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The Hard Questions By Patty Marruffo

Some days are completely booked with meetings, which means I can spend long hours in our conference's executive board room. There's a place at the table in the conference room to which I often gravitate. Opposite my place at the table is our conference's mission statement prominently displayed across the entire wall.



Executive Secretary Patty Marruffo stands in front of the mission wall.

The font on the wall is large and flowy. The large lettering boldly denotes its importance and implies its priority for our daily interactions in service to the local churches, conference departments, and ministries in the field, as well as to our local community.

Our statement starts by highlighting that our mission is the "expansion of God's Kingdom." It continues by saying we will do this "through the preaching, teaching, publishing, and living of the everlasting gospel by women and men in the cross-cultural communities of our territory." Every time I look at this large statement on the wall, I agonize—wondering if our mission statement is really about something more than we can imagine.

Do the words on the wall mean more than we think? Are we truly living up to our mission? I want to live up to the mission set before us. So, I ask myself hard questions and

become laser focused on what the expansion of God's kingdom might look like if we dare to question our progress, if we dare to think outside of the box, if we dare to color outside the lines, and if we dare to harness our creativity for the purpose of kingdom expansion.

Is there more? Can we imagine more beyond the status quo? Can we continue to seek God's kingdom daily to discover how God might be showing up in our ministry and in our lives? It's OK to ask hard questions, and it's OK to self-assess—because when we dare to ask the questions, we can create new and exciting pathways to live out our mission.

Our collective dreams, voices, and creativity can be the momentum that keeps us engaged and continuously questioning and discovering the opportunities God is presenting to keep our mission relevant and our message clear and refreshing. It's my prayer that God's kingdom in our conference territory will continue to expand in beautiful and inspiring ways that underscore the greatest news of all time—Christ's passionate love for humanity!



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LEFT: Youth Pastor Andy Palomares gives the keynote address. ABOVE: Panelists share wisdom on creativity.

Taking the Lid Off the Box:

A Biblical Approach to Discovering Purpose

By Becky St. Clair

Andy Palomares, youth pastor of Crosswalk Church in Redlands, attended Loma Linda Academy and, like many Adventist kids in Southern California, grew up knowing he was going to end up in the medical field. The only problem was that he didn't want to be a medical professional.

"That was terrifying," he admitted. "I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life or what God wanted me to do with my life."

Once Palomares recognized that his calling was pastoral ministry, his passion became helping other young people find their purpose in God's calling for their lives—whatever it might be.

And thus was born the Crosswalk Creative Summit, a one-day workshop that presented for young people a biblical way to identify and understand their purpose. Essentially, Palomares was speaking to his high-school-senior self.

Both Palomares and Joshua Estrada, campus lead at Crosswalk L.A., were keynote speakers, and the third session was a panel discussion between a graphic designer, teacher, coffee shop owner,

"Attendees left the event feeling validated in their talents and encouraged to lean into the unique part they play in ministry."

pastor, and physical therapist.

"Crosswalk's Creative Summit was an open calling for the church community to gather together to explore the role that creativity has within the church and how young creatives can use their talents to further ministry," explained Taji Saleem, attendee, who also serves as media specialist for SECC.

Throughout the event, they examined Genesis 1:28, where God instructs Adam and Eve to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (KJV). Some scholars, Palomares points out, believe that command was not just about procreation but was a mandate to create culture and civilization.

"When we talk about purpose, it isn't just the traditional service professions that are valuable," Palomares said. "Life includes coffee shops and beautiful landscapes and cars that function. It's a beautiful and

divine thing to be listening when God takes the lid off the box of professions we can choose from and says, 'Go build civilization in my name, in your own unique way.'"

Saleem added that the summit was beneficial to anyone who might be questioning their ability to use their gifts within the church. "Attendees left the event feeling validated in their talents and encouraged to lean into the unique part they play in ministry," he said.

Palomares said that's exactly what the summit was meant to do.

"God calls us into many different pathways, and He needs each one of us and our unique skills and gifts—from doctors to writers to small business owners to transit workers," he said. "Sometimes we just need a little nudge—like this summit—to recognize these pathways are valid, valuable, and God-led."



FAR LEFT: Youth Pastor Ben Amoah speaks to camp attendees. LEFT: Students enjoy Propel Bible Camp.

