

EDITORIAL
"God's Special Place"

FEATURE
"Vacation Bible School:
Combating the Silent Pandemic"

NEWS
"Corvette Owner Runs
into a Canvasser"

INFORMING MEMBERS SINCE 1988

Memo

SEPTEMBER 2023



God's Special Place

The couple from California were in their mid to late 60's and always by themselves. His biker-style headwrap made him seem a bit intimidating, and he was often sitting alone as if meditating on something important. There seemed to be a mysterious aloofness about the couple with a touch of tension, but I couldn't tell if it was just unique personality, marital problems, or some life issue they were working through.



Jim Micheff

They didn't join in any of the activities and only came to meals and some of the worships.

Whenever I saw them, I tried to talk with them, intentionally attempting to maintain balance between making them feel included and protecting their desire for personal space. I started praying for them, not knowing what more I could do to help them enjoy Camp Au Sable.

As the week went by, I wondered how helpful we (and Camp in general) were for them. On Thursday after lunch was over, I noticed them sitting at one of the picnic tables off by themselves. I felt impressed to go over and talk with them. They were friendly and welcoming, and he especially seemed to want to talk to me. After a short time,

his wife excused herself, leaving us to enjoy the sunshine and cool breeze together. It was then that he told me he was dying of cancer.

He had tried chemo and radiation, which was why he wore the bandana, but the doctors had told them there was nothing more they could do and he only had a few weeks to live. I was surprised! He didn't have the appearance of someone with only weeks to live.

He went on to say that their lives had been absorbed in their professions and God had been in the background. After the prognosis, he and his wife began reminiscing about when and where they had sensed God's presence in the past. His wife remembered Camp Au Sable. She had some distant connection with Camp Au Sable and

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MICHIGAN
Memo



Prayer Focus

had faint memories of sensing God's presence there. She asked if he would be willing to go there if an opening was available, and when he agreed, she immediately called the camp. There had been a last-minute cancellation, making room for them at a Family Camp.

They decided to drive their motorhome to Michigan and experience one more road trip together. Then he told me, "You will never know what this time at Camp has meant to me. When we first came, I was wrestling through the reality of death, angry with God and everyone else, but God is in this place! As the days have gone by, I sense His presence as never before. I've seen and heard Him through the general camp setting of worships, music, and friendly staff, but especially through the beauty of nature all around us here. God has been gently hugging me close and communicating His love through the lake, trees, squirrels and other wildlife, the boardwalk, and nature center. He has replaced anxiety and fear of the future with peace I cannot explain. I'm now at peace with death and the grave because I know God is with me."

We rejoiced together at the goodness of God, then he asked me if there was something the camp needed to strengthen the program. I told him I had just been looking at replacing all the mattresses in the boys' and girls' villages. He told me he had a Harley Davidson motorcycle that was his special delight, and since he would not be able to use it anymore, he wanted it to bless others. He had already talked to his wife, and she agreed to his idea of selling it and giving the proceeds to Camp Au Sable. He asked how much the mattresses would cost. I told him the quote was for about \$20,000. He smiled and told me his Harley was worth that exact amount.

This experience happened when I was the Youth and Camp director. Over the years, stories like this have been repeated in so many ways.

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"You will never know what this time at Camp has meant to me. When we first came, I was wrestling through the reality of death, angry with God and everyone else, but God is in this place!"

Every Monday morning, the Michigan Conference staff meets for worship and prayer. Please join with us as we pray for these churches and ministries.

SEPTEMBER 4
Buchanan/Chikaming
Buchanan ACS
Chikaming ACS

Paul Ratsara, Jr.
Berrien Springs PMC
 Shane Anderson Jenifer Daley, Prescott Khair, Ben Martin, & Lindsey Pratt

Andrews Academy
Ruth Murdoch Elementary

SEPTEMBER 11
Michiana Fil-Am/St Joseph

Roy Castelbuono
South Haven
 Jorge Mata
Benton Harbor/Coloma

Gerhard Erbes
Hartford Indonesian

Adrie Legoh
Fairplain Food Pantry
Village Adventist Elementary
Berrien Springs Village
Village Adventist Elementary

Ron Kelly, Michael Hess, Michael Kusarawana, & Dennis Page

SEPTEMBER 18
Andrews Korean

Sang Gyu Seo
Niles Westside
Niles Adventist School
 Alex Rybachek
Niles Malawi Michiana

Symon Kumwenda
Niles Southside

Isaac Kubvoruno
Harbor of Hope
Harbor of Hope Food Pantry

Taurus Montgomery
Edwardsburg/Glenwood
Edwardsburg ACS

Alex Niculaescu
SEPTEMBER 25
Stevensville

Bryce Bowman
Dowagiac/Eau Claire
Eau Claire SDA Elementary
Eau Claire ACS

Tom Shepherd
Berrien Springs Living Word
 MC Shin
Neighbor 2 Neighbor

Vacation Bible School: Combating the Silent Pandemic

There is a silent pandemic that plagues our churches. Tiny chairs and dusty felts sit unused, forgotten in a Sabbath School room that hasn't been touched in months, if not years. Rooms which were once filled with the sweet sound of toddlers singing praise to Jesus are quiet.

