

EDITORIAL
"God's Wisdom and Faithfulness"

FEATURE
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NEWS
"Vacation Bible School
for Teens"

INFORMING MEMBERS SINCE 1988

Memo

OCTOBER 2023



Strong Tower Radio continues to introduce listeners to Bible truths and Michigan churches are witnessing the results.



God's Wisdom and Faithfulness

He was an outcast, shamed from society. He most likely lived outside the village, as that would have been required of him and the nine others he was with, no matter what previous positions they held. They must have heard of Jesus and the miracles He had performed, which included even the healing of lepers. Could it be true? There was no record of this happening since Naaman's healing 800 years before. Were the rumors true?



Mike Bernard

When they encountered Jesus, he and the other lepers were simply told to go and show themselves to the priest. They didn't look or feel any different, but they went anyhow. Somewhere along the way I can hear him yelling, "They're gone! They're gone!" The white spots that had plagued him in the past were no longer there. While the others ran to get approval from the clergy, this one man retraced his steps. His life was changed forever, and he had to recognize the One who was responsible for it—to give Him due praise and honor before going forward in what He had called him to do.

During my childhood years, on most Friday nights our family listened to or

read wonderful stories like this of the power of God and the amazing ways that He touched lives and transformed them through His miraculous power. We often didn't want to stop reading or listening because it was so captivating. The testimonies revealed what an amazing and loving God we have, and they would always draw us nearer to Him.

It was a reminder of what we are told in the Spirit of Prophecy: "Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal

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MICHIGAN
Memo

in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 347).

I have always known that testimonies are very powerful tools for sharing the gospel, but what about me? Am I like the leper who couldn't help but stop and give glory and honor to Christ for the mighty miracle He had done for him, or am I like the other nine who took for granted what Christ had done for them, almost expecting that they deserved it? The devil loves for us to keep walking like the other nine, but just think of what God can do through us when we share the powerful testimony of gratefulness for what God has done in our lives. The story is already there, we just need to tell it.

Recently, I was asked to put together a financial summary to be included in the booklet for the 34th Michigan Conference Constituency Session. My job was to gather data from the last five years and highlight different ways the Lord has led from a financial perspective. During the process, it gave me a wonderful opportunity to reflect over that time period and the events that happened along the way.

I remember arriving for work after our constituency session five years ago and walking into my new office. I looked around the room and many thoughts and feelings began to race through my mind, many of which produced questions I didn't have the answers to. I was quickly reminded of my need for heavenly wisdom as I only wanted to be faithful in all the Lord's dealings He had in store for me.

Nobody but the Lord knew what

we would be navigating through as a Conference over the five year period. Many large decisions would need to be made and I was still quite new to some of the uniqueness of denominational work. The Lord reminded me of something I learned a long time ago—to remember that I was not personally responsible for having all the answers. My job was to stay connected to the One who does, and, by God's grace, work together with others who are seeking His will and guidance as well.

Previous work and life experiences can play a role and are helpful in the process but are fruitless if we let them alone be our guide in our decisions. I had been blessed to work in the corporate world, served a short stint in denominational work as a boy's dean, and then in ministry at Weimar Institute for eight years before coming home to the Michigan Conference. Those times were filled with relatable experiences where I can now look back and clearly see the Lord's hand and how it prepared me for each step of my life. There were many times I had no idea why things happened the way they did and I was clueless on how it would prepare me for the future, but my job was to trust the One who sets the world in motion.

One small example for me was how Weimar used the same accounting software as the Conference, and not having to learn it when I arrived. It may seem like such a small or inconsequential thing, but not to me. The software was made specifically for the Lake Union and it just so happened that they were using it in California. We serve a God that oversees the whole universe yet He even cares in the smallest details of each of our lives.

