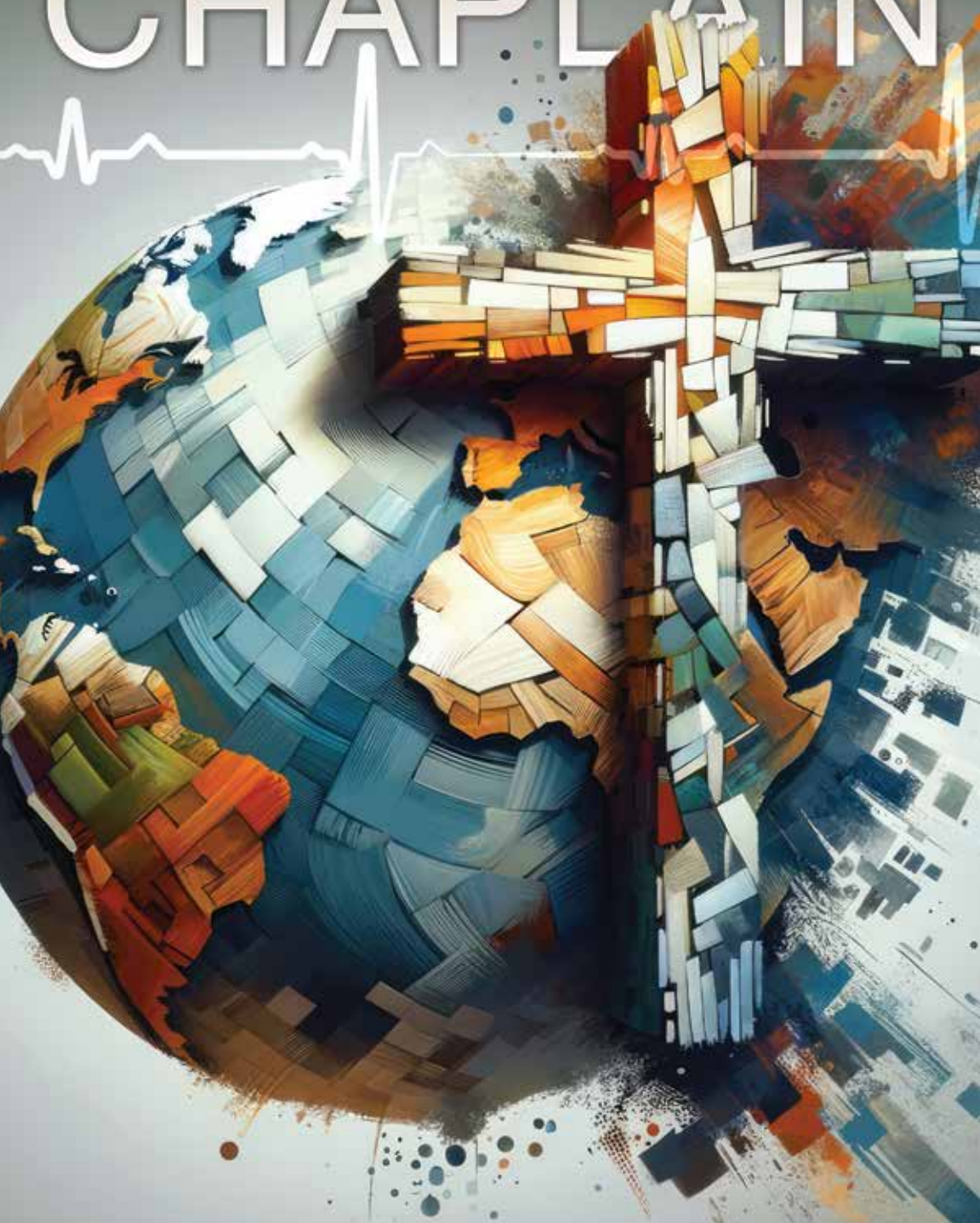


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# ADVENTIST CHAPLAIN





## PERSPECTIVE

# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF ADVENTIST CHAPLAINCY MINISTRIES:

HONORING OUR FOUNDATIONS, ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE

**By Ivan H. Omaña, D.Min., BCC**

Director/Endorser, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries—General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

This year marks a significant milestone in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—the 40th Anniversary of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM). Reflecting on four decades of faithful service, innovation, and spiritual care, we begin by honoring the men and women whose vision and leadership helped establish a ministry that now touches the world with presence-based gospel work. Their commitment laid a solid foundation for what has become one of the most dynamic, Spirit-led arms of our church's mission.

The early 1980s brought a growing awareness within our denomination that ministry must reach beyond the church walls. A small but committed group of leaders began to shape a framework for supporting pastors

called to serve in unique institutional settings—military installations, hospitals, prisons, and educational campuses. Among those leaders was Chaplain Charles D. Martin, who became the first director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries. Alongside him, Chaplain Barry C. Black, who would later become the 62nd Chaplain of the U.S. Senate, helped define excellence in military chaplaincy and model pastoral leadership in public life.

As the years unfolded, other leaders stepped forward and expanded the vision. Chaplain Richard Stenbakken offered pioneering leadership that helped professionalize ACM while preserving its spiritual heart. Martin Feldbush elevated the ministry of health care chaplaincy, integrating pastoral sensitivity with clinical competence.

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## OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES, ADVENTIST CHAPLAINCY MINISTRIES HAS MATURED INTO A PROFESSIONAL, THEOLOGICALLY GROUNDED, AND GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED MINISTRY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH.

Gary Councell, through his service at the General Conference, broadened the ACM's global reach and fortified its professional standards. Most recently, Dr. Mario Ceballos led ACM into a new era of worldwide influence, strengthening identity and mission alignment across all fields of service.

Though varied in context and emphasis, their contributions share a unifying theme: chaplaincy is not a secondary ministry—it is essential.

Over the past four decades, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries has matured into a professional, theologically grounded, and globally recognized ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Chaplains are no longer seen merely as supportive figures—they are frontline ministers trained to navigate diverse, secular, and often

spiritually complex environments.

The endorsement process developed by ACM ensures that our chaplains are both professionally competent and missionally committed. They minister with excellence, meeting the high standards required by public institutions, while holding fast to their Seventh-day Adventist identity and values. Whether in military units, university campuses, intensive care units, correctional facilities, or alongside law enforcement officers, our chaplains serve as the hands and heart of Jesus in moments of crisis, questioning, and transition.

As we approach the final events of Earth's history, this professional branch of ministry will prove ever more crucial. Chaplains are embedded witnesses, uniquely positioned to

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## WHAT'S



Please share what is happening with chaplaincy in your part of the world.

- Send it to [ACMEditor@gc.adventist.org](mailto:ACMEditor@gc.adventist.org)
- Copy your Union and Division ACM Directors.
- Include your email and phone number.

# THE **HEARTBEAT** OF OUR MISSION

BRINGING HOPE AND COMPASSION TO A WORLD IN CRISIS

In 2025, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries-General Conference (ACM-GC) celebrates 40 years of ministry and service. Providing compassionate ministry and hope to individuals through the ministry of Adventist chaplains and the work of Medical Cadets is the heartbeat of our mission.