Halls where little feet used to patter are muffled, scuffed by but a few feet. This pandemic is not a virus, but rather an absence of children. Our churches used to be filled with children, now, it is often quite the opposite. Families aren't attending church anymore, and there are no families coming in to fill the silence left behind.

Children, in their sweetness, are a source of inspiration for church members. There is nothing quite like a child's first realization of the sacrifice of Christ, or a song sang from the bottom of a child's heart. As a church, we often forget that children need to be evangelized, too. It is for this reason that churches across the conference hosted Vacation Bible School (VBS) programs. To win a child to Christ is to lead a little one onto the path to heaven. That is the goal of every VBS program.

This summer, 41 churches held VBS programs

all across Michigan, according to Sarah Canada, who is Children's Ministries director for the Michigan conference. Most of the churches used the Mission Cruise program, produced by Canada for state-wide use. Several churches chose to use their own programs as well.

"Mission Cruise: Making Waves for Jesus" focused on God's love for every individual, and His specific purpose for each child, a strong theme at a time when children and youth are rocked by the struggle to find their identity. Children across Michigan were impacted by the simple peace found in God's love for us.

Canada says that sometimes the significance of the VBS program slips away unnoticed. Canada explains that we set aside thousands of dollars for evangelistic series, which is a good thing, but we forget that VBS is evangelism, too! "We have more visitors coming into our church for Vacation



VBS attendees sing fun songs about Jesus at the Petoskey church!



Petoskey church participates in the Independence Day parade and distributes 750 VBS invitations.

“VBS is truly an evangelistic series for children—praise the Lord for the 41 programs held state-wide and for the follow-up happening now.”

Bible School than for any other program across the year,” Canada says, “and the parents come, too!” VBS reaches not only children, but their parents, too. “We are missing children in our churches,” Canada says, “but we are also missing families. A lot of the people coming into our church do not have families... [Vacation Bible School] is one of the best ways we can bring children and their families into our church.”

One year, Canada led a VBS program in her home church which usually has about five children attending regularly. For their VBS program, however, Canada reports that over 100 children attended. “Anyone can do this,” Canada says, “you just have to be willing to try.” She further explains that everyone wants children in their church, “but we aren’t willing to provide programming.” In other words, if we want kids and families in our churches, there needs to be age-specific programming.

If there is someone who would like to start a VBS program, but is unsure how to begin, Canada recommends attending the VBS workshop which is held annually in February. At the workshop, Canada and her team shares tips on advertising, follow-up, organization, and budgets. No one has to start from scratch—programming is provided with step-by-step directions. Anyone with a willing heart can lead a VBS.

After the workshop, Canada recommends doing what several churches have already done. “They’ve been attending fairs and parades,” she says, “passing out flyers, or having a booth with games and crafts.” Not only does this advertise VBS, but it puts your church out into your community and establishes trust within the community—your church becomes a recognizable, trusted presence.

VBS is already a trusted event with which many are familiar. Some may have attended a program when they were a child, and so when a church chooses to hold a VBS program, “people would come to the church for a Vacation Bible School,” says Canada, “whereas they wouldn’t come for anything else.”

Because VBS attracts a demographic of attendees



The Houghton Lake church has an established VBS presence in the community from passing out invitations at the Memorial Day parade, local fairs, and local businesses.

unique to children’s programs alone, it is important to make sure that the church follows up appropriately. “Our main struggle with VBS,” explains Canada, “is to get the children to come back.” To combat this, Children’s Ministries is sharing several follow-up tips on Facebook and Instagram. (Follow [MisdaKids.org](https://www.MisdaKids.org) to access those tips and more).

One idea that every church should implement is to have church members “adopt a kid from VBS. Share the child’s name, pray for them, and drop off a care package,” says Canada. The important aspect here is for the child to understand that the church is a caring place. In the package, the church member can include flyers for the church school, Sabbath School, Adventurers or Pathfinders, and any other age-specific event, “anyway to stay in contact with them and draw them back,” says Canada.

