



# ILLINOIS Focus



Ron Aguilera, President

## PROCLAIMING JESUS PASSIONATELY



Our theme in the Illinois Conference this year is "Proclaiming Jesus Passionately." As I have been praying about this, I have been asking God to not let me get confused or insensitive about who matters to God. The example of Jesus in John, chapter four, comes to mind—the story of the Samaritan woman. This story reminds me that every life counts to Jesus. See, in this story, the disciples want Jesus to go get lunch with them in town, but Jesus chooses to stay. When the disciples return and they say to Him, "You missed out! Too bad you didn't get lunch," Jesus replies, "I have food you know not of." See, Jesus was giving the woman the Gospel, the Bread of Life. "I had lunch," He says.

In Mark 3:1-6, we find the uncaring Pharisees. They had hard hearts, even in worship. It reminds me to pray for our churches. We need churches with believers with soft hearts toward those with broken bodies and shattered hearts. I think Jesus desired that then and He desires it now. The Bible is clear. Our God has a heart for lost people, and He wants us to have a heart for the lost too.

As I have been praying, God has been reminding me that our job as followers is not to do behavioral modification. Our job is to be a carrier of the message that can do internal spiritual transformation. We must be the carriers of grace. We must continually point others to the cross. See, when people open their hearts and the Holy Spirit comes in, the Spirit will do the behavior modification. Our job is to show them Jesus.

to know Christ?" We must know how to answer. We must be prepared. The example that comes to mind is Acts, chapter 8, and how Phillip was ready to share God's Word.

We must keep our sword sharp. Beyond that, the more prepared we are, the more confident we are. The more confident we are, the more we look for opportunities to share Christ, no matter how small the opening. This is why we are asking our pastors to

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### ISSUE FOCUS

## CHURCH GROWTH, CHURCH PLANTING, AND EVANGELISM

As I have been praying, God has reminded me of the problem of unpreparedness. I think of 1 Peter 3:15 which says, "*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give and answer to everyone who ask you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*" In other words, followers of Jesus must always be ready. Anytime, anywhere. Why? Because you never know when an evangelistic opportunity will come up. You never know when someone will ask you, "how do I get

increase the level of preparedness of the people in the church. But, even if this is not happening in your church, let me ask this—whose responsibility is it to be prepared? Yours. It is our responsibility to be prepared.

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**& MORE**





“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching people” (E.G. White. Ministry of Healing, p.143.). A statement this strong and direct is worthy of much thought and reflection. In our search for best evangelism practices, how Jesus reached people should be our primary study. How can we contextualize Jesus’ methods into today’s complex culture? How can we individually, and as a church collectively, know and embrace His methods?

Everything that Jesus did was a model for reaching lost souls. How He loved, how He healed, what He taught, and who He associated with, was all given as an example for us to follow. His ways are a blueprint for making other disciples. As Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives with a large gathering of His disciples just before his ascension, He reinforced His purpose for them (and us today): to “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28: 19). What Jesus said just before His return to the Father carried greater value and emphasis. How Jesus ended His earthly ministry, was a reinforcement of His challenge to His new disciples to “follow Me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:17).

## “ ... EVERYTHING JESUS DID WAS A MODEL TO REACHING SOULS. ”

Only as we learn to “follow” Jesus and allow Him to be Lord of our lives can we achieve “true success” as effective disciple-makers. The next step is not “we will become,” but “I will make you” effective “fishers of men.” As we abide in Christ, learn His ways, and answer the call, He has promised to be with us “always” (Matthew 28:20) and show us what successful fishing looks like.

I grew up with a brother who was obsessed with fishing. He lived for the next tournament or opportunity to take his boat (that he won in a national fishing tournament) to a secluded lake. He was indeed a master fisherman. He studied what bate to use, made his own lures, and what spots would yield the best catch. On several occasions I went with him only to discover that I didn’t get the fishing gene. He could sit for hours and patiently wait. If no fish were caught, he would try a different location, bait, or tactic. I, on the other hand, didn’t have much patience to sit or stay in one spot very long. I realized that I lacked the patience and commitment (God is still working on that) to achieve “success” in the fishing realm. In truth, I didn’t pay much attention to what my master-fisher brother was doing.



