



Official Newsletter for the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

# MICHIGAN MEMO

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▲ Teen Bible Camp attendees

## See Jesus at

# TEEN Bible Camp

By Jeremy Hall

ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

**“Our youth have always been special. However, over the past few years I am seeing something even more special. There is a deeper openness to God’s call, a broadening spirit of cooperation and service.”**

I just finished dismissing tables and walked over to the breakfast bar for the camp’s famous granola. Unfortunately, I placed my tray, full of food, only half on the counter while I filled my bowl. Gravity won the battle and my complete breakfast plate spilled all over the floor! Instantly, two young men from Kalamazoo Junior Academy jumped up from their table to clean the mess with their bare hands. They worked so fast and efficiently that I wasn’t able to help clean up the problem I had created! I saw Jesus in those boys. In that one simple act of kindness I saw an example of how Christ stooped low with His bare hands to clean up a mess that He didn’t cause so I could be redeemed. Those boys were

happy to clean up the mess for me, and I’m so thankful Jesus is too.

Later that evening we partook in a beautiful communion service, and a young man from Holland Adventist School asked if I had been served. When I shared that I hadn’t, he offered to serve me. I saw Jesus in that young man’s offer, but I saw Christ even more in the way he washed my feet. He took his time, was thoughtful, and sincere. I was blessed and impressed.

Our youth have always been special. However, over the past few years I am seeing something even more special. There is a deeper openness to God’s call, a broadening spirit of cooperation and service. They are poised and ready to

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- GUEST EDITORIAL -

# Bottomed out Football Star Now A Pastor

By Judy Putnam

LANSING STATE JOURNAL

**“He was an all-state high school football star, a likely recruit for major universities, and poised to be the first in his Alabama high school to ever win a college football scholarship. . . Then he tore his ACL his senior year.”**

**W**e praise God for Pastor Wes Peppers’ testimony that was published in the Lansing State Journal. The film, *Hacksaw Ridge* that recounts the heroic efforts of Desmond T. Doss provided him a unique opportunity to share his faith with thousands.

Fifteen years ago, Pastor Wes Peppers was a 22-year-old former college football player struggling with a drinking problem. He said he was bitter, mean and contemplating suicide. And he was an atheist.

Today, at 37, Peppers is a sober, healthy family man who pastors the congregation at the Lansing Seventh-day Adventist Church on the city’s west side.

He also battled cancer at age 28 and sepsis — blood poisoning — that nearly killed him. He’s told his story to thousands around the globe.

I connected with the pastor after writing about his local ties to Desmond T. Doss, who was awarded the Medal of Honor for heroic acts captured in the recent Academy-award winning film *Hacksaw Ridge*, directed by Mel Gibson.

Doss was a Seventh-day Adventist and conscientious objector. As a medic, he was credited with saving 75 lives on Okinawa, Japan, all while refusing to carry a weapon due to his religious beliefs. Doss was awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest military award possible.

For two decades, Camp Doss, a summer Army medic training camp

named for Doss, was held at a Grand Ledge campground owned by the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Turns out, Camp Doss is not the only strong Doss connection to the area. Peppers considered Doss a friend. He knew Doss, his second wife, Frances, and Doss’ stepson from a church in Alabama that Doss attended near the end of his life. Desmond and Frances Doss attended Peppers’ wedding in 2005 to Marion Blythe. Peppers offers up a photo of the two couples as proof. And Peppers was given a small personal Bible and two other books after Doss’ death in 2006.



Photo by Aron Crews

“It’s not the Bible he carried in the war. It’s one of the personal Bibles he used later in his life,” Peppers said.

The Bible in the movie plays a key role, carried onto the battlefield by Doss. Peppers’ version is engraved with Doss’ name and the initials C.M.H. for Congressional Medal of Honor.

Peppers said Doss’ story is even more amazing than that portrayed in the movie. He said a 1967 book, by Booton Herndon, the *Unlikeliest Hero*,



reprinted when the movie came out as *Hero of Hacksaw Ridge*, contains more details that tell the story of God working through Doss and protecting him.

For example, Doss recalled an enemy sniper's gun jamming repeatedly when aimed at Doss as he was rescuing an injured soldier. Doss never credited himself but God for the acts many consider heroic.

"He was a very special man," Peppers said. "Though Doss was small, he carried far heavier soldiers to safety, then lowered them with ropes over a cliff. That's the miracle. Many of them were twice his size – he was probably 150 pounds dripping wet, but he kept rescuing them all night long," Peppers said.

Peppers uses his own personal story in his sermons about divine intervention. His teen life was troubled. He started drinking in ninth grade. Peppers found his mother when she tried to commit suicide and called the ambulance. He was nearly 17, and his parents were divorcing.