The church may also consider holding more age-specific events to draw kids, as well as families. Canada suggests parenting classes to bring in entire families, as well as other events, such as a back-to-school party, with free gifts such as pencils, paper, crayons—things that families may not be able to afford. She also suggests other seasonal events, such as ice-skating, bowling, or even “just a social event at the church they could come back to.” The idea is to bring children and families into contact with the church as much as possible.

VBS is truly an evangelistic series for children—praise the Lord for the 41 programs held state-wide and for the follow-up happening now. Keep the children who attended VBS this summer in your prayers as churches across Michigan continue to follow-up. If you or your church have follow-up tips, reach out to [MisdaKids](https://www.MisdaKids.org) on Facebook or Instagram. Good ideas deserve to be spread. Happy evangelizing! 📌

By Judy Ringstaff, Communication

Corvette Owner Runs into a Canvasser

This is my second summer as part of the Michigan Youth Rush canvassing team. I'd like to share one of my experiences with you.

One day as I walked up to a house, I noticed a new Corvette and a red Mustang sitting in the driveway. I admired them all the way to the door. A younger man, probably in his early 20s, answered the door. I shared the book *Habits That Heal* (an adapted version of *The Ministry of Healing*) with him and then *The Great Controversy*.

At that point, I closed my canvas and told him how much they were for the set. He said, "Wait, what's

the set?" I shared that the donation price I had mentioned was for the two books in his hand, but that I could show him some of the other ones that I had. "Yes, show them to me," he eagerly responded. I showed him the other books in my hand and briefed him on the books in my bag.

At this point he had five books in his hands. Holding up *Peace Above the Storm*, he asked, "So what is this one about again? Is this one religious?" I was disappointed because I felt like a young guy like him wasn't going to be interested if I said it was religious. I proceeded to tell him that it was religious and it would help him get to know Jesus better as a friend.

After going over the books in his hand, he picked out *Peace Above the Storm* again and *The Great Controversy*. I was excited and relieved that he did want the religious books! I shared about the donation prices and mentioned that if he gave just a little bit more, I could leave another book, *The Answer Book*, with him also. "It's basically three for the price of two," I stated.

"Ok, let me go find some money. I want to do cash if I can." He didn't find anything in the house, so he decided to go look in his truck. I followed him a little way and as he was looking, I

"This morning I just felt like something was going to happen today. Just a sense, but I didn't know what it was, and now here you are!"

remarked how cool the cars were in the driveway. We had a great conversation and I learned he had just gotten the Corvette a few days before. (The Mustang was his brother's). He got in the car and revved the engine for me. It was awesome and I even got a video of him revving the engine.

But back to the story...we went back to the door and finished up with the money and the three books. At the end, my leader walked up, and we offered to pray with the homeowner. He accepted and then after the prayer he said, "You know, this is a funny coincidence. Just two weeks ago, I started listening to the Bible for the first time. I grew up Orthodox, and I've known that I believed in something, but I never really knew what I believed in, so I started listening to the Bible. This morning I just felt like something was going to happen today. Just a sense, but I didn't know what it was, and now here you are!"

I responded by affirming how great God's timing is. He took down all the local church information and was very excited about the books. God's timing is impeccable, and I was reminded to never judge what someone will be interested in by how old they are or how they look. God wants to draw each one of us to Him! 🙏

By Dillon Austin, 17, lives in Newberry, Michigan, where he will be a homeschool high school senior this year.



The team is like family. They work together, play together, pray together, and serve together.



The Youth Rush team stationed in Warren, MI.

(God's Special Place, continued from page 2)

Families have been reunited and strengthened, new acquaintances have become lifelong friends, couples have met and joined their lives in holy matrimony. Perhaps you have your own special memory in connection with Camp.

In our conference, Camp Au Sable is a crucial ministry, where kids and adults of all ages commit or recommit their hearts and lives to Jesus. It has also become an important crossroads and training center for our conference. What began as a youth focused summer camp, with Bible camps and Pathfinder events during the school year, has grown into a conference wide training facility ministering to the needs of all our constituents. Family programs, such as marriage and individual men's and women's retreats, along with health, Sabbath School and Personal Ministry training workshops are only a few examples of the various activities taking place there. In addition, Michigan Conference churches regularly use the camp for campouts and retreats.

In the early 1950's, the current dining room served as both dining hall and auditorium for programming. Over the years, the kitchen has been remodeled and adjusted to maximize the current space. An auditorium and additional housing have also been added to help accommodate conference needs, however several times each year we must rely on hotels in Grayling to help meet housing needs.