## CHRIST’S METHOD ALONE

Pete Braman  
Ministerial Director,  
Illinois Conference

Why do I use this real-life illustration? Making disciples is similar to fishing, it takes patience, commitment, and a variety of methods (bait) to connect with people in their context. While we hope the fish come to our boat (church?), we are called to “go” and “mingle” in proximity to people in their spaces. In our culture, people respond to those who have befriended them and much less with strangers. In any relationship, trust and friendship take time to develop. Finding out the interests of others is a key to forming friendships. Jesus went to banquets, weddings, synagogues, homes, the marketplace, watering holes, hospitals, and many other locations to “desire their good,” know their environment, and meet their needs. Much like putting a worm on a hook, sometimes discipling others is messy and uncomfortable, but the reward far outweighs the effort. (534)

A significant part of understanding Christ’s methods is through prayer. Before He chose His disciples, He spent all night in prayer with His Father (Mark 3:13). He also tells us to “pray for the harvest (and workers – Matthew 9:38). He instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem in prayer and supplication to receive for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4,14). I believe Jesus wants us to pray for how we can enter the harvest. As we make ourselves available to God, He will teach us the right side of the boat to cast our fishing line.

# EVANGELISM IS NOT AN EVENT, IT'S A LIFESTYLE

Gordon Fraser, Pastor  
Beverly Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Goshen Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Mount Sinai Seventh-day Adventist Church



From as far as I could remember, from about 8 years old, every summer when we were out of school, my grandmother would wake us up early in the morning. We would have worship, get dressed, and off we would go with her not knowing where we were going.

I dreaded those days because it was my time to play and have fun with the other children. Not only were my summers interrupted but every Sabbath afternoon she would take me with her after church as she was engaging in personal evangelism—knocking on people's doors and standing on the street corner talking to everyone we met.

My grandmother never waited for the church program, or a revival to motivate or propel her to do evangelism. She was an evangelist, and one of the finest evangelists that I have ever witnessed in my life, without preaching one sermon. She met people where they were and would talk to them about the love of Jesus. She would invite them to her home and would feed them.

This is what shaped my worldview regarding evangelism. I had no idea what evangelism was. She embodied to me what evangelism should look like. What I didn't realize was that she was teaching me how to be an evangelist.

Evangelism is not a planned event. Evangelism is an individual lifestyle. So many times, when we hear the word evangelism, we think of a church-sponsored event; something that was planned by the pastor and the evangelism team—cooking classes, big and small meetings in the church or auditorium, a food giveaway and more. Evangelism is not just an event, something of importance that happens for a moment. Evangelism is a lifestyle that all Christians should act out daily.

We are called to take this good news of Jesus to the entire world. This is an individual mandate; one that we must take personally. I am suggesting that the way we think of evangelism needs to change. Instead of thinking of it as something that all of us must do as a group or wait for the church to initiate an evangelistic outreach event, we need to step out in faith and become personal evangelists creating daily opportunities to reach and disciple someone.

In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus made a personal command inviting all of us to labor with Him: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations," "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Amen.

Jesus repeats the personal pronoun "you." He said *"I commanded you... I am with you,"* I believe Jesus is expecting everyone to take this mandate to get personally involved and becoming disciple-makers.

I am suggesting that you no longer sit on the sidelines as a spectator. Evangelism is not a spectator sport. It's unlike a football game where only a few chosen individuals are playing waiting for the coach to call the plays. While most people sit on the sidelines looking and cheering, you should be proactive. Take the mandate personally. Come up with ways to reach out and share the good news of the Gospel.

Living an evangelistic lifestyle begins with a life dedicated to prayer and surrender and allowing Jesus to live His life through you by the power of the Holy Spirit. Make friends with strangers; one of the ways we can do this is through social media. You can create a personal social media marketing campaign on Facebook seeking out those who are interested in Bible studies, which is a powerful way to reach new people.