## ADVENTIST CHAPLAINCY MINISTRIES



On a planet filled with humanity in need of hope, compassionate, committed, competent Adventist Chaplains serve daily

on the front lines.

Adventist Chaplains stop and listen in a world that needs a listening ear.

To the patient who has received a devastating diagnosis, Adventist Chaplains bring comfort.

Adventist Chaplains counsel students who have spiritual questions and seek answers, helping them refine their biblical worldview.

Adventist Chaplains help incarcerated inmates who have committed crimes to connect or reconnect with God.

Adventist Chaplains help soldiers

trained to defend and liberate find peace as they face the unknown.

To the law enforcement officer who risks everything daily, Adventist Chaplains are a sounding board as they cope with the stress and uncertainty of situations they encounter.

ACM supports these dedicated men and women who fulfill their calling outside church walls.

ACM's oversight includes Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, Adventist Chaplaincy Institute, and the World Service Organization. ACM focuses on chaplaincy, the specialized ministry that steps beyond the walls of a church building and into the community. Often, chaplains touch the lives of those who have no formal connection with church or religion. ACM's vision is to create competent, compassionate, committed chaplains.

Today, more than 2,000 Adventist chaplains worldwide are trained to serve in their specialty areas.

All Adventist chaplains are first trained as pastors, which provides a theological foundation for their faith as they often minister in pluralistic settings. It grounds them in their Adventist identity and commitment to the church's mission, which is also their mission.

Training for pastoral ministry and

chaplaincy must be accompanied by a calling to both pastoral and chaplaincy work. The church formally recognizes this calling through both ordination and commissioning.

Educational chaplains work in diverse settings, such as Adventist and non-Adventist campuses. Health care chaplains minister in hospital rooms and provide comfort and counsel to hospice patients at the end of their lives. Corrections chaplains connect with inmates serving their sentences in prison, as well as the facility's staff. Military chaplains are embedded with the military personnel of their nation's defense forces. Many provide counsel and guidance to high-ranking officers. Law enforcement chaplains are on patrol with their fellow officers as they seek to keep their communities safe. They also support the officers and their families as needed. Chaplains also minister in specialized settings such as the Secret Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Olympic Games, airports, NASCAR, and more.

ACM-GC has established worldwide standards of professional chaplaincy certification. Use of onsite training and online courses contributes to immersing chaplains in this specialized ministry. Each of the 13 world divisions receives authority from the ACM-GC to conduct the endorsement process in their territory. A review of the endorsement and certification process for all levels of the organization is conducted by the General Conference Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) Committee.

Although they don't work in a parish setting, the ministry of Adventist chaplains benefits both the local and global church.

Chaplains open doors and minister where the church could seldom enter otherwise.

Chaplains guard the church's



1. Chaplains serve in the Australian Defence Force.
2. Across the Inter-European Division, chaplains minister in schools, hospitals, the military, and more.
3. In the Southern Asia Division, chaplains can often minister in unique situations.
4. Chaplains from Zimbabwe, part of the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, are a part of the worldwide chaplaincy corps of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

credibility and ensure positive community relations.

Chaplains bring professional expertise and services to church members.

Chaplains are fully engaged in evangelism: sowing, nurturing, and reaping.

Chaplains loyally support the church through their personal stewardship.

Adventist chaplains care for the human spirit in a multitude of settings. Their pastoral training, combined with their specialized education, equips them to work in pluralistic settings and fill the role of a spiritual leader for those in their care. Flexibility and adaptability are necessary as chaplains adjust to the changing needs and ways to approach those whom they serve.

Every day, Adventist chaplains fulfill the call to use Christ's method of mingling with others, showing sympathy, ministering to people's needs, and winning their confidence. They prepare the way for the invitation to follow Christ.

It is an honor to support their ministry as this vanguard of chaplains brings hope and comfort and responds faithfully to God's call with a resounding "I will go!"

## ADVENTIST CHAPLAINCY INSTITUTE



Board Certification is how candidates demonstrate their competence, qualifications, and ability to function as professional chaplains.

One purpose of Board Certification is to assure the public and the employing organization that the chaplain has met established national standards for professional competence and is held to a code of ethics. The second purpose is to promote certified spiritual care providers' continuing

education and development.

Adventist chaplains are often recognized as among the best professionally equipped practitioners in the field.

Adventist Chaplaincy Institute fosters professional training, Board Certification, and continuing education. It:

- Grants Board Certification to endorsed chaplains who fulfill requirements for the designation Board Certified Adventist Chaplain.
- Certifies Adventist Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) supervisors.
- Evaluates and grants accreditation to CPE training centers and other chaplaincy training programs. These training programs are reviewed every five years to re-certify compliance with accreditation standards, relevance, and quality.
- Establishes quality controls, ensuring standards of excellence at the same level or higher than accepted and required by secular, government, or professional organizations.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), which is clinical education in a supervised setting, is a vital part of chaplaincy training. CPE trainees develop interpersonal and interprofessional skills essential for chaplains and pastors alike.

Clinical Pastoral Education Training Centers (CPETC) in Adventist hospital settings assist chaplains in developing their theological understanding of suffering and compassion, and in interacting with individuals of varying faiths or of no faith. Chaplains, conference presidents, church leaders, and pastors are availing themselves of this specialized training. They report that it has changed their lives and their ministry.



Clinical Pastoral Education training includes group time working through verbatims under the direction of a Certified CPE Educator.

Currently, ACM operates CPE Centers in the East-Central Africa Division, the West-Central Africa Division, the Inter-American Division, the North American Division, the South American Division, the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, and the Trans-European Division. Future openings of CPE Centers in other divisions are being planned.

## WORLD SERVICE ORGANIZATION



Operating under the auspices of ACM-GC, the World Service Organization (WSO) is an integral element of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM) and is the official military

relations office of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its primary mission is to provide pastoral care and religious resources to support the spiritual well-being of Seventh-day Adventists who serve their nations in all aspects of government service, in

and out of uniform (including military forces and law enforcement agencies around the world).

The WSO works with church leaders to develop effective working relationships with government officials concerning Adventists in public and uniformed service. As a part of these efforts, the WSO works with the world divisions to obtain official government recognition for alternative and/or exception to military service for Adventist members in countries with mandatory service.

It educates young men and women about the biblical and ethical principles around military and public service and their freedom to exercise their religion. The WSO also helps individuals understand the denominational stance on military services.



The WSO administers the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Cadet Corps (MCC) and the Seventh-day Adventist National Service Corps (NSC).

Initially launched in the 1930s at

Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, the MCC played an essential role in preparing young Adventist men for non-combatant military service. MCC units were established in many local conferences to provide training and guidance to young men who could face conscription. The paramilitary training equipped them with skills that routinely placed them in the U.S. Army's Medical Corps. This allowed them to serve their country without carrying a weapon.

Although its roots are in North America, MCC Corps were also organized in the Philippines, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, Puerto Rico, and Singapore.