Our AUSMIN (Au Sable Administrative committee) and Long-Range Planning committees give oversight and help cast a vision for camp. They ensure each additional lodge can accommodate separate groups, maximizing the number of multiple parties using the grounds at any one time. For years we have been repairing and maintaining camp facilities, trying to get

as much use out of our existing buildings as possible. Both committees recognize we have an aging kitchen, dining hall and auditorium that, in the future, will have issues requiring major repair costs. Estimated costs to upgrade these amenities, including the fire suppression system, to current code using professional services are projected to be over 5 million.

Last year, with the recommendation of AUSMIN, the MCEC (Michigan Conference Executive Committee) authorized a feasibility study to be conducted by Lew Seibold and Ariel Solis, both architects and former chairs of the Architectural program at Andrews University. They addressed several questions. Would it be more cost effective and efficient to build a separate kitchen/dining hall and auditorium or keep them together as they are now? Or would it be better to remodel or tear down and rebuild? After analyzing the study, both AUSMIN and Long-Range committees concluded that it was best to have them together and rebuild rather than remodel.

This year the MCEC authorized Seibold and Solis along with Daniel Bacchiocchi, an architect and building contractor, to prepare two proposals for our Constituency delegates to consider. The feasibility study along with their preliminary architectural work indicates that the cost, depending on the selected proposal, will be between 12 and 15 million dollars.

We solicit your prayers for our Constituency Session on September 24. This will be one of the important topics of discussion as we will determine if the time has come to replace the kitchen, dining hall and auditorium. Regardless of the outcome, we know God will continue to use Camp Au Sable as His special place. 🙏

By Jim Micheff, President

ANNOUNCEMENT

Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists[®] 34TH CONSTITUENCY SESSION

The 34th constituency session of the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will be held at the Cedar Lake church in Cedar Lake, MI, September 24, 2023. The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m.

Reports of the previous five years will be rendered, proposed constitutional changes may be considered, the election of conference officers, departmental directors and members of the executive committee will take place, and any other business will be transacted, which may properly come before the session. Delegates are those duly elected by the various churches of the conference and delegates-at-large as provided in the constitution. As provided by the bylaws, the organizing committee will meet on Sept. 23 and will begin with vespers at 7:00 p.m. at the Cedar Lake Church.



Seventh-day Adventist® Church

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

NATURE NUGGET

Brant: Goose or a Duck?

Brant, also known as Brent Geese, are a type of medium-sized waterfowl which have dark brown or black plumage, a white belly, and a short, stubby bill. They are commonly found in coastal areas and are known for their distinctive honking call.

Brant are often mistaken for ducks due to their similar appearance, but they are actually part of the goose family. One key difference between ducks and geese is the shape of their bills. Ducks have flat, broad bills adapted for filtering food from the water, while geese have more pointed bills that are better suited for grazing on land.

Another reason Brant are considered geese rather than ducks is their behavior. Geese are known for their strong social bonds and their tendency to mate for life. Brant are no exception, and they form close-knit family groups during the breeding season. They are also highly migratory birds, and they travel long distances between their breeding and wintering grounds. The pair of Brant shown above were



photographed on the Atlantic coast of Massachusetts at a location called "Goose Point"! It's a good thing I did not see them on "Duck Lake"!

The Brant can teach us a valuable lesson about the importance of community and relationships. Just as Brant form close-knit family groups, we, too, are meant to live in community with others and build strong relationships with those around us. In the Bible, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." Why not say thank you to someone today who has played an important part in your relationships and/or community? 🙏

By Dr. Gordon Atkins, Head Naturalist, Camp Au Sable

MONTHLY CALENDAR

September

- 1-3** *Stride Missionary Retreat*
- 4** *Office Closed – Labor Day*
- 8-10** *Adventurer Family Camp – North Woods*
- 8-10** *UP Camp Meeting*
- 13-15** *GLAA Home Leave*
- 15-17** *Pathfinder Camporee – North Woods*
- 15-17** *PCM Fall Retreat (CAS)*
- 24** *Michigan Conference Constituency*
- 29-Oct 1** *Family First (CAS)*

October

- 2-28** *Keys to Revelation: Conference-wide Evangelism*
- 6-8** *TLT Squared – North Woods*
- 8-11** *LIFT – Camp Au Sable*
- 13-15** *Mother-Daughter Retreat (CAS)*
- 18-20** *GLAA Home Leave*
- 21** *Women's Ministries: One Day Getaway*
- 27-29** *UP Marriage Retreat – Camp Sagola*

*CAS = Camp Au Sable