He was an all-state high school football star, a likely recruit for major universities, and poised to be the first in his Alabama high school to ever win a college football scholarship. "I was big, strong and fast. I had a big ego too," he said. Then he tore his ACL his senior year.

He did end up with a scholarship and played for two years for Linden-

wood University in Missouri but it wasn't what he hoped for, and he later sank into despair and alcoholism.

When he was 22, he was close to suicide when he felt compelled to start reading the Bible and found his way to the Piedmont Seventh-day Adventist Church in Piedmont, Alabama. The Bible captivated him, and he decided to give his life to God. He was later baptized. A year and a half later, he met his future wife, the daughter of the pastor.



Peppers worked in ministry for a number of years before serving for five years at Amazing Facts Ministries in California, as an evangelist, speaker, and teacher in nearly two dozen countries. He then became a pastor at churches in Kalkaska and Traverse City from 2011-2014 before moving to Lansing in January 2015.

His religious beliefs also helped him through a bout of testicular cancer

when he was 28. The cancer had spread to his abdomen and chest cavity, and he had surgery and chemotherapy. During treatment, he developed an infection. It became septic, and he was facing death. It cleared after his students at Amazing Facts Ministries did a prayer walk around the hospital, he said.

His denomination, with seven churches in the Lansing area, has some distinctive features. Members worship on Saturday and embrace creationism over evolution.

The church also has a health-conscious focus, and Peppers' church and the Bethel Seventh-day Adventist in Lansing together, held a health fair Sunday, March 5, that served over 300 needy people with dental work, health screenings, and eye exams.

He's been at the Lansing Church for two years. He tells his congregation that he's "no one special, and God can change anyone who trusts in Him. He has a purpose and plan for every individual."

"I would have been dead many times over if it hadn't been for God's intervention," he said. He is thankful to be alive today to share with others what God has done for him and what He will do for them.

*Reprinted and adapted from the original article published in the Lansing State Journal.*





# Historic Public Campus Ministry Advisory Launched

By Israel Ramos

PUBLIC CAMPUS MINISTRIES DIRECTOR

## PRAYER FOCUS

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

### APRIL 3-7

Grand Rapids Central/Lowell Riverside  
Pastor Bob Stewart  
Grand Rapids Adventist Academy

### APRIL 10-14

Monroe/Tecumseh  
Pastor Rod Thompson

### APRIL 17-21

Boyer City/Central Lake/Gaylord  
Pastor Chris Ames  
Community Services -  
Boyer City - Jack Dunlop

### APRIL 24-28

Otsego/Paw Paw  
Pastor Michael Taylor  
Community Services -  
Otsego - Yvonne Engel

**S**unday, February 19, 2017, was a historic moment for public campus ministry. At the conclusion of our yearly winter retreat, a Michigan Public Campus Ministry Advisory was formally launched. During the winter retreat, more than 125 people gathered together for Bible study and fellowship—nearly half of them were not Seventh-day Adventists. This constant trend and others have created an urgent need to organize this ministry.

The advisory is composed of three groups: presidents of registered Adventist student organizations on public campuses, pastors of churches serving university campuses, and laypeople who have a passion for this ministry. More than 20 people attended our first meeting, including Pastor Daryl Bentley who serves as the district superintendent in the Detroit-area which is home to more public colleges than any other district in the Michigan Conference.

The purpose of our first gathering was to address the question: *What Do We Want to Do?* After a devotional reading of Ellen White passages regarding ministry to secular campuses, a brief introduction was given along with the current state of public campus ministry across the various campuses in Michigan. Presidents of the student groups shared what was taking place on their campuses. Attendees also participated in an exercise where they answered questions like: *What can the pastor do to support public campus ministry? How can student groups help*

*the ministry of the local church? What can local churches do to help reach secular campuses?*

Large Post-It notes were placed around the room and the various answers were discussed. One of the major topics that emerged centered around creating better ways of identifying Adventist young people who plan to attend secular campuses because this increases their chance of integrating into the local church. Students also shared their appreciation for pastors that attend student events to support their groups. Likewise, students attending church regularly and finding meaningful ways to integrate into the local church was also noted.

The advisory meets at the conclusion of each CAMPUS (Center for Adventist Ministry to Public University Students) Winter Retreat in February in order to integrate a public campus ministry into the local church and conference structure.

Public campus ministries that have the full integration of pastoral mentorship, local church support, and converted presidents leading the student organizations, produce fruit for God's kingdom and develop strong Adventist leaders in our local churches. Our prayer is to bring people together who have a passion to reach secular campuses with the everlasting gospel.

Please keep this effort in your prayers!