Today, MCC units train to serve their local communities in times of disaster, provide support as requested at large events, and encourage self-discipline and leadership. The Medical Cadet Corps paramedical training includes basic and advanced rescue training, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), disaster relief, and preventative health. A regimen of physical exercise

promotes mental and physical discipline in the members.

The NSC provides a nonuniformed service alternative to military service. Divisions and union conferences can design the program to meet the exigencies of their country for an alternative to military service. Each country establishes and enforces its own regulations.

### **COMMITTED, COMPETENT, AND COMPASSIONATE**

Compassion for humanity permeates the ministry and equipping that ACM provides. Many studies show a trend that society in general is not compassionate and does not place a high value on compassion for others.<sup>1</sup> The preponderance of data tends to indicate that people are becoming significantly more self-focused and less others-focused.<sup>2</sup>

In a study among college students, researchers discovered that the focus was shifting from compassion to empathy; in other words, making a difference between empathic disposition and compassionate





Training in the Medical Cadet Corps teaches skills, self-discipline, and service to others, along with

behavior.<sup>3</sup> This is important because, though the terms are related, they are not the same. Empathic disposition relates to the *feeling with* another person, whereas compassionate care relates to the *action* of caring for another person. In other words, empathy ends with feeling, while compassion leads to action.

Our world today needs people of compassion who are willing to act out their care for those around them. Every Seventh-day Adventist baptized member is called to touch those around them and bring hope to their lives. Recently, in the war-torn country of Ukraine, ACM conducted the Sanctuaries of Wholeness, Healing, and Grace seminar for local church members. Seminar topics included how the church can be a community of wholeness, discipleship as a lifelong journey, and the gift of grace and

restoration through the Sabbath. The attendees were challenged to use these concepts and to live in grace by demonstrating God's love to those around them.

Through the mission of the church and our unique Adventist identity, ACM is committed to bringing hope to a world in crisis. This is the heartbeat of our mission.

<sup>1</sup> Emma M. Seppala et al., "Loving-kindness Meditation: A Tool to Improve Healthcare Provider Compassion, Resilience, and Patient Care," *Journal of Compassionate Care* 1, no. 1 (Dec. 19, 2014): 5. A key factor that may help buffer the impact of stress on provider well-being and patient health outcomes—compassion—is low in health care settings and declines under stress. This gives rise to an urgent question: What practical steps can be taken to increase compassion, thereby benefitting both provider well-being and patient care?"

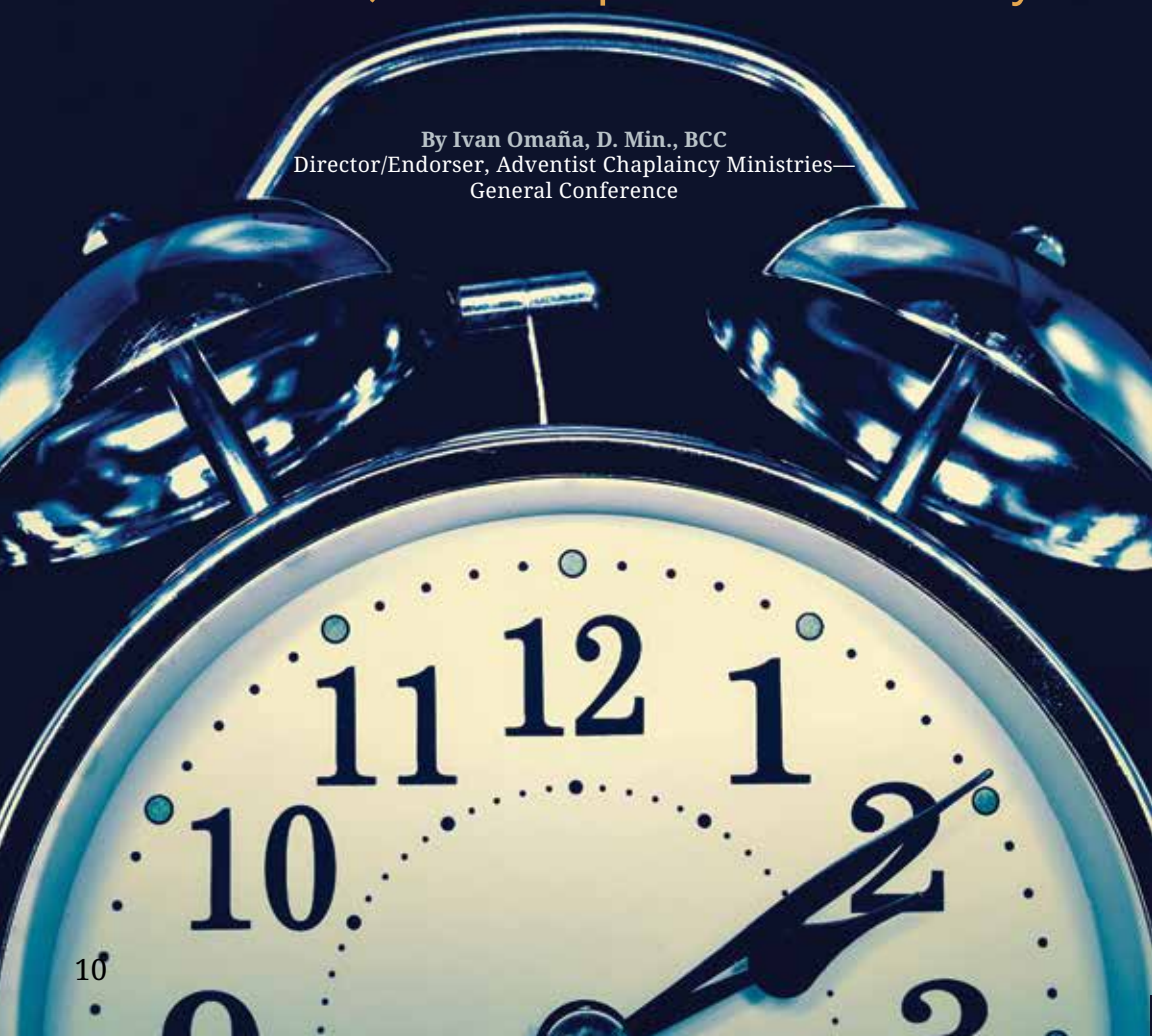
<sup>2</sup> Sara H. Konrath, Edward H. O'Brien, and Courtney Hsing, "Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 2 (May 1, 2011): 180-198.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

# NOW IS THE TIME!

Embracing God's Call to Competent,  
Committed, and Compassionate Ministry

By Ivan Omaña, D. Min., BCC  
Director/Endorser, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries—  
General Conference



## CONFESSION

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I want to confess something. I am a sinner. I have failed. I have stumbled. And I am here solely because the grace of Christ has reached me. I do not write this because I am perfect or better than you. I am here because Jesus has forgiven me, lifted me up, and continues to transform my life daily. I need His grace today just as much as I did the first day I gave Him my heart.