As we began to come together frequently as newly elected officers of the Conference and earnestly pray and discuss all the different matters, it became very clear in my mind that the Lord had blessed me with two amazing and godly leaders to serve with, along

Prayer Focus

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

OCTOBER 3

Kalamazoo Korean
JinWon Lee

Kalamazoo/Kalamazoo Filipino Co -
Moise Ratsara

Kalamazoo Filipino Co
Dharwin Yanilla

OCTOBER 10

Kalamazoo ACS Center
Kalamazoo Jr Academy

OCTOBER 17

Centreville/Kalamazoo Countryside
Mike Szykowski

Covert/Hartford/Pullman
Covert ACS
Hartford Food Pantry
William Richardson

OCTOBER 24

Allegan/Gobles
Allegan Food Pantry

Gobles Jr Academy
Gobles Pinedale ACS Center
Dan Rachor

OCTOBER 31

Otsego/Paw Paw
Otsego ACS Center
Paw Paw Food Pantry
Sean Reed

Clear Signals, Changing Lives

Strong Tower Radio continues to introduce listeners to Bible truths and Michigan churches are witnessing the results.

We praise God when someone embraces the everlasting gospel and begins a new life in Jesus, signified by baptism. At Strong Tower Radio (STR), there's further rejoicing when those baptized have been introduced or nurtured in present truth through the broadcast.

We also praise God when STR listeners call and share of their recent encounter with STR, or when a church member tells us about an STR listener visiting their church for the first time. This summer, we've seen many clear signals of the Holy Spirit working through the radio broadcast!

A northern Michigan couple listened to STR for a few months and were convicted to visit a local Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church. They spoke at length with the pastor and continue exploring what they're hearing on STR, comparing it to Scripture.

A mid-Michigan evangelistic series concluded with numerous baptisms, and one of those baptized stated "I know all this is true, I've been listening to STR for years."

A central Michigan Bible scholar was scanning the radio dial and encountered STR during a reading of *The Desire of Ages*. Captivated by the depth of the chapter being read, this new listener wanted more and looked up their local Adventist church. Visiting the next Sabbath, this listener asked about STR and the reading. The church members contacted STR to determine the program aired, then provided a free copy of the book within minutes!



“As STR continues broadcasting, many more seeking souls will hear the everlasting gospel, grasp it by faith, and join this end-time movement to which God has called each of us!”



Jeremy Swanson (right) along with Pastor Ariel Roldan, moments before his baptism on July 29, 2023.

One listener contacted a ministry whose program STR broadcasts, expressing appreciation for the program and asking many questions. They're clearly seeking a deeper connection with Jesus and a church that lives by and teaches 100 percent truth. They continue listening to STR, and even attended Camp Meeting last June!

A few weeks ago, a southern Michigan STR listener of 18 months walked into her local SDA church with an amazing testimony of how the Holy Spirit led her to attend *that church, that day!*

A friend shared that after praying with a new client, the client asked if he was an Adventist. He said yes, then the client shared that they'd been listening to STR for two months and found my friend to be much like the people/content of STR! They were listening on the newest station, WMPA, 93.1 FM, which returned to the airwaves this past March. Two weeks after that initial visit, the client died of a stroke. Eternity will reveal the impact that STR and my friend had on this listener during those final two and a half months.

Speaking of WMPA, 93.1 FM, generous donors gave nearly \$50K in late June and July and provided the funds to fully pay for this Grand Haven station! The station returned to full power in early July, broadcasting at 6kW from Spring Lake, Michigan.

A central Michigan listener recently contacted a local Adventist pastor and asked to meet with him. The listener wanted to better understand what Adventists believe and stated that all he knows is what he's been learning from listening to STR for several years. That meeting led to another, and he is currently taking Bible studies. Praise God!

Another central Michigan listener walked into a local Adventist church and stated, "I've been listening to STR for three and a half years, and I decided to do something about it!"

Just a few weeks ago, STR listener Jeremy Swanson was baptized at the Cadillac, Michigan, church. A listener for about one year, Jeremy found the broadcast true to the Bible, studied further with pastor Ariel Roldan, and embraced the everlasting gospel. Several more family members are being convicted as they study, and by God's grace will soon join Jeremy in that life commitment.

