

# REACHING OUT

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## Stronger Together: Surviving and Thriving Through COVID-19



This past year was unlike anything Southern's students and employees had ever experienced. There was no blueprint to follow, so the School of Religion (SOR) had to be creative to find ways to be safe while still engaging the students both academically and socially.

Classrooms were converted to centers that included in-person learning, Zoom, live streaming, synchronous learning, and the recording of lectures. The students learned to navigate the COVID seating arrangement, and attendance was taken through a QR Code that also included where they were sitting in the room for contact-tracing purposes.

Due to the reality of COVID, professors were solicitous of the students' health and how they were dealing with daily life during the pandemic. But more importantly, professors found ways to connect spiritually with and to minister to their students during a time of uncertainty.

In trying to keep life in the SOR as normal as possible for the students, alternative ways were found to keep special outings and programs alive and well. The annual Student Ministerial Association and SOR Retreat was held at Elsie Holmes Nature Park in Ringgold, Georgia, in September. To maintain necessary social distancing for each part of the program, the group was split into thirds and spread out around the park, rotating between the three Sabbath School, special feature, and sermon times. A boxed

lunch picnic at the park allowed for easy distribution of the food and provided plenty of space and fresh air in which to enjoy the meal.

Another important aspect of the SOR program is the opportunity for ministerial candidates to interview with local conferences each fall. Some conferences farther away from campus chose to hold their interviews online using Zoom, because of travel concerns related to COVID. However, most conferences requested to hold in-person interviews, which were conducted outside. A large white tent, normally used for vespers, served as an excellent spot for these interviews. This location allowed plenty of space between the students and the conference leaders as the interviews took place. The Lord blessed the interview process, resulting in many seniors receiving invitations to join the pastoral team in various conferences.



Ministerial Candidate Recognition	2
Pierson Institute of Evangelism Weekend	2
Faculty News	3
2020-2021 Ministerial Candidates	4-5
Ministerial Trainee Weekend	5
Senior Consecration Weekend	5
Evangelistic Resource Center Turns 20	6
Dean's Page	7
Graduate Program Goes Hybrid	8

# MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE RECOGNITION WEEKEND



**David Wright, lead pastor of the Hendersonville, North Carolina Church**

A spirit of anticipation was in the air as the School of Religion students and faculty gathered in Thatcher Hall Chapel on Friday evening, September 26, 2020. It was time for the first meeting of Ministerial Candidate Recognition Weekend, an important event on the departmental calendar. Although it was shaping up to be a special weekend for the whole departmental family, it would be especially memorable for the 18 students who would be dedicated as candidates in the ministerial training program. Becoming a ministerial candidate means that a senior may partici-

participate in scheduled interviews with conference leaders in the hope of finding placement in pastoral ministry.

Our guest speaker for the weekend was Pastor David Wright, a 2003 theology graduate from Southern Adventist University, who is currently serving as the lead pastor of the Hendersonville, North Carolina, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In his remarks Wright expressed his appreciation for the oppor-

tunity to return to the community where he had been raised and to the campus where he had taken his ministerial training and met his wife, Elizabeth.

His message on Friday evening highlighted the unusual battle in 2 Chronicles 20, when King Jehoshaphat of Judah sent a choir out in front of the army to face the enemies of God's people. Though surprising from a human point of view, it was what God had directed them to do, and the result was a remarkable triumph. Wright indicated that if ministers follow the Lord's leading in ministry, they will witness victories over the forces of evil.

In his first message on Sabbath morning, he spoke of surprises that awaited him after he entered ministry. "Welcome to ministry!" was the repeated refrain during this compelling presentation, as he sought to prepare young pastors-in-training for what they might face in the future.

Wright's final message highlighted the special calling of Seventh-day Adventist Christians at this stage in Earth's history and exhorted everyone present not to compromise biblical truth. In conclusion, the 18 candidates gathered at the front of the chapel for a dedicatory prayer offered by Greg King, dean of the School of Religion.

## PIERSON INSTITUTE OF EVANGELISM AND WORLD MISSIONS WEEKEND And North American Division SEEDS Conference



**Anthony WagenerSmith, associate director, NAD Evangelism Institute and Assoc. Professor, Andrews SDA Theological Seminary**

Church planting is a passion of a number of faculty and staff in the School of Religion. This year, for the annual Pierson Institute Weekend of Evangelism, we invited the North American Division (NAD) Evangelism Institute, to run a SEEDS Conference on our campus. It was an outstanding success!

"I'm inspired!" Michael Black exclaimed at the end of the meetings, "I'm already making plans to do a church plant of my own."