And just as I need that grace, so do you. We are a broken people in need of healing, sinners in need of rescue, souls crying out for the mercy of a Saviour. No matter how far you've fallen or how deep your wounds are, the same Christ who sustains me is here to sustain you. Together, we come as we are, not because we are worthy, but because His love calls us, and His grace is sufficient for us.

Chaplain's bear the light of Christ into places where pain, uncertainty, and expectant hope reside. They are not just counselors but spiritual companions to those who seek solace and understanding, reflecting God's love and mercy.

I want to draw attention to a powerful scripture that is timely and transformative, found in 2 Corinthians 6:2, *"For He says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor,*

*now is the day of salvation."* This passage reminds us that God's call is immediate and personal. It speaks of divine timing and God's readiness to engage with us, right here, right now.

As we contemplate this scripture, let's explore the essential qualities that define a ministry capable of answering this call with urgency and purpose: competence, commitment, and compassion. These attributes not only resonate through the work of our chaplains but are crucial to each of us as we consider our roles as ministers within our communities.

Competence is not just about having knowledge and skills, but also about being spiritually equipped and attuned to God's guidance. Commitment calls for a steadfast dedication to God's mission, showing faithfulness and perseverance in every circumstance. Compassion, at the core of all ministry, is expressed through genuine love and empathy towards others, mirroring the heart of Christ.

Let us journey together to embrace these values, understanding that our collective ministry begins with a personal response of hearing God's call and choosing to act within His favor. As the Apostle Paul urges, "Now is the time" to rise in faith and step boldly into His service. Whether in hospitals, schools, military posts, or other venues of service, chaplains inspire us to serve God wherever we are. Now, more than ever, the world needs our competent, committed, and compassionate response to God's call.

CHAPLAINS BEAR THE LIGHT OF CHRIST INTO  
PLACES WHERE PAIN, UNCERTAINTY, AND  
EXPECTANT HOPE RESIDE.

May this article be a reminder and a call to action for each of us to embrace these qualities in our daily lives, contributing to God's work in profound and impactful ways.

## COMPETENCE IN MINISTRY

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Being prepared and equipped is paramount in our journey to serve and fulfill God's call. In 2 Timothy 2:15, we are reminded to, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." This scripture exhorts us to cultivate our skills and knowledge with dedication and perseverance. It calls us to be diligent in study and practice, so we are ready to serve effectively whenever and wherever God places us.

Ellen G. White eloquently stresses in her foundational work, *Education*, the necessity of developing the mind, character, and skills to serve with excellence. She writes about a holistic approach to education, one that nurtures intellectual growth,

strong moral character, and practical abilities. As followers of Christ in ministry, we must constantly engage in learning and personal development. This commitment to growth ensures we can meet the diverse needs of those we serve with wisdom and understanding.

The story of Moses offers a profound illustration of a leader equipped and prepared by God. Initially raised in Pharaoh's court, Moses acquired education and leadership skills in a royal setting, giving him insights into governance and law. However, it was in the solitude and simplicity of the wilderness, where he shepherded flocks for forty years, that he learned humility, patience, and trust in God. These combined experiences prepared Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage as a competent and compassionate leader.

In examining Moses' journey, we see how God strategically placed him in environments that would shape his abilities and character. Both the palace and the wilderness were crucial stages of development, underscoring that God often prepares us in unexpected ways and places.



# WHEN JESUS CALLED THE APOSTLES, THEY LEFT EVERYTHING—THEIR PROFESSIONS, FAMILIES, AND FORMER LIVES—TO FOLLOW HIM.

As we examine our own lives, let's embrace the value of preparedness and continuous improvement. Whether through formal education, mentorship, or practical experience, every learning opportunity is a building block for effective service in God's kingdom. Let us commit to being diligent workers, not for our own approval, but to be vessels through which God's love and wisdom flow into the lives of others. With this dedication, we can stand unashamed before God and His people, ready to impact the world with competence, commitment, and compassion.

## COMMITMENT TO GOD'S CALL

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Answering God's call requires a deep and unwavering commitment, a theme underscored by the Apostle Paul's reminder of the urgency in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." This call to immediate action reminds us that our commitment to God must be resolute and without hesitation. Paul urges believers not to delay or postpone their response to God's calling, emphasizing that each moment holds the potential for spiritual impact and growth.

In her insightful book, *Steps to Christ*, Ellen G. White emphasizes the necessity of an unyielding commitment to God's will. She

describes this commitment as a journey of trust and dedication, where we surrender our desires and plans in favor of God's purpose for our lives. White stresses that true commitment involves giving God control of our lives, trusting fully in His promises, and earnestly seeking His guidance in every decision we make. This level of devotion requires faith and perseverance, knowing that God's path, though sometimes challenging, leads to fulfillment and eternal joy.

The apostles provide an inspiring example of this unwavering commitment. When Jesus called them, they left everything—their professions, families, and former lives—to follow Him. This decision wasn't made lightly or without sacrifice. It was rooted in a profound trust and love for Jesus.

They continued to uphold this commitment even when faced with persecution and hardship. The apostles exemplified how dedication to God's call transforms lives, equips us for service, and empowers us to endure challenges with faithfulness and courage.

## COMMITMENT TO OUR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY

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Within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, our commitment extends to

upholding and living out our unique theological identity. This involves embracing the core beliefs that define us, such as the Sabbath, the Second Coming of Christ, the state of the dead, and the health message. Each aspect of our theology is biblically rooted and calls us to live in accordance with the truths we affirm.

Our theological identity compels us to act in ways that reflect God's character to the world. Our commitment to health and holistic living concerns individual well-being and acts as a witness to the care and stewardship we are called to show for God's creation. The anticipation of Christ's return motivates us to live purposefully and share the hope we have with others.

Together, our steadfast commitment to God's call and our theological distinctiveness equip us to serve effectively. They challenge us to diligently prepare, continually learn, and unfailingly trust in God's guidance. Ultimately, these commitments enable us to participate in God's work with integrity and impact, contributing to the mission of sharing God's love and truth with the world.

## COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

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At the core of ministry lies a profound commitment to compassion, which entails reaching out to others

with empathy and kindness. Jesus profoundly demonstrated this throughout His earthly ministry. Wherever He went, Jesus extended His hand to the marginalized, the outcasts, and the broken-hearted, offering them acceptance and healing. Whether engaging the Samaritan woman at the well or restoring sight to the blind, Jesus consistently made compassion the heart of His interactions, teaching us that true service stems from love and understanding.

In *The Ministry of Healing*, Ellen G. White reiterates that genuine service must be underpinned by a spirit of empathy and kindness. She asserts that when we cultivate a heart that feels for others and acts upon that feeling, we mirror Christ's love to the world. Compassionate service involves seeing people not just in terms of their physical needs but understanding their emotional and spiritual challenges as well. Through our hands and hearts, we become conduits of God's love, grace, and healing power, thereby advancing His kingdom in tangible ways.

This commitment to compassionate service is vividly illustrated in the lives of chaplains who serve in varied contexts, such as hospitals, military settings, universities, and correctional facilities. Chaplains embody compassion as they provide emotional and spiritual support to individuals in distress, gently guiding them toward peace and solace amidst their struggles.