Friends, all of this has transpired in just the past three months! The Holy Spirit continues to escalate His work through the radio dial. We praise God and we thank you, as you've clearly been praying with us for more listeners to be drawn to Jesus through the STR broadcast! Pray even more with us! Many are now responding to the signal they've been hearing for several years.

As STR continues broadcasting, many more seeking souls will hear the everlasting gospel, grasp it by faith, and join this end-time movement to which God has called each of us! Thank you for making this possible, as the Holy Spirit sustains this ministry through your continued prayer and financial support.

May our heavenly Father abundantly bless you as you keep STR ministry and its listeners in prayer. 🙏

By Kam Ferguson, Development Director, Strong Tower Radio.

Vacation Bible School for Teens

Erin Gordon discovers creative ways to keep teens involved during Vacation Bible School.

“We need to keep our teens involved in the church by reaching them at their level. Their interests and desires are changing but that does not mean church is not for them.”



Above: Roughly 30 teens read to children, built beds, baked cookies, and filled food baskets during this year's Vacation Bible School.

Below: The Belleville teen group.

They're too old for VBS." "They'll get bored during the games and crafts." Have you heard these comments when talking

about including the teens in your Vacation Bible School (VBS)? Knowing that some teens might get bored doing some of the activities of the main VBS program, my church found a different way to involve them. Community service. And while community service may not sound exciting, both the teens and the community have been blessed.

Four years ago, I was asked to help lead the teen program of Belleville's VBS and take them to different areas in the community to do service projects. It has been a learning process, determining how much of the main program to involve the teens in so that they still feel like part of the group. Everyone

stays in the sanctuary to watch and participate in the opening program, sing the songs, and learn the Bible verses.

When the groups divide for their stations, that is when we go outside for our worship thought, which correlates with what the younger children are learning in the main program. Then we pile into vehicles and go to our service locations such as churches to help set up for their food banks, thrift stores to help organize their clothes, businesses to deliver hand sanitizer and GLOW tracts, community centers to help with gardening, and a homeless shelter to read to children. We've also joined up with Sleep in Heavenly Peace to deliver beds to children in need.

My first year, we had ten teens in our group. We felt blessed to have so many wanting to come to VBS and be willing to do



with a whole office of other workers that loved the Lord and were passionate about serving Him. The Lord brought us together to take us on a journey with Him through some amazing times. He has used those experiences to show us that our Redeemer lives and is still in control. Here are two I would like to highlight.

One financial area we began praying over was the debt on the new conference office. It stood at \$4.9 million, which was a mountain we needed the Lord to move for us. Through many sources of funding, including generous donations, operating surpluses, the sale of different properties, and even money we were not expecting, the Lord moved that mountain. It was not always easy though. One struggle in that process was the sale of the old office building. The Lord used that experience to grow us and our faith in Him. The office was sold multiple times, but each sale fell through. We reached our final agreement and then COVID hit. There were many bumps in the road, but God came through as only He could, to complete the sale for His glory.


One of the biggest ways in which the Lord provided financially was through His providences in getting us through COVID. At the very onset,

community service, but the Lord didn't stop there. Our numbers have continued to grow. This year, we had 28-33 teens every day reading to children, building beds, baking cookies, and filling food baskets.

This was Selah Fox's first year with us. She says, "I loved how all the youth could enjoy spending time with each other while doing good things for the community. It's a great way to make new friends and, at the same time, do something purposeful." When I called places asking if we could volunteer, they were amazed at how big our group was. They asked how we convinced so many teens to do community service and I told them, "We didn't. They just keep inviting their friends." Every day, someone brought a new friend. Peyton Anderson shares, "Going to the teen program was a good opportunity to help out the community and get closer to Jesus." Not all of these teens and their friends are Adventist, but they saw a part of Jesus as they ministered to the needs of others.


