

Illinois Focus

Volume 3, Issue 2

April 2016

Special points of interest:

- Inspiring and encouraging stories of the experiences of people who are attending a new church plant
- Report of the March Church Planting Rally

Coming Events:

Outdoor Education **May 2-5**

Pathfinder Spring Camporee **May 13-15**

Hispanic Men's Retreat **May 21**

Mission Akita **June 1-8**

Summer Camp Starts! **June 19**

Church Growth/Planting

Imagine we are playing a word-association game, and I say the word, "evangelism," what do you think of? Many Adventists might say "Doug Batchelor," "a Prophecy Seminar," or a crusade or other "event."

Growing up, crusade evangelism dominated the Adventist church's ideas about evangelism. Find a venue, invite "an evangelist," and get ready for five or six weeks of meetings five nights a week. Your role? To attend (and hopefully invite people).

For many years, we have not emphasized enough personal evangelism; how to build relationships with irreligious people, how to share the Gospel, the Good News, in a way that is winsome and attractive (and actually Good News). As a result, evangelism to many church members is the pastor's job, or they just wait to see when the next crusade is scheduled and what evangelist will come to town and win people to Christ.

These days, crusades haven't disappeared, and learning how to give a personal witness is

emphasized a bit more, but church planting is now the primary way of evangelism. And, it is not just in the Adventist Church. Go to any evangelical denomination and ask them what they are doing to grow, and they will talk about church planting. Frustration with other methodologies has something to do with this trend, but biblical rethinking has also fueled the conviction that church planting is the ideal way to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission.

In the Illinois Conference, church planting is one of the main tools we are using to grow. Why plant churches? Studies show that after 15 years churches typically plateau. After 35 years, they usually can't even replace the members they lose. Those same studies show that new congregations reach a lot more people. Why? Those who study churches say established congregations tend to turn inward, no matter how hard they try to resist the trend. But new churches must look outward to survive.

Our desire here in Illinois is to fulfill the mission Jesus gave all his followers to "Go and Make



Growing our churches using the building blocks of church planting

Disciples of ALL nations..." Church planting is the primary way we are endeavoring to accomplish that mission. Join us in praying that God will continue to prompt those He has called to share the Good News of Jesus, and help us as we seek to plant churches to reach those God misses the most.

- Ron Aguilera

Oscar's Epic Story

I was born and raised a Seventh-day Adventist, attended Adventist elementary school, academy and university. At the end of my teenage years I became disenfranchised with the church. I felt like I didn't belong

and couldn't fit in. I got tired of all the looks and the guilt projected on me by the "church." Soon after enlisting into the U.S. Army, I quickly lost my way. All my Christian upbringing was put to the side

and I went down a very deep and dark path. In the meantime, my parents, especially my mom, never lost hope for me and continuously prayed for me, even when I was the farthest away from God.

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Lisa Isensee, Andres Flores and Paul Korac during a question and answer time.

Church Planting Rally 2016

Every church has a natural life cycle. From birth to adolescence; maturity to death. The first annual Church Planting Rally, "Becoming a Movement Again!" was held March 19 in the Joliet SDA Church. Presentations were made in short intervals followed by time for questions and answers. Crest Hill Christian School provided a very tasty dinner.

Each presenter put growing God's people into personal, empowering language. Ray

Pichette, Conference President, provided a visual presentation of the church life cycle. Ray stated, "Growth doesn't happen by accident, it is intentional." Did you know that the fruit of an apple tree is not the apple, but rather the number of apple trees to be born from the fruit?

Justo Morales, Associate Ministerial Director, pointed attendees to use "Jesus' Method Alone," a message of drawing people in by creating caring relationships. Lisa

Isensee (Wisconsin Conference Church Planting Director), and Pastors Korac, Flores, and Reyes captured attention with their personal stories of cultivating successful genuine biblical communities using small groups where visitors can encounter God.

Vision is the key factor for planting and re-planting churches. Part of our Conference's vision is to create a church planting movement. You won't want to miss the next SEEDs event in September.

- Jamie Daum

"The one thing I was searching for: acceptance"

At the lowest point in my life, during all the parties, drinking and extra-curricular activities, there was always the same emptiness that just couldn't be filled. In those days I could not envision myself in a relationship with God. Even though I could hear and feel Him calling me, I would remember the looks and the guilt that were still vivid in my mind, and I would turn away.

About 3 years ago, almost 30 years after leaving the church, I received a phone call from my brother inviting me to lunch; he was excited about a new

church being planted in Chicago and wanted me to hear about it. I was introduced to Pastor Andres Flores, who proceeded to explain their vision for this new church, a lot was said...but the one word that clicked in me was "ACCEPTANCE". It was the one thing for which I had been searching.

Epic Church has been a total blessing to me and many others that have experienced a similar story. At Epic Church we are striving to become disciples and to train more disciples for God. Nine months ago I gave

my life to the Lord and was baptized. My prayer and hope is to spread all the "LOVE and ACCEPTANCE" that I have been blessed to receive and bring more people to Christ.

-Oscar Lopez



Oscar, second from the left, prior to his baptism.

Caught in the Act!