WHEN JESUS CALLED THE APOSTLES, THEY  
LEFT EVERYTHING—THEIR PROFESSIONS,  
FAMILIES, AND FORMER LIVES—TO FOLLOW HIM.

Consider the story of a hospital chaplain who met a patient undergoing a serious illness. The chaplain, through active listening and quiet presence, created a space for the patient to share fears and hopes. By offering prayers and words of comfort, the chaplain became a beacon of hope and resilience for the patient, embodying Christ's love and care in a time of need.

Another example is a military chaplain stationed overseas who, amidst the chaos of deployment, facilitated group discussions that allowed soldiers to express their worries and establish camaraderie. Through such compassionate encounters, the chaplain fostered a sense of community and provided spiritual guidance, affirming each individual's intrinsic value and dignity.

In practicing compassionate service, we demonstrate our commitment to the values of the Seventh-day Adventist faith and the universal call to love others as ourselves. This service transforms

lives and communities by being a living testament of God's love and drawing others to Him through actions that speak louder than words.

## THE ROLE OF CHAPLAINS

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Chaplains hold an indispensable role in their work across a wide array of settings, exemplifying the triad of competence, commitment, and compassion. Whether serving in hospitals, the military, educational institutions, or correctional facilities, chaplains navigate complex environments to provide emotional and spiritual support to those in need. Their diverse roles require not only a firm grounding in theological knowledge but also a profound emotional intelligence and unwavering dedication to their calling.

Competence is vital to the chaplain's role. Chaplains must possess extensive knowledge of spiritual care practices and maintain a capacity



# COMPASSION IS PERHAPS THE MOST DEFINING ATTRIBUTE OF THE CHAPLAIN'S WORK.

to engage effectively with people of varying beliefs and backgrounds. In hospitals, for instance, chaplains may be called upon to support patients and families facing acute medical crises. Their training helps them conduct pastoral care assessments, guide difficult conversations about end-of-life care, and provide religious services and sacraments when requested. Chaplains' competence involves not only theological expertise but also an understanding of psychological principles and ethical standards, thereby enabling them to contribute meaningfully in interdisciplinary teams.

Commitment exemplifies a chaplain's dedication to serve consistently and selflessly. This commitment is evident in the military chaplain striving to uphold the morale of troops by joining them in harsh environments, accompanying them through deployments, and being available to listen at all hours. Through acts of empathy and encouragement, military chaplains bolster resilience and facilitate the spiritual well-being of personnel as they navigate the challenges of service.

Compassion is perhaps the most defining attribute of the chaplain's work. Chaplains often encounter individuals at some of the most vulnerable points in their lives, requiring a depth of compassion that allows them to connect and offer comfort. Consider an educational chaplain supporting students grappling with personal crises. By creating safe spaces for students to share their struggles and fears, the chaplain shows Christ-like love,

helping students find inner strength and direction.

## REAL STORIES AND TESTIMONIES

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One powerful testimony comes from a hospital chaplain who, during the height of a pandemic, went beyond her typical duties. This chaplain tirelessly coordinated virtual prayer meetings and provided daily reflections via phone to patients isolated from their families due to health protocols. Her compassionate presence and regular outreach provided spiritual sustenance and alleviated profound feelings of loneliness for many.

Another impactful story involves a correctional facility chaplain who worked diligently to implement restorative justice programs, facilitating transformative discussions between offenders and victims, promoting healing and forgiveness. Through dedicated workshops and consistent spiritual guidance, the chaplain cultivated an atmosphere of hope and change, demonstrating his commitment to reconciliation and rehabilitation.

In educational settings, a chaplain's testimony reflects a journey of mentoring students, establishing peer support networks, and guiding them through spiritual discovery. The wisdom and kindness demonstrated by this chaplain fostered a community in which students felt valued, inspired, and equipped to face life's challenges.

These stories illustrate how

chaplains live out the crucial values of competence, commitment, and compassion. Through their dedicated service, they illuminate pathways to healing, understanding, and renewal, making a significant impact in individuals' lives and communities. The role of chaplains, with its unique blend of skills and attributes, embodies a steadfast commitment to making tangible the love and teachings of Christ in today's world.

## A CALL TO ACTION

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As we ponder the invaluable contributions of chaplains, we are left with an inspiring challenge. How can each of us translate these qualities of competence, commitment, and compassion into our own lives and

communities? Today, we stand before a profound invitation to reflect upon and act upon God's call to be vessels of His love and service in all corners of our personal and communal spheres.

## DEVELOPING COMPETENCE

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First, embracing competence requires us to continually seek growth and learning. Whether in our jobs, homes, or volunteer activities, we can strive to enhance our knowledge and skills. This might mean enrolling in courses, participating in workshops, or simply being observant and reflective in our daily experiences. By developing competence, we better equip ourselves to serve others effectively, meeting needs with greater confidence and understanding.



## DEEPENING COMMITMENT

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To deepen our commitment, we must cultivate a mindset of steadfast dedication to our faith and community. Just as chaplains demonstrate a tireless commitment to their vocations, we, too, can consistently engage in various forms of service. Regular engagement with our spiritual practices—such as prayer, worship, and study of scripture—fortifies our resolve and centers our actions in Christ. This commitment calls us to be present and active within our families, workplaces, and churches, offering our time and talents generously.

## SHOWING COMPASSION

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Compassion is at the heart of loving our neighbors as ourselves. It calls us to empathy, understanding, and mercy—a willingness to walk alongside others in their joys and struggles. In everyday interactions, we can practice active listening, offer support to those in distress, and extend kindness even in the smallest gestures. Our lives can become

testimonies of God's love, echoing the compassionate service demonstrated by chaplains worldwide.

## URGING INVOLVEMENT

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Ellen White's counsel in *Christ's Object Lessons* beautifully highlights the importance of embodying Christ's teachings through our actions. She reminds us that true service to God involves active concern for our fellow beings, urging us to be "the hands and feet of Jesus" in practical and meaningful ways.

Reflecting on her wisdom, we are called to engage deeply with our communities through:

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

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Volunteer at local shelters, food banks, or organizations dedicated to social justice. Our efforts, big or small, contribute to collective societal well-being and show God's care to those who need it most.

### MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS

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Otherwise mundane daily encounters can be transformed into opportunities for ministry. Listening



# OUR LIVES CAN BECOME TESTIMONIES OF GOD'S LOVE, ECHOING THE COMPASSIONATE SERVICE DEMONSTRATED BY CHAPLAINS WORLDWIDE.

with an open heart to a neighbor, sharing a meal, or offering a word of encouragement nurtures community bonds and exemplifies Christ's love.

## DEDICATED MINISTRY IN VARIOUS FORMS

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Find areas where your gifts align with genuine needs, from mentoring youth and teaching adult Bible studies to supporting overseas missions. As Ellen White counsels, these acts of service, done in love, edify and build up the community, reflecting the kingdom of God on earth.