Evangelism is not an event it's a lifestyle. The harvest is ready. Jesus has already done the work you just need you to partner with Him and "reap a harvest you have not sown."



# ¿COMO PUEDE ALCANZARNOS JESUS EN NUESTRO PROPIO MUNDO?



Nolberto Barrueta Alvarado, Pastor  
Fairmont City Hispanic Church  
Effingham Hispanic Mission Group  
Champaign Hispanic Mission Group

Un refrán popular en mi País dice: "cada cabeza, es un mundo". A mi alrededor miro una variedad de "mundos." Jóvenes en el Rock, personas de todo nivel en la homosexualidad, el alcohol y las drogas, entre otras. Y me pregunto, ¿cómo podemos alcanzarlos para Cristo?

Hoy pensamos que vivimos en la era más difícil. Concluimos, que es casi imposible alcanzar almas para Cristo. En realidad, los avances tecnológicos, científicos y económicos han progresado. Sin embargo, hay algo que no ha cambiado, a saber, el corazón humano. Sigue siendo el mismo. Afectado por el pecado. Lleno de temores, ambiciones y anhelos. Buscando en algún lugar y de cualquier modo la felicidad.

La pregunta a responder es: ¿cómo Jesús alcanzó a los de su tiempo?

## LA PRESENCIA DE JESÚS EN LA BODA

El Señor Jesús fue invitado a una boda y estuvo allí (S. Juan 2: 1,2). El primer elemento de evangelismo de Jesús es que él se acercó a la gente. Visitó la reunión de boda, el estanque de Bethesda, Jericó, fue a la tumba de Lázaro. Los corazones son atraídos en la proximidad, no en la distancia. El evangelismo transformador se acerca a los descarriados. Llega donde están los quebrantados, los enfermos. Visita a los desahuciados. Para alcanzarnos, Dios movió su tienda a la tierra (Ex. 25:8). Se hizo hombre. (S. Juan 1:14). El evangelismo de Jesús nos mueve hacia donde están los perdidos.

## IDENTIFICAR LAS NECESIDADES

En cierto momento de la boda, la madre de Jesús, le dijo: no tienen vino (S. Juan 2: 3). En el segundo elemento de la evangelización, Jesús identificó sus necesidades. Las necesidades superan al poder, la riqueza o la pobreza. Todos, en algún momento necesitamos algo o a alguien. El desafío es identificar los vacíos de la gente. Saber en que podemos ayudarle. Conocer donde están sus puntos vulnerables. La necesidad de un corazón puede ser la oportunidad de salvación.

## TRABAJAR EN EL TIEMPO OPORTUNO

Un tercer elemento es: actuar en los momentos adecuados. Le dijo a María: "aún no ha llegado mi hora" (S. Juan 2: 4). Jesús no actuó de manera apresurada. Esperó el momento oportuno. Muchas veces cometemos el error de actuar precipitadamente. La naturaleza nos enseña los procesos de siembra y cosecha. La cosecha es el producto de la siembra. Descubrir las necesidades de la gente, requiere un tiempo para trabajar en ellas.

## PROCESO PREVIO AL MILAGRO

Jesús continuó diciendo: "Llenen las tinajas hasta arriba" (S. Juan 2: 7). El cuarto elemento es destacar "el esfuerzo humano". Jesús dijo: llenen las tinajas. ¿Las podía llenar él con su Palabra? Si. No obstante, hace del hombre su colaborador. El esfuerzo humano es requerido.

Es una obra del poder divino unido al esfuerzo humano. Elena White escribió: "La iglesia es el medio para la salvación de los hombres." Nada puede sustituir nuestra parte. Nos toca visitar los hogares. Establecer grupos pequeños. Casas de oración. Hacer programas radiales. Nuestra tarea es llenar las tinajas, hacer lo que Él dice que hagamos.