This feature is my way of affirming church members for their faithful service to Jesus and His church. In my 46 years of membership, my biggest disappointment has been seeing unforgiving members angry and bitter against fellow brothers or sisters. Unfortunately, in spite of Jesus' strong teaching about forgiveness (see Matthew 6:14-15), these painful broken

relationships are common in many churches.

God isn't to blame for these situations. He's clearly doing His part. The Holy Spirit is here, convicting us of our sins and motivating us to be reconciled to one another. Today in my office, a member who has been very angry with me for two years came and

apologized. It was a God thing. Friends, I witnessed a miracle. We forgave each other. We shook hands and were reconciled.

How is it with you? Is there a relationship in your life that needs healing? Please do it today.

- Ray Pichette, President



The Oasis Story

Church planting is by far the most frustrating, joyful, challenging, yet growing experience. Oasis is almost a year old now. Starting with a core team of twelve dedicated and hardworking people, we have grown to around 30. About one third of those attending our services are former Seventh-day Adventists. Let me share two stories that have validated the necessity of a church plant. The names have been changed to protect the privacy of our visitors.

Nathaniel had not been going to church faithfully for a long time. He is a millennial. Other than having friends and family in

church, he rarely experienced anything that he found relevant there. As soon as he left for college he stopped going to church. At an invitation from one of our core members he came one Sabbath and felt comfortable with the fellowship and was inspired by the program he experienced. One Sabbath during our service he felt closer to God than he had ever felt before and that day he gave his life to Jesus. Today he attends church regularly and is part of our discipleship training.

Savana had never been an Adventist but was interested because she had an Adventist friend. The problem was her

friend didn't attend church and didn't feel comfortable inviting her to any of the churches he had attended. One Sabbath she was determined to go to a church just for the experience. She googled Adventist churches in Lemont and found Oasis. Now she and her Adventist friend are attending Oasis regularly.

In our experience new church plants appeal to people in a way that an established church may not. Bringing in people like Nathaniel and Savana makes the sacrifice and hard work worthwhile.

- Pastor Frenzell Reyes

“New church plants appeal in ways that an established church may not”

The Reach Community: Each One Reach One

Mary Sandoval's Story:

My first exposure to God had been a 12 step program where we talked about a personal God in your life. I started attending a Seventh-day Adventist Church; people were welcoming and friendly but I did not feel like I fit in. They seemed to know everyone and every Bible scripture for every occasion, and I floundered. I had never even opened a Bible.

I found that I best fit into a small Sabbath school study group because there I did not feel inadequate in my Bible knowledge. We prayed for others to join us but realized our numbers were not growing in the traditional church setting. We started to meet in a friend's home, and soon three more friends joined. My daughter, Jessica, who was never interested in God, started coming. Soon decisions for baptism were made, including Jessica! What a joy!

God answered our prayers with the formation of Reach Community Mission Group. It

represents what I feel that all of us are seeking, a safe place to study the Good News. God continues to work in my family. Even my husband, who had given up on God, is now referring to Reach as his new family.

I now have the faith community and personal relationship with God that I spent years trying to find. My feelings of emptiness and loneliness have been replaced with the love of the Holy Spirit.

Judy Mooncotch's Story:

My participation in a weight-loss program with an Adventist counselor led to weekly Bible studies in my home and then baptism.

In the years following, my husband, son and daughter joined the church. The structure of the church was good for us. However, it was painful as we watched our extended family live, due to lifestyles choices, through one disaster after another, but felt that the church was not a

welcoming, safe place for them. I left the church in search of a such a place.

A friend invited me to hear a new pastor. While he was an awesome caring individual, the church was still the same. Before leaving, I poured out my heart to the pastor, sobbing that I wanted a community where I could bring my wounded family. A place where they would be welcome and could learn about the love of God. When I left I was filled with hope that it was possible.

I attended the Pastor's group on Sabbath and Wednesday night. I was inspired. I began witnessing again to my friends and family. The pastor encouraged me to start a group in my home and I did. When the pastor talked about starting a new church, I was so excited. I love the Reach Community. I feel that I can invite anyone to this safe, warm and welcoming community.

- Submitted by Pastor Paul Korac



Judy, Jessica, Joan, Lori and Mary with Pastor Korac at the baptism.



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Our Mission:

Growing Healthy,
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Family Camp Meeting at Camp Akita 2016

Family Camp Meeting takes place this year from July 27-30, 2016 at Camp Akita. There will be plenty of time for everyone to enjoy the activities that this wonderful retreat center has to offer such as a climbing tower, horse riding, archery, hiking, swimming and canoeing.

The theme for the weekend will be, "Presenting Jesus Irresistibly." Our main speaker this year will be Elder Ray Pichette, with morning and evening worship times during the week conducted by Pastor Peter Braman and Pastor Travis Sager, respectively.

There will be a thought-provoking seminar on Prayer on Thursday and Friday mornings conducted by prayer warrior and Illinois Conference



Prayer Coordinator, Pastor Ron Schulz.

There are different options for accommodation. Tent camping is always fun, especially if you bring a whole church group! There are a limited number of

rustic cabins and regular cabins available, as well as RV hook-ups or the dormitory style chalets.

For further information and to make reservations, please check out the Illinois Conference website camp meeting page:

www.ilcsda.org/campmeeting

If you do not have access to the internet, you may prefer to call Norma at the conference office, (630) 856-2874.