Let us respond to this call by examining where God places us and where we are uniquely positioned to serve. Let us act in love and humility, allowing God to use our competencies to effect change, our commitments to inspire others, and our compassion to heal relationships and communities. In doing so, we answer the call not only to glorify God but also to affirm the inherent worth of every person we encounter, fulfilling Christ's teachings in a tangible, transformative manner.

## CONCLUSION

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As we draw our reflections to a close, let us embrace the profound truth that “now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). This is our moment to step forward in faith, courage, and purpose. In the context of our lives, this Scripture not only urges us to seize the opportunity to deepen

our relationship with God but also challenges us to act upon His call with sincerity and determination.

We must remind ourselves of the necessity for competence, commitment, and compassion—for these virtues serve as the foundation upon which we respond to God's call. Competence equips us to address the needs we encounter with skill and insight. Commitment ensures our reliability and presence in our service to God and our neighbors. Compassion compels us to reach out with understanding and kindness, reflecting God's unwavering love.

As we have explored the qualities exemplified by chaplains and how each one of us can integrate them into our lives, let us pledge to grow in these attributes. May we be vessels of God's grace, capable of making a tangible difference, deeply engaged in our faith, and wholeheartedly devoted to embodying Christ's love.

*\*This article was initially presented as a sermon during Chaplains' Sabbath in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division.*

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# From Buddhist Adherent to **Adventist Chaplain**

**By Soontorn Thanterraphan**, Chaplain, Hong Kong Adventist Academy,  
with Deena Bartel-Wagner, Editor, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries—General Conference



People often say God uses various methods to bring someone to believe in him. For Soontorn, it was when his parents sent him to the United States to work for a family member.

“My grandfather emigrated from Shantou in southern China to Thailand in his pursuit to become a Taoist priest,” says Soontorn. “My family is quite religious in their own way. One of my uncles followed my grandfather’s path and became a Buddhist monk.”

Daily village life centered around the temple. “As a child, my mother taught me the chants to Buddha, and we recited them each evening,” says Soontorn. “My family was lower middle class, and we lived with my father’s large extended family in our village.”

Education was important to Soontorn’s parents, and they made a

difficult decision when he was three years old. “There were two options for my schooling,” says Soontorn. “The local village temple had a school, but the education wasn’t of high quality. My mother had family members who lived in a larger town with a prestigious private Chinese school. I could study English and Chinese as well as the other standard subjects.”

During those years of study, Soontorn lived with his mother’s extended family, including aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. For Soontorn, there was always someone to be with, and it was a fun place to be. His training in Taoist Buddhism continued at the school, and the religious aspects of his life continued to be built.



## Coming to America

The years passed quickly, and another life change came when Soontorn was 14 years old. “My father’s sister emigrated to Hawaii to run a business. It was decided that I should attend school in Hawaii and help my aunt with her business,” says Soontorn. “Getting on a plane was a big thing.”

The plan had been for Soontorn to attend a public high school, but due to a change in state educational policy, his aunt decided he should attend a private high school. “She found Hawaiian Mission Academy and enrolled me,” says Soontorn. “I spoke no English, although I could read and write it. It was quite a struggle for me.”

Being the outsider and someone who couldn’t speak English, Soontorn suffered from bullying. “This wasn’t new to me because I’d been bullied before,” says Soontorn. “I learned I had to survive and adjust until I could make friends.”

Eventually, Soontorn did make a friend, Cody Wells, and his parents became an influential part of Soontorn’s life. “Robert and Kazuko Wells moved from Oregon to Hawaii. They mentored me and became a powerful influence during my years at the academy.”

Another adjustment was moving from a large, extended family to a home that included only Soontorn and his aunt. During these years, a strict daily routine infused Soontorn’s life. “We lived on the other side of the island from the academy, so I had to leave no later than 5:30 each morning for school. After school, I travelled by bus to my aunt’s business and finally reached home at 10:00 p.m.”

Eventually, Soontorn decided he wanted to attend an Adventist church. The Hau’ula Church was closest, but it was an hour’s ride by bus. “The people were so friendly and accepted me

from the beginning,” says Soontorn. “My curiosity about Adventists grew when I attended a foot washing service. The 70-year-old grandfather of one of my friends asked me if he could wash my feet.”

The request surprised Soontorn. In Asian culture, the feet are considered the lowest and least pure part of the body. “To have an adult actually touching my feet created a change in me,” says Soontorn.

## I’ll Sell the Books To Earn My Tuition

One summer, Soontorn decided he would become a colporteur and sell books. “I didn’t start out doing this for any spiritual reason,” admits Soontorn. “It was simply a way for me to raise money for my tuition. My logic was that it was the greatest pay ever because you got to keep fifty percent of what you sold!”

Soontorn’s poor English skills resulted in zero sales during his first three weeks going door-to-door. Then the team leaders began praying specifically for him, which spurred Soontorn to try praying, as well. His sales began to increase, and he earned a good portion of his tuition.

Again, turning to logic, Soontorn realized if he were baptized, he’d qualify for a twenty-five percent discount. Although phone calls to Thailand were expensive and his relationship with his parents wasn’t close, he called his dad. “I explained my thoughts about baptism and the discount. My dad said to go ahead if it works out.”

## A Spiritual Mentor

Home life was difficult, so Soontorn sought outlets that took him away from the turmoil. “My Bible teacher, Melvin Villegas, spent time mentoring me. We’d hike and backpack and share many philosophical

conversations,” says Soontorn. “By the time I graduated from the academy, my perception of being a Christian had grown, but it was still in its infancy stage.” Soontorn viewed his relationship with God as one of being faithful in church attendance, giving tithes and offerings, and doing good. He hadn’t yet developed a strong relationship with Jesus.

### Moving On to University

A generous scholarship to La Sierra University in Riverside, California, allowed Soontorn to continue his education. But life was still chaotic. He’d moved in with his uncle’s family and helped them in their business. After getting up at 3:00 a.m. to deliver flowers to the flower market, he’d drive two and a half hours to the university, attend classes, and then make the return trip home.

One morning on the way to classes, Soontorn fell asleep at the wheel. He woke up just in time to avoid an accident. After this, he decided to move into the dorm. “I didn’t have the money, but there was a quiet place in my heart saying that I’d be okay.”

### Dorm Life, Campus Ministries, and Mama Jody

Living on campus allowed Soontorn to become more involved in activities. “I started getting involved in a program called HomeBase Ministries, founded by Jodi Cahill,” says Soontorn. “The students called her Mama Jodi, and she became a mentor to me. Her influence began to warm my heart towards God, but I continued to struggle with my combining this with my Buddhist background.”

Another setback occurred when Soontorn couldn’t raise the funds for his tuition for another year. Family members ignored him when he contacted them to ask if they would be a guarantor.

“My visa would be terminated if I weren’t enrolled at the university in the fall,” says Soontorn. “During the summer break, I went on a campus ministry trip to Calexico, where a doctor was conducting evangelism and starting a church. Since I had to move out of the dorm, I didn’t have a place to live and ended up staying with friends.”

Soontorn worked many odd jobs, but the money he earned wasn’t enough to cover his tuition.



