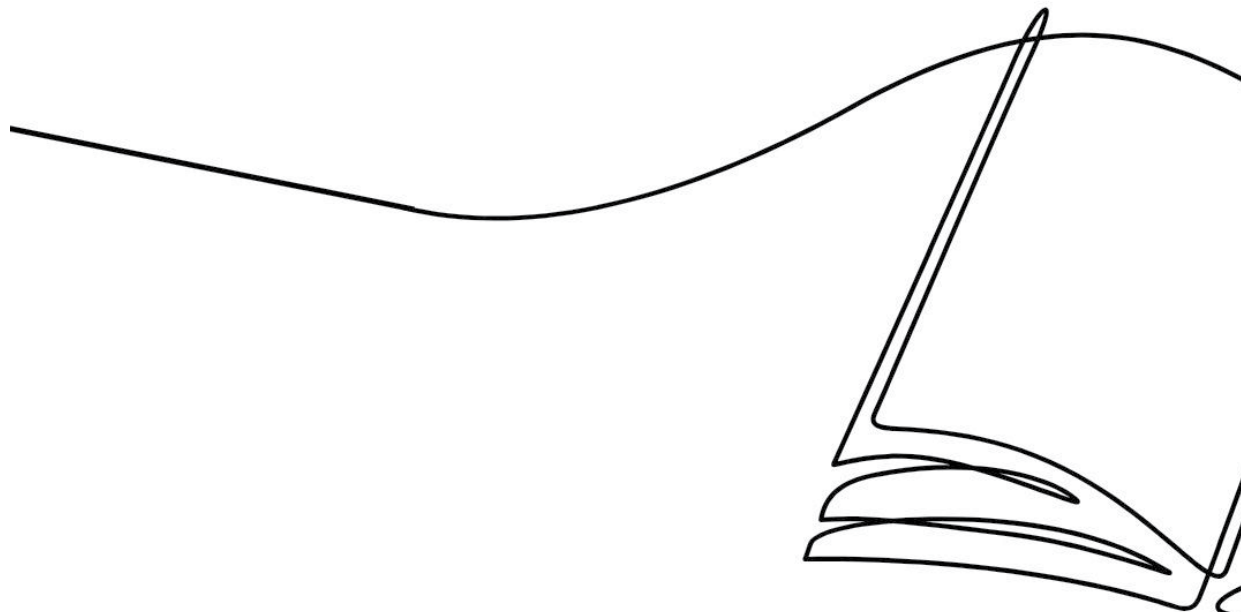
Welcome to the Illinois Conference!



Gurnee Christian School

ELIOMAR PEREZ SOTO

I'm from San Sebastián de Las Vegas del Pepino in Puerto Rico and very proud of it. Third generation Adventist. I have worked for 7 years as a teacher and professor at school and university level since 2015. Previously, I taught chemistry and math at Antillean Adventist University. Music and sports are my passion. Happily married to the most amazing woman in the world, Ashley Robles-Robles who is a school psychologist. I'm really excited to start working in the school. I believe that teaching is a calling that not everyone has and I'm very hopeful to impact the development of these kids academically and spiritually.