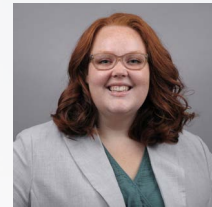
## GANÓ A SUS DISCÍPULOS

La experiencia de la boda de Cana termina diciendo: "y sus discípulos creyeron él" (S. Juan 2:11). Jesús los alcanzó donde estaban. Identificó sus necesidades. Obró en el momento oportuno. Las vasijas fueron llenadas. Entonces, ocurrió el milagro de la conversión del agua en vino y de las personas a Cristo.

Dondequiera hay corazones necesitados de Cristo. Nuestra tarea: hacer nuestra parte. El Señor Jesús hará la suya.

## PUTTING ASIDE THE BAGGAGE OF EVANGELISM

Elizabeth McDonald, Associate Pastor  
Hinsdale Seventh-day Adventist Church



Growing up, I attended a small church located outside of Portland, Oregon, in an area known for its lower-income families and homeless population. I can remember several different programs, events, and evangelistic endeavors that our church put together throughout my childhood. However, one of the most impactful focuses didn't involve flyers, fancy presentations, or extravagant presenters from out of town. It simply involved bread. A church member in our congregation had a connection with Dave's Killer Bread, and because of that, twice a month, we would receive a large donation of bread with which we would go door to door and share them with the community. We didn't bring any tracts or Bible studies. We simply handed each neighbor a loaf of bread and wished them well. Throughout our time in the community we formed several relationships, some of which resulted in baptism.

You may read this story and say, "How in the world is that evangelism? Loaves of bread? How can you call that bringing people to Jesus?" However, as I look back on that time, I think it was one of the most useful evangelistic endeavors we ever did. It all began by leaving our church building, entering into the community, and giving away something that could benefit the person who received it. The practice of going to people with something useful was something that Jesus did quite well. A great example of

this can be found in my favorite Bible story: The Woman at the Well. As Christians, we are too often tempted to rush to the end of this story in John 4:13-14, where Jesus says, *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

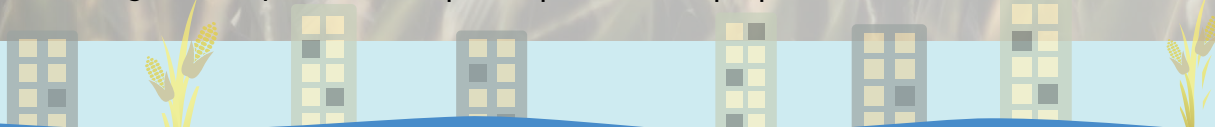


We **love** this point in the story because this is where Jesus is giving His call. However, we often miss that Jesus went completely out of His way and defied all traditional norms to reach this woman. He entered into enemy land; He risked His reputation by talking to and being alone with a woman (let alone a Samaritan woman). Yet, He did this all because He knew that salvation was at stake.

When was the last time that we inconvenienced ourselves in order to share Jesus? Unfortunately, I think preconceived ideas of what 'evangelism' is supposed to be can often prevent us from dreaming about what evangelism can be. Evangelism is more than putting together a four-week series and opening the church's doors with the hope or expectation that people

will come flooding in. Although seminars certainly have their place, I believe evangelism starts when we intentionally choose to go out of our way to actively engage and build relationships with our communities. Jesus cared enough about people to go to them - even breaking social and religious norms and more, if necessary. So why are we so often content to simply invite people to join us in our church-building comfort zones, instead of going to them?

In her book *Medical Ministry*, Ellen G. White says, "The Lord is calling upon the men and women who have the light of truth for this time to engage in genuine, personal missionary work." Christ has equipped us and given us examples of how we can share His light. So why don't we put aside whatever baggage we may feel comes with the word 'evangelism,' and instead turn our attention to the example of Jesus.