Many students commented on how practical and relevant the meetings were.

For instance, the Friday night presenter was Michael Lewis, a church planter from South Central Conference, who had the audience on the edge of their seats as he talked about his outreach into communities in Alabama. Practical, hard-hitting, yet inspiring,

he explained how evangelism and church planting worked in the real world.

Abraham Newball, speaking by Zoom from Florida, brought another hands-on perspective when discussing his creative outreach and multiplication efforts. Anthony WagenerSmith, an alumnus of our School of Religion, then gave biblical examples of how early church leaders were involved in church planting. Speaking with passion and out of his own personal experience, he showed how church planting leads us to reach people who would never come to a traditional church.

Anthony WagenerSmith shared his grandfather's story, who twice left his comfortable church to plant in an area with no Seventh-day Adventists.

Afternoon break-out sessions gave further practical steps for how students could become church planters. "This was one of our best weekend events!" Alan Parker, Director of the Pierson Institute, commented. "I loved the blend between inspiration and real-life examples. We are grateful to host SEEDS and to spark church planting in the School of Religion." Plans are underway to focus on church revitalization with Tom Evans for the upcoming Pierson Institute Weekend.

# FACULTY NEWS

**Hyunsok John Doh**, professor of New Testament, is the director of the Biblical Research Committee for the Korean Church Association, which deals with biblical questions from Korean pastors in the North American Division. This summer he preached on the theme of repentance at the Collegedale Korean, Benton, and Athens, Tennessee, churches and the Washington-Spencerville Korean Church. Doh also taught two online summer classes for the School of Religion: Research Methods and Writing for the graduate program and Adventist Heritage for the Southern Union Conference teacher certification requirements.



**Eliezer Graterol**, associate professor of world religions and missions, led a team of students to the Dominican Republic, where they conducted 15 evangelistic campaigns as part of the School of Religion's field school of evangelism program. He taught two graduate classes: Theology of Missions at Southern Adventist University and Mission to the World for Montemorelos University in Mexico. He also wrote articles for the magazine *El Centinela*. With the help of Zoom, he taught classes, and spoke for conferences, youth rallies, seminars, and training sessions around the world.



**Michael Hasel**, professor of archaeology and biblical languages, co-authored the second-quarter Sabbath School companion book *The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant*. He contributed two major chapters to the book *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach*. He also published scientific articles and book reviews in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, and *Qadmoniot*, among others. He lectured extensively via Zoom around the world, including for the Second Sabbath School Congress of the Inter-America Division and the Global Camp Meeting sponsored by the General Conference. A new documentary has been released on his excavations at Lachish by the Geoscience Research Institute.



**Martin Klingbeil**, professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern studies, wrote the section on the Book of Psalms, as well as an essay entitled "Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament," which were published in the *Andrews Bible Commentary*. He presented the honors in Biblical Archaeology and created a hands-on Zoom lab experience for the Pathfinders worldwide for the British Union's E-Honors program that connected over 4,000 Pathfinders which enabled them to work on their honors simultaneously. He spoke for the 2020 graduation for Helderberg College, contributed an article for *Adventist World*, and co-authored an article on the 2013-2017 Lachish excavations published recently in the *American Journal of Archaeology*.



**Alan Parker**, professor of ministry and evangelism, is conducting one of the largest research projects on race and culture in the Adventist Church, with plans to publish the results next year. He also participated in more than 20 Zoom forums during the lockdown and presented online training for six conference and union events. Parker and his wife, Nicole, spoke for the student missions' retreat and for an Engaged Encounter Weekend for couples planning to get married.



**Wilson Paroschi**, professor of New Testament studies, participated in several pastors' and elders' meetings via Zoom in the United States, South America, and Europe, addressing topics such as perfectionism in light of Scripture, righteousness by faith, and church order in the New Testament. While visiting Brazil last December, he preached a sermon in a special evangelistic meeting and recorded sermons and lectures for some of the local conferences there. He also reviewed a volume on creation in the New Testament for the Biblical Research Institute and is currently working on a major essay on creation in Romans for the same volume.



**Barry Tryon**, professor of applied theology, was on sabbatical during the first part of 2020. His sabbatical projects included an article on pastoral health and a book on students' questions about prayer that Tryon has collected over the years from his Christian Spirituality classes. Both are now in the publication stage. He also conducted a training seminar for adult Sabbath School teachers on conflict resolution for the Ooltewah, Tennessee, Seventh-day Adventist Church.