## A Return Home to Thailand

A solution for Soontorn to resume his studies didn't seem imminent. After meeting with Dan Smith, a missionary on furlough from Thailand, the idea of returning to Thailand began to take root. "Both Dan and Jodi encouraged me to study theology in Thailand," says Soontorn, "but this felt like the same rejection that I experienced from my family."

Emails were exchanged with a new Adventist college that was opening in Thailand. "I hadn't talked to my parents in eighteen months, and didn't know how they would receive me. This filled me with anxiety," says Soontorn. "But I wanted to continue my studies and decided it would be better to be in a place where I had legal status instead of staying in the United States illegally."

During this in-between time, as

Soontorn made his decision, he met Pastor David Madrid and his wife. "Their children were classmates of mine. Mrs. Madrid worked at a travel agency, and when she learned I was returning to Thailand, she kindly paid for my ticket," says Soontorn. "This act of kindness impressed me."

## Finding Understanding in Hebrew Class

Culture shock hit hard when Soontorn returned to Thailand. It was unexpected, but he adjusted and resumed his studies again. "I didn't know I could enjoy Bible study so much," says Soontorn. "The Hebrew class I took helped me understand what the Bible really meant."

Finances continued to plague Soontorn, but eventually he graduated. A bill remained to be paid, but hard work took care of that. Another test



of faith came when Soontorn learned of the opportunity to take a Master's degree in pastoral care counseling. For the next five years, he studied and worked to pay for the degree.

### Ministry Opportunities

Many opportunities presented themselves for Soontorn's growth as a pastor. He worked as a church planter and with the Hope for Big Cities campaign in Bangkok. His appointment by the Thai Mission as pastor at the Bangkok Adventist Hospital Church made him the youngest pastor on staff.

Soontorn met and married his wife, Rodjana, and they increased their family circle with the birth of their first son, Pongsakorn. Life seemed to be turning around. Then a series of stressful events led to a miscarriage, which devastated Soontorn and

Rodjana. Despite feelings of betrayal and grief, they followed God's leading. A second son, Pathihan, joined the family after their move.

### What is This Clinical Pastoral Education?

Amid moving to a new location and building relationships with church members, Soontorn also worked on his doctoral degree. "In 2018, I was stuck on the second chapter of my dissertation. I was writing about the role of pastors. I had been a church pastor, a church planter, a counselor," says Soontorn. "But I'd never been a chaplain, not even on a volunteer basis."

He wasn't even sure what chaplaincy was. Then the questions came. What does it take to be a good chaplain? Can anyone who with a theology degree function as a chaplain? As he pondered these



questions, Soontorn learned about Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). “I began to search for a CPE center because I decided to take a CPE unit. But most of them were financially unfeasible for me,” says Soontorn. “Then I learned about the Royal Perth Hospital in Western Australia and their CPE center. I wrote to them and was accepted into the program.” Soontorn didn’t know he would soon experience a spiritual enlightenment that would change his life.

### I Want to Quit

The first four weeks of the program were grueling. “I struggled because of the mindset I used during those weeks, and didn’t understand what the program was trying to accomplish,” says Soontorn. “Those weeks were the lowest I’ve ever been emotionally. I questioned almost every decision I’d ever made. Had I been naive in my faith in following God?

Why had my life been so difficult?”

Then the CPE supervisor asked the group to read the book *Promise of the Soul* by Dennis Kenny. “As I read, I slowly began to understand myself,” says Soontorn. “I was able to unpack my life and found a balance between my Eastern upbringing and the Western behaviour I’d acquired while living in the United States.”

When the CPE unit came to an end, Soontorn burned with new hope. “CPE helped me clean up my past, accept my vulnerability, and I was a new person,” says Soontorn. “I had the sense that God was calling me back to Thailand. I had new perspectives I wanted to use in my church.”

### Ministry in a Pluralistic World

As he began to implement new techniques, Soontorn understood how to connect the sermon to the heart of the people. “I was able to develop a new pastoral care model based on



my CPE experience. The church in southern Thailand began to grow using this model among the Muslim, the Buddhist, and the Chinese people.”

In September 2019, Soontorn was ordained to the gospel ministry. And then the COVID-19 epidemic began. “When the pandemic hit, my district consisted of 14 churches,” says Soontorn. “We had to do ministry in different ways.”

### **We Need Your Expertise**

A prestigious local university approached Soontorn and requested that he help them with a project. “They were creating a handbook on how to approach various faith traditions in the health care setting,” says Soontorn. “The population in southern Thailand is diverse, but the university didn’t have anyone with specialized training in this area. I was able to help them produce the handbook.”

As Soontorn worked on this project, he learned about a chaplaincy opportunity that intrigued him. “Rodjana encouraged me to apply for a position as a chaplain and Bible curriculum developer,” says Soontorn. “Hong Kong Adventist Academy wanted to implement a Bible curriculum using the pastoral care model. Along with this, they needed a full-time chaplain for grades 1-12.”

Within just seven days, Soontorn’s application was accepted, and the family moved to Hong Kong. “When I came here in 2021, COVID still impacted in-person classes, so we used Zoom,” says Soontorn. “My main focus during that time was to develop a curriculum meeting the needs of the students.”

Helping students develop a biblical and Adventist worldview as a primary focus in the curriculum. But the pandemic, lockdowns, and protests created another issue. “Hong Kong is