# Youth Triathlon Making Evangelistic Impact!



By Ernest Wolf

PASTOR OF THE FROST AND ITHACA CHURCHES

**W**hat do you do to jumpstart your church into a vibrant youth group? What if I told you that you can have a thriving first-rate youth program, and the only cost is your time!

Our church was aging, and we wanted to bring young people into the church. We were having a hard time getting anyone outside our church to attend our Vacation Bible School. Our NEW-START (Nutrition, Exercise, Water, Sunlight, Temperance, Air, Rest, Trust) program was well attended, but most of the participants were older. We began asking how we could reach a younger generation with the principles of health before they ran into health issues. So, we put our heads together.

God impressed us with hosting a youth triathlon in our little town of Gaylord. We put a triathlon flier in every public elementary and middle school box and offered a free bike to those who trained with us for three months. We had over 50 kids sign up the first year!

To pay for it we asked local business owners to sponsor the youth in our community for \$100 per child. This gave us an opportunity to get in the doors of the local business owners, and they learned that the Adventist church cares for the health of our young in the community. We raised over \$3000 our first year and were able to give 20 free bikes to the triathletes that qualified!

It's crucial to follow the method of

Jesus by going out into the community to meet their needs. When the church goes out, God opens doors and helps make connections that otherwise would be impossible. When you reach out to kids you also reach the parents!

December 2016, Pastor Chris Ames had the privilege of baptizing the first couple that came through our triathlon program.

If you desire to host a youth triathlon don't let a shortage of funds stop you. God can provide all you need from your community. Don't let the size of your church stop you. In fact, if you are a small church you especially need to start a triathlon this year!

Don't let the lack of experience with such events hinder you. We had no experience either, but God blessed. Parents helped kids warm up and provided training on proper swimming and biking techniques and supervision. The Kiwanis club in our community donated \$500 and provided five volunteers on race day. The Kiwanis members told us, "We do a lot of youth programs, and this was the best program for young people we have ever been involved with!" The Lord knows our needs, and He provides!

Perhaps you're inspired to get your church ready to host this exciting youth evangelistic event this summer! Email me at [pastorwolf@gmail.com](mailto:pastorwolf@gmail.com), and I'd be happy to give you more information.

God bless as we train our children in the way they should go!



▲ Pastor Chris Ames baptized the first couple from the triathlon program.





Artwork illustration by Pastor Jacob Gibbs

## TEEN BIBLE CAMP, *Cont'd*

**“A call was made for young people that were willing to give a year of their life to mission service before the age of 25. Seventeen young people came forward!”**

be used to help finish this work! Youth retreats such as Teen Bible Camp are events that encourage young people to know Christ as their personal Savior and to be inspired to take an active part in the church’s mission.

This specific retreat has been taking place at Camp Au Sable for years. The program targets our 8th-10th graders from across the Conference’s 38 schools. It is one of two retreats each year that brings the youth and education departments together. This year we had 150 students that chose to attend.

The theme for the weekend was, “Growth Rings...It takes time.” Pastor Jacob Gibbs was our keynote speaker and shared the process of growth in the Christian journey. The unique feature that enhanced Gibb’s presentations was how he illustrated some of his messages with his own art drawings. We were also blessed to have Kalicia Clements (Charlotte teacher) lead out in our music.

When Gibbs gave the opportunity for young people to come forward for baptism, 23 students came forward! Most were preparing to be baptized; however, of that number, eight young people responded for the very first time. In addition, a call was made for young people that were willing to give a year of their life to mission service before the age of 25. Seventeen young people came forward!

Sabbath morning David and Melissa Young, from the Publishing Department, conducted an outreach training for the students and sponsors. After lunch the entire group headed to Mio and Grayling where they handed out free books, GLOW tracts, and the Camp Au Sable brochure.

Our youth are a treasure. Whether it be Pathfinders, working at Camp Au Sable, or as students in our schools, young people are being intentionally trained to be “difference makers.” We must ensure that these various institutions and programs continue to exist and thrive. Satan knows the potential in the youth and the role our schools and youth programs play in their development. Thank you for your support for our conference youth programs and schools. Your investment of prayer, time, and resources are making eternal deposits!

We invite you to visit the Michigan Conference Department of Education Facebook page to keep up with the various events taking place in our schools. In addition, you can go to [miadventistyouth.com](http://miadventistyouth.com) to know more about Michigan Conference Adventurers and Pathfinders programs. Also, visit [campausable.org](http://campausable.org) to find out more about activities for youth camps and more!





# Advent Heralds Film in Israel

**J**esus is coming! Everywhere we look we can see that this is true, and our mission to herald this good news is so exciting! "Israel!" is the buzzword. What a privilege it was to film the production *The Story of Jesus* in Israel, which will be a soul-winning feature that will be packaged with the book *The Desire of Ages*.