Watching these youth was not only a blessing to those we helped but also an encouragement to our adult volunteers. As our number of teens grows each year, the number of drivers we need grows. They don't always know the impact this program has on everyone involved, but by the end of the week, they are looking forward to joining us again next year.

uncertainty abounded in every aspect of life. What would ministry look like? What would our financial health be like? Many people thought giving could significantly drop due to the stoppages of everything around us. Many long days pursued in searching and praying for His guidance in how to be stewards during this crisis. We praise the Lord for His goodness and for how He provided for His church. Not only did we NOT see a dip in giving, but we saw an increase, with the biggest tithe ever coming in 2021. What a testimony of the faithfulness of God and His people!

These are only a few examples of the many ways God has blessed us during this quinquennium. As the apostle John said, "There are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). God is always faithful, brothers and sisters. In all the fulfilling of His promises, may we never cease to praise Him and tell of His goodness and faithfulness. It is "Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world." 

By Mike Bernard, Treasurer

We need to keep our teens involved in the church by reaching them at their level. Their interests and desires are changing but that does not mean church is not for them. Some of the teens chose to stay back and help with the younger children. Isaac Acosta said, "During my time volunteering at the Belleville VBS, many memories came rushing back to me on how I used to be one of the little kids running through the many stations. I remembered my time as a child being so invested in all the lessons I had yet to learn about Jesus. I missed the sensation I had while listening to the Bible stories given by Aunt Stella. Overall, I just realized the importance that those experiences had on me growing up." He now wants to help other children have a positive experience at VBS and with Jesus just like he did when he was their age.

I encourage you to find ways to include your teens and youth in ministry. Do they want to help lead the younger children? Do they like gardening, building, or baking? Are they good with technology or can they design things? Do they like organizing? Inquire about their interests and include them in your events, including VBS. 

By Erin Gordon, she attends the Belleville church and is actively involved in children's ministries.



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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

NATURE NUGGET

The Black-backed Woodpecker

A remarkable bird known as the Black-backed woodpecker resides in the quiet corners of North America's northern forests. Adorned with a striking contrast of a glossy black back and a white underbelly, the males have a splash of yellow on their foreheads. These birds have an interesting way of making their home in places where wildfires have left their mark. While most creatures shy away from areas scarred by fire, the Black-backed woodpecker finds opportunity amidst the ashes. It's a skilled forager, uncovering tasty beetle larvae beneath the charred bark of trees, aiding the forest's rebirth in the aftermath of destruction. They also follow insect infestations of spruce, pines, or tamarack. Its soft tapping seeps through the woods like a quiet heartbeat, reminding us that from the darkest of moments, new life can emerge.



Black-backed Woodpecker's efforts after a fire teach us that there is a chance for renewal even in our most challenging times. Just as the woodpecker finds nourishment within the burned landscape, we, too, can discover hidden blessings within our trials. As you ponder the black-backed woodpecker's tale, remember its insightful message – within the ashes of difficulty, the seeds of transformation await. 🐦

*By Dr. Gordon Atkins, Head Naturalist, Camp Au Sable
Photo taken at the Centennial Visitor Center in
Algonquin Provincial Park.*

MONTHLY CALENDAR

October

2-28 *Keys to Revelation: Conference-wide Evangelism*

6-8 *TLT Squared – North Woods*

8-11 *LIFT (CAS)*

13-15 *Mother-Daughter Retreat (CAS)*

18-20 *GLAA Home Leave*

21 *Women's Ministries: One Day Getaway*

22 *Lay Advisory Annual Meeting*

27-29 *UP Marriage Retreat – Camp Sagola*

November

3-5 *Public Hi-C Retreat (CAS)*

10-12 *Crystal Mountain Marriage Retreat*

17-19 *Youth Rush Summit (CAS)*

20-24 *GLAA Home Leave*

22-23 *Office Closed - Thanksgiving*

*CAS = Camp Au Sable