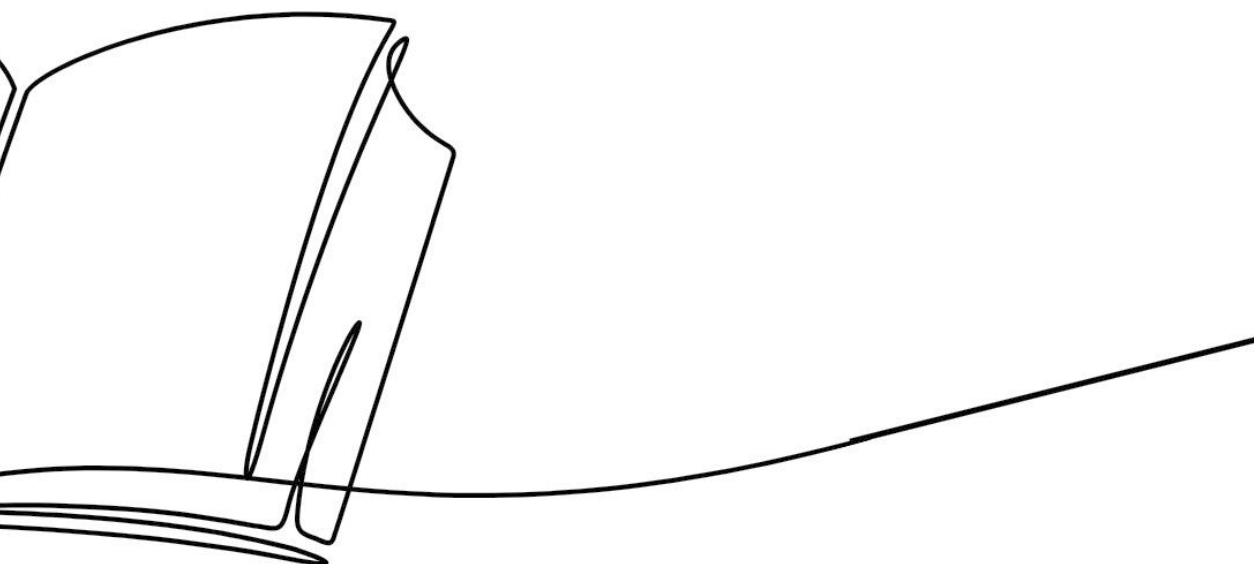
CARRIE SOMOSO

North Aurora School

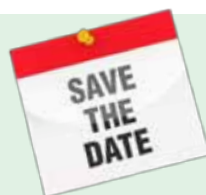
I was born in the Philippines, but have been working as a teacher in the US since 2007. My work experiences include teaching music, math, language, arts, science, and social studies to elementary and high school as a music and special education teacher in Louisiana, Las Vegas, and North Carolina. I have always depended and relied on the Lord for guidance and inspiration whenever I perform my responsibilities and duties in the workplace.

While working in a regular school setting as a teacher, this past school year was completely different for my 14-year-old son, Ceazar, and I as he opted to be a first-time 8th grade homeschooler and I became his homeschool teacher. It was a great challenge to be a teacher in both a traditional school and a Christian homeschool setting at the same time, but the Lord made it easier when He reminded me of Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

As I join the Seventh-Day Adventist educational institution this year, I believe that it is a noble call of service to teach God's precious and beloved children in the North Aurora Seventh-Day Adventist School to be faithful Christians and successful learners.



Constituency Delegate Orientations



The Illinois Conference Constituency Meeting takes place on October 23, 2022. At that time, selected delegates from Illinois churches will meet for reports, update, and business decisions regarding the Illinois Conference leadership and direction. To best prepare our delegates, they are all invited to a delegate orientation. During these meetings the delegates will receive information on what to expect during the Constituency meeting, discuss the preliminary agenda, and discuss other items that will be helpful for the Constituency Meeting. See below for dates:

Area 1 Southern Illinois	Monday, August 29, 2022	Thompsonville Church
Area 2 Central Illinois	Tuesday, August 30, 2022	Peoria SDA Church
Area 3 Northwest Illinois	Wednesday, August 31, 2022	Ottawa SDA Church
Area 4 Chicagoland – North of I-88	Thursday, September 1, 2022	Elmhurst SDA Church
Area 5 Chicagoland – South of I-88	Wednesday, September 7, 2022	Illinois Conference
Area 6 Hispanic Churches	Thursday, September 8, 2022	Illinois Conference

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Is it possible that growing in well-being includes a growth in love, a growth in peace, a growth in kindness, etc.? Healthy, disciple-making congregations involve people growing in each of these (although not exclusive to these). For, as Paul states it, there are no laws against such fruit.

Thus, my prayer for every one of our congregations, whether they be groups, companies, or churches will continue to be that we grow...in *eudaimonia*!

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