Please join us in getting the story of Jesus out to the world! Pray for us as we complete our exciting project. For more information and access to our YouTube page, you can visit our webpage at: <http://www.adventheralds.com>. Also be sure to follow us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/adventheralds/>). You won't want to miss the updates as this project unfolds!

Transitions in

## MISSIONS



TODD ERVIN

**Todd Ervin** and his wife Sharlene will be joining the Michigan family as the pastor of the Livingston and Waterford churches in the month of April. He is coming to Michigan from Alaska where he served as a pastor.



NILTON GARCIA

**Nilton Garcia** will serve as the senior pastor of the Berrien Springs Spanish Church in May. He, his wife Sarah, and four children are coming from the Gulf States Conference where he served as the communications and associate director for Hispanic ministries.



MARIO REATEGUI

**Mario Reategui** will be joining the pastoral team at the Grand Rapids Central and Lowell churches as an assistant pastor starting in May. He is married to Miglagros, and they have two children.

- **Ryan Counsell** will be pastoring the Belgreen, Ionia, and Portland churches starting in May. He is currently the pastor of the Marshall and Urbandale churches.
- **Leeroy Hernandez** is now pastoring the Grand Rapids Maranatha Spanish and Kentwood churches. He formerly served as assistant pastor to the Grand Rapids and Lowell churches.
- **Tom Hubbard**, formerly the pastor of the Allegan and Gobles churches, is the new pastor of the Wilson and Menominee churches.



## MONTHLY CALENDAR

### APRIL

- 2-4 | Prayer and Fasting
- 7-9 | Women's Ministries Retreat I -  
Camp Au Sable
- 14-16 | Women's Ministries Retreat II -  
Camp Au Sable
- 18 | MI Conference Executive  
Committee - Conf. Room
- 19 | Camp Meeting Directors
- 25 | K-12 Board of Education - GLAA
- 21-23 | Women's Ministries Retreat III -  
Camp Au Sable
- 22 | Pathfinder Bible Experience -  
Division Level - Grand Rapids
- 24-30 | GLAA Home Leave
- 28-30 | VBS Workshop - Camp Au Sable
- 29 | MI Men of Faith - GLAA

### MAY

- 18 | MI Board of Education
- 19-21 | Pathfinder Fair -  
Au Sable Northwoods
- 23 | MI Conference Executive  
Committee - Conf. Room
- 24 | Camp Meeting Directors -  
GLAA
- 26-29 | Memorial Day Weekend -  
Office Closed
- 26-29 | Hispanic Camp Meeting

## WINTER BLIND CAMP

Nineteen participants, from locations around the United States, arrived at winter blind camp at Camp Au Sable, in Grayling, Michigan, on Sunday, February 5.

A highlight of the camp was two excursions to nearby Challenge Mountain, a facility in Boyne City, Michigan, specially designed to offer adaptive recreational activities such as downhill and cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, and snowboarding.

"I'm living the dream!" exclaimed camper Jamie as he glided down a beginner hill on a snowboard.

Additionally, during the week, campers were able to forge new friendships and rekindle old connections through social opportunities and shared experiences.

Campers witnessed the hand of God at work, when freezing rain threatened to cancel the day's activities at Challenge Mountain. During a season of prayer at morning worship, the campers asked for safety and for the weather to hold. The campers enjoyed a fun and safe day at Challenge Mountain, where the freezing rain did not begin until after the activities had ended.

The five-day winter camp was a cooperative arrangement between National Camps for Blind Children (NCBC), and Michigan Conference Adventist Community Services (ACS). ACS volunteers served

at the camp as counselors, medical and kitchen staff, and pastors, and marketed the camp.

"The Michigan Conference is grateful to Larry Hubbell, ACS volunteer and assistant winter blind camp coordinator, and his wife, Merna, also an ACS volunteer, for their hard work and dedication to the winter blind camp program and the campers this

program serves," said Diana Bruch, Michigan Conference ACS director and winter camp coordinator. "ACS enjoyed partnering with Christian Record to provide fun, safe camp experiences for these individuals who are blind," she said.

"It is heart-warming to hear from campers how winter blind camp changes and enriches their lives. Christian Record Services, Inc. and National Camps for Blind Children extend its gratitude to Diana Bruch and Michigan Conference ACS

volunteers for this winter camp partnership," said Diane Thurber, Christian Record Services president. "Through cooperative endeavors such as this and the support of many compassionate donors Christian Record and NCBC can provide opportunities for campers to fellowship, learn new skills, and most importantly, minister with people who are blind," she said.

To learn more about summer and winter camps through National Camps for Blind Children, please visit [www.blindcamps.org](http://www.blindcamps.org).