More Than 100 High School Students

Gather at PROPEL Camp Retreat

By Danni Thaw

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, more than 100 public high school students gathered this past April for the annual PROPEL Bible Camp retreat at the Mile High Pines Camp, nestled in the beautiful San Bernardino National Forest. The theme for 2022, “Reset,” was focused on encouraging students to reset their minds, views of God, and the ways they see other people. This ministry is one of many under the Southeastern California Conference (SECC) Youth Department and partners with Pacific Union College (PUC), La Sierra University, ADRA, and California Preparatory College.

Started in 2016 as a grassroots initiative by passionate pastors across the SECC, PROPEL Bible Camp aims to empower and equip students who don’t attend Adventist academies to serve God and His church through cultivating “mountaintop experiences with God.”

Since its inception, PROPEL has hosted yearly weekend retreats at various campsites throughout Southern California, with 150 to 250 attendees at each event. It is open to all public high school students.

“Our focus has been on dealing with and having conversations with students about mental health,” shared Clifford Lim, associate pastor of Yucaipa church. “The pandemic has highlighted and, in some cases, created certain mental health issues.

We intentionally create space and time for our attendees to confront issues with trained mental health professionals from our team.”

At the event, students were split into smaller teams, called family groups, to participate in activities and discussions. Led by college students from PUC and La Sierra University, family group time allowed young people to meet other students, engage in real conversations, and build lasting relationships.

“I was able to really bond with the people in my group and our leaders,” said one student. “I wish there was even more time for family groups. It was fun! I learned a lot and loved it so much.”

Typically, camp begins on a Friday with invigorating worship services and family group time. On Sabbath, students complete various activities with their family group, participate in worship services, and connect with one another. Sunday, the last day, is designed to help deepen the connections within the family groups. On the last day, PROPEL also offers workshops on higher education to better inform and equip students for the transition from high school to college.

For more information on PROPEL—including how to get involved, support, or attend—reach out to the SECC Youth Department at seccyouth.com or visit gopropel.org.

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Super Bowl Missionaries

By Rodney Bowes

While most Americans were getting ready for the long-anticipated Super Bowl between the Los Angeles Rams and the Cincinnati Bengals, the Mentone church had been preparing for several weeks to go to the game as missionaries!

They were inspired by Ellen White's counsel concerning the 1904 St. Louis Fair: "At all similar gatherings there should be present men whom God can use. Leaflets containing the light of present truth should be scattered among the people like the leaves of autumn. To many who attend these gatherings these leaflets would be as the leaves of the tree of life, which are for the healing of the nations" (*Publishing Ministry*, p. 347).

The church ordered 300,000 GLOW tracts for the event. Every tract encouraged readers to visit a website the church had designed called



Mounted police take a photo before taking tracts.



Mentone members prepare the tracts.

LovesLastCall.org. They even had four billboards around the stadium with the catchy phrase "Listen to God's Two-Minute Warning" from the Friday before the Super Bowl to Monday afternoon.

For several Sabbaths prior to the game, volunteers gathered to collate the tracts and to pray for the mission. When Super Bowl Sunday arrived, they had a season of prayer and headed to the stadium.

Their first challenge was getting to the stadium exits and waiting. They got there before the game was over, so they didn't see a lot of people. Nathailia Rasman and her young son were led by the Holy Spirit to put

tracts on the cars. They found many drivers who were excited to receive the tracts.

Dealing with the overall coldness of the people was also a challenge. The first ones out of the stadium had been rooting for the losing team, and they weren't happy. After that group came masses of fans from both teams, but the majority of the people did not want to take anything, which was discouraging.

Holly Jenkins was drawn to the mounted police and asked if she could get a picture. One officer agreed. After getting the picture, Holly gave him a pack of tracts, and he seemed genuinely happy to receive them. Not only did he accept them, but he also gave them to all the other officers. "When Satan tried to close people's hearts, Jesus opened another heart to receive," recounted Rasman.

The Super Bowl missionaries may never know the impact of the tracts that were given out that evening, but they have the promise of Ecclesiastes 11:1, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (NKJV). This promise has inspired the Mentone congregation to set a goal of distributing at least 5,000 tracts every month about Jesus' love and plan for this world.

ANGLES
A Southeastern California Conference Publication

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