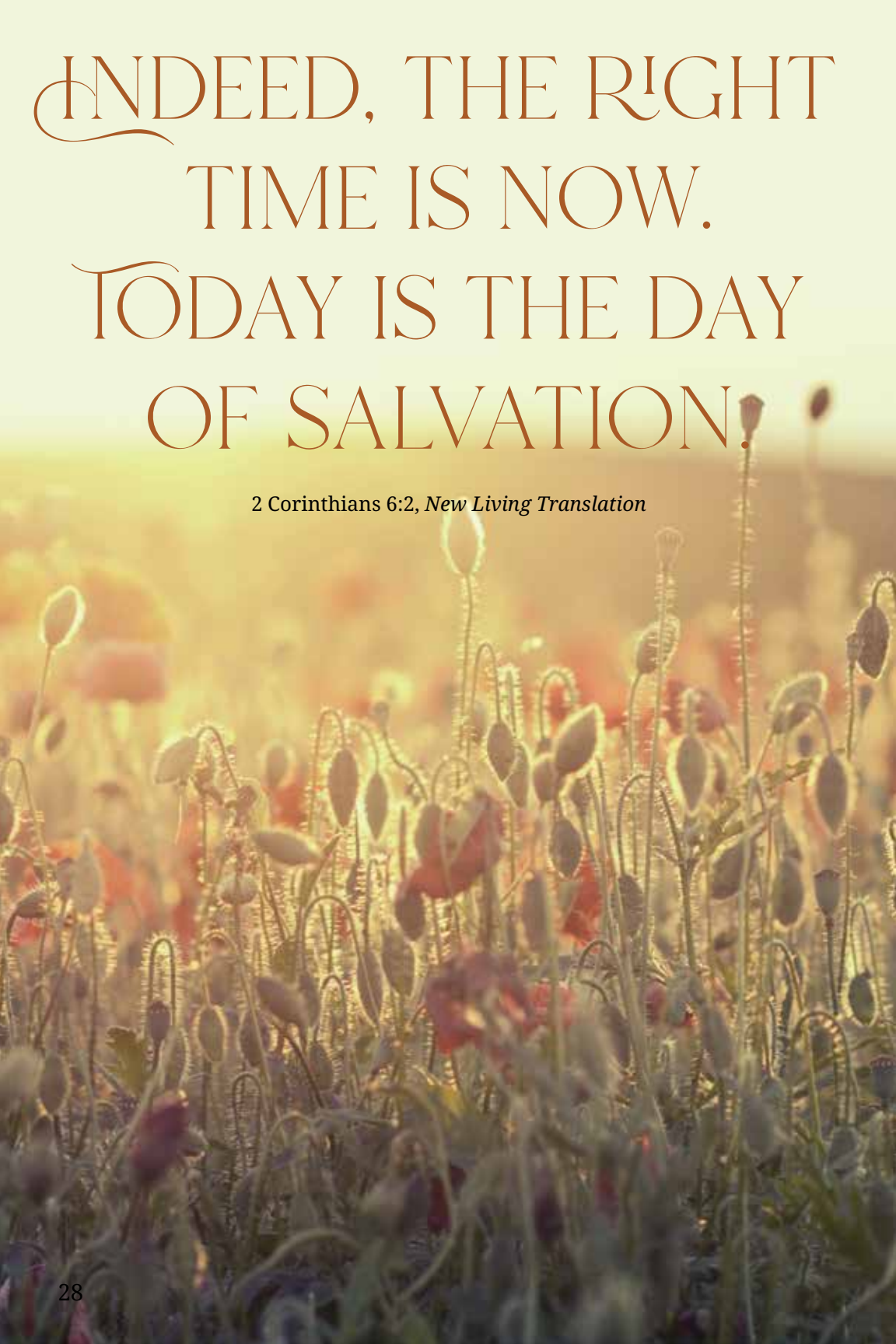
known for its mental health issues,” says Soontorn. “Sixty percent of students face serious repercussions in their lives. I implemented a program where I met with each student personally four times during the academic year.”

As the academy has grown, Soontorn adapted his original curriculum to include character development and confidence-building. “I’ve also implemented a program where the students interact with their peers and reflect on those interactions,” says Soontorn. “This prepares them for the next stage in their life.”

The academy population is primarily non-Christian, so the spiritual development of the students is a key focus. “God has been gracious,” says Soontorn. “Each year, we have between three and four baptisms. Many of our students come from mainland China, and they live in the academy’s dorms. My ministry encompasses them, our day students, and faculty members.”

### **God’s Never-Ending Steadfastness**

As a teenager, Soontorn didn’t understand his loneliness. When mentors introduced him to Jesus, the influence of his past impacted his understanding of a loving God. And when he felt he’d reached the lowest point in his life during a CPE unit, God’s steadfastness was still there. As he reflects on his life journey, Soontorn says that chaplains possess opportunities to reach others. “We have a challenge to help pastors understand chaplaincy and how the tools chaplains use can enhance their ministry of the listening presence,” says Soontorn. “Each of us has to overcome our previous mindsets and allow God to work through us.”

A close-up, low-angle shot of a field of poppies. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some showing vibrant red petals and others as green buds. The background is a soft, out-of-focus expanse of more flowers under a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

INDEED, THE RIGHT  
TIME IS NOW.  
TODAY IS THE DAY  
OF SALVATION.

2 Corinthians 6:2, *New Living Translation*



# Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries **WORLD DATABASE**

**A**dventist Chaplaincy Ministries is the church entity that supports Adventists who serve as chaplains in both church-related, public, or private institutions.

To support you, we need to know who you are and what you do. We have created a system to collect this information and store it securely. This information will be available to your Division and Union ACM director to help them also serve you better.

## **YOU CAN CREATE YOUR PERSONAL PROFILE AT PORTAL.ADVENTISTCHAPLAINS.ORG.**

- Click the Create Account button.
- Create your login information, supplying your email address and a password. Your password must be at least 8 characters long and must contain at least one uppercase and one lowercase letter.
- Complete the User Information section.
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Be sure to complete the section on subscriptions to receive your complimentary digital copies of the ACM magazines *The Adventist Chaplain* and *For God and Country*. You can also choose to receive occasional email updates and texts from Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries—General Conference. Don't forget to click submit.

Once you submit your profile, it must be approved by the ACM office. You'll receive an email notifying you when your profile has been approved.

speak hope and truth in institutions the Church might otherwise never reach. Their ministry will be vital as the world faces intensifying moral confusion, spiritual hunger, and systemic challenges.

While Ellen G. White did not use the modern term “chaplain,” her writings clearly support the principles that undergird Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries today. She writes, “The very best talent should be employed to give the patients spiritual instruction and help.”<sup>1</sup> This insight affirms the need for well-trained and spiritually grounded ministers in institutional settings—precisely the mission of professional chaplaincy.

She also counsels, “The cause of God needs efficient men and women, persons of thought and capability, who are well balanced, sober-minded, and who have a deep experience in the things of God.”<sup>2</sup> Adventist chaplains are called to embody these very qualities—sound in theology, emotionally intelligent, and deeply compassionate.

In harmony with this counsel, ACM is committed to preparing chaplains who are fully aligned with the mission of the Church, clearly Adventist in their witness, and marked by a Christlike heart of service. This is not about mere institutional presence—it is about Spirit-empowered mission.

Revelation 14 calls the Church to proclaim the everlasting gospel “to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” In these end times, chaplains fulfill that mandate—not with fanfare, but with faithfulness. They minister in secular institutions, governmental agencies, and closed systems where their words, actions, and presence bear witness to the love of God and the truth of His Word.

Their influence is often unseen by the Church but deeply felt by the world. They provide pastoral care during disasters, serve in military deployments, accompany grieving families, support mental health teams, and guide students wrestling with life’s biggest questions. In every setting, they offer a faithful Adventist witness, not by compromise but by compassion.

Looking Ahead with Purpose

As we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries, we are not merely looking back with appreciation—we are looking forward with holy expectation. The next generation of chaplains must be even more prepared, even more mission-minded, and even more Spirit-filled.

Let us invest in their training, affirm their calling, and include chaplaincy at the center of our missional planning. The foundation has been laid—by Martin, Black, Stenbakken, Feldbush, Councell, Ceballos, and others. Now, it is up to us to build upon that foundation and carry the torch forward.

As Ellen White reminds us: “The world is to be warned, and God’s people are to be true to the trust committed to them.”<sup>3</sup> Adventist chaplains are fulfilling that trust—faithfully, professionally, and compassionately.

And so, we celebrate. We recommit. And we press on—until the Great Shepherd returns.

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# “TO LOVE THE LORD OUR GOD IS THE HEARTBEAT OF OUR MISSION, THE SPRING FROM WHICH OUR SERVICE OVERFLOWS.”

Mohr and Dennis



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