Seventh-day  
Adventist Church 2021 Sunset Calendar\*

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE

Date	Chicago	Rockford	Moline
January 2	4:32	4:37	4:45
January 9	4:39	4:45	4:52
January 16	4:47	4:52	4:59
January 23	4:57	5:00	5:08
January 30	5:04	5:09	5:17
February 6	5:13	5:18	5:26
February 13	5:23	5:27	5:34
February 20	5:31	5:36	5:43
February 27	5:39	5:45	5:51
March 6	5:48	5:53	6:00
March 13	5:56	6:02	6:07
March 20	7:04	7:10	7:15
March 27	7:11	7:18	7:23
April 3	7:19	7:25	7:30
April 10	7:27	7:33	7:38
April 17	7:35	7:41	7:46
April 24	7:42	7:49	7:53
May 1	7:50	7:57	8:01
May 8	7:57	8:04	8:08
May 15	8:05	8:12	8:15
May 22	8:11	8:19	8:22
May 29	8:17	8:25	8:28
June 5	8:23	8:30	8:33
June 12	8:27	8:34	8:37
June 19	8:29	8:36	8:39
June 26	8:30	8:37	8:40
July 3	8:29	8:36	8:39
July 10	8:26	8:34	8:37
July 17	8:22	8:29	8:33
July 24	8:16	8:23	8:27
July 31	8:09	8:16	8:20
August 7	8:00	8:07	8:11
August 14	7:51	7:58	8:02
August 21	7:41	7:47	7:52
August 28	7:29	7:36	7:40
September 4	7:18	7:24	7:29
September 11	7:06	7:12	7:17
September 18	6:53	6:59	7:05
September 25	6:41	6:47	6:53
October 2	6:29	6:35	6:41
October 9	6:17	6:23	6:29
October 16	6:06	6:12	6:18
October 23	5:56	6:01	6:08
October 30	5:46	5:51	5:58
November 6	5:38	5:43	5:50
November 13	4:31	4:36	4:43
November 20	4:25	4:30	4:38
November 27	4:22	4:26	4:34
December 4	4:20	4:24	4:32
December 11	4:20	4:24	4:32
December 18	4:22	4:26	4:34
December 25	4:25	4:30	4:38

\* <https://sunrise-sunset.org>

"So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

Hebrews 4:9

Photo by Dewang Gupta on Unsplash

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

...I want to invite you to ask God to give you a heart that breaks for people. I want to invite you to ask God to help you increase your level of preparedness and readiness. We must know how to set sinners free, how to explain the plan of salvation, how to follow Jesus. Our level of preparedness must be high.

I hope that you will set this as a goal this year; to raise your level of preparedness. Join a training event, read books, spend time in prayer, be in church to worship God regularly (church services sensitize people to the things of God). Invite your friends and family to come with you.

As I close, I invite you to ask yourself these questions:

*Are you doing your best to maintain a soft heart towards people who are far from God?*

*Are you doing your best to maintain a level of preparedness and readiness to share the gospel message when the opportunity arises?*

*Are you inviting friends/family to where you know God is going to work powerfully?*

Join me in committing to pray each day that God will give us a soft heart for people, and to preparing your mind for the conversations God has in store for you, and to extend invitations to those who desperately need to hear the Good News Jesus offers.

May God bless us as we Proclaim Jesus Passionately this year!

**Ron Aguilera, President  
Illinois Conference**



  
ILLINOIS CONFERENCE  
OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

We exist to make healthy  
disciple-making churches

**PROCLAIMING Jesus**  
PASSIONATELY  
LUKE 4:18



“

**GO** THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, **BAPTIZING** THEM  
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.  
**TEACHING** THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.  
AND BEHOLD, **I AM WITH YOU, ALWAYS**, TO THE END OF THE AGE.

**MATTHEW 28:19, 20**

”



@Illinois Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists



Phone: 630.716.3560  
Fax: 630.734.0926  
Email: [info@ilcsda.org](mailto:info@ilcsda.org)



[www.ilcsda.org](http://www.ilcsda.org)  
619 Plainfield Road  
Willowbrook, IL 60527



Illinois Focus Editor: Nikki Quilatan  
Design: Heather Lanphear