# 2020-2021 Ministerial Candidates



*Kevin Acosta*  
May '21  
Florida Conference



*Bryan Arvelo*  
May '21  
Carolina Conference



*Hormar Barboza*  
May '21  
AdventHealth



*Jaime Barboza*  
December '20  
Georgia-Cumberland Conference



*Jaudé Barboza*  
December '20



*Ryan Boldman*  
December '20  
Georgia-Cumberland Conference



*Edimir Echeverria*  
May '21



*Marco Estrada*  
May '21  
Gulf States Conference



*Andrew Korp*  
December '20  
Georgia-Cumberland Conference



*Joslen Lache*  
May '21  
Carolina Conference



*Clayton Powell*  
May '21  
Mountain View Conference



*Jeremiah Samuel*  
May '21



*Juan Sánchez*  
December '20  
Carolina Conference



*Luis Sánchez*  
December '20  
Stone Mountain, Georgia Church



*Jerson Sical*  
December '20  
Arkansas-Louisiana Conference



*Cristian Sorto*  
May '21  
Wisconsin Conference

Dates reflect the time of graduation. Employment location is listed for students who have accepted positions at time of printing.



Daniel Venegas  
May '21  
Mountain View Conference



Drew Weaver  
May '21  
Georgia-Cumberland Conference

## MINISTERIAL TRAINEE WEEKEND

## SENIOR CONSECRATION WEEKEND



Kris Eckenroth, Associate Senior Pastor, Collegedale Church

The School of Religion's ministerial trainee induction weekend was held February 19-20, 2021. The services recognized theology and pastoral care majors who have been approved to advance to the next level of training on the way to their degrees.

The speaker for the weekend was Kris Eckenroth, associate senior pastor of the University Church in Collegedale, Tennessee. His presentation on Friday evening was titled "The Call," in which he shared the personal testimony of his own call to ministry and encouraged the

audience that God has a call for each of His followers.

"Creating Community" was his first presentation on Sabbath morning. During this service he shared his church planting experience. He indicated that for a new church to grow and thrive it needs to be intentional in connecting with the local community.

Eckenroth's second message on Sabbath morning, "Redefine Church," was a challenge to make God's church become what God intended it to be—a group of people sharing the message of salvation with a lost world.

Following the message, Dr. Greg King, dean of the School of Religion, officially welcomed the 21 trainees, reminding them that they have been viewed by their faculty as students who have demonstrated potential for ministry and encouraging them to faithfully continue in their education for their last four semesters at Southern.



Ron C. Smith, DMin, PhD, President, Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

An important occasion took place on the last Friday evening before the winter semester came to an end. This occasion recognized and affirmed the exemplary commitment of three groups of students who persisted in their willingness to move out of their comfort zone and use their abilities to advance God's kingdom, despite the pandemic. These groups were the 42 students who volunteered to be student missionaries during the coming school year, the 72 students who agreed to conduct evangelistic campaigns during the summer, and the 34 School of Religion

seniors who were about to graduate and enter upon the ministry to which God was calling them. The students were dedicated during a special service in Iles Gym on April 30. Dr. Ron Smith, president of the Southern Union Conference, gave an inspiring challenge to let God be in charge. Drawing from the biblical story of Jairus, he showed the futility of trying to tell God what to do.

On Sabbath morning, due to safety protocols, the consecration service was held outside in the Student Park amphitheater, appropriately named the Goliath Wall. Smith preached a powerful message on the Babylonian envoys visiting Hezekiah. He asked, "What have they seen in your house?" as a sobering reminder to each of us to be faithful to God.

Recognition awards were also given to a number of students. Smith's final message invoked the example of Jonah, who ran from difficulty instead of stepping out in faith. Smith ended with a powerful personal testimony of when he became paralyzed and God helped him to see life from a new perspective. God is always bigger than the devil. The "battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47), and we need to put our trust in Him.



# Evangelistic Resource Center Turns 20

In March of 2020, as an Evangelistic Resource Center (ERC) team was ready to depart to spring break destinations to hold evangelistic meetings, the university administration made the difficult decision to cancel all of the international mission trips. COVID-19 had become a pandemic. Even though the ERC leaders had been working for eight months to deploy 88 students to five destinations, the students now had to be informed of the sad news that their trips had been canceled and that they needed to go home and finish the semester doing their classes online.

After this abrupt departure from campus, the ERC wanted to keep connected with the students who had volunteered to do evangelism. Thus, the ERC leadership began to host Friday vespers for 40-50 students during the rest of the semester.

The semester concluded with a new endeavor for the ERC, a digital Week of Prayer, led by students. The success of this endeavor sparked the idea of doing digital evangelism as a way to continue to fulfill the ERC's mission. By this time many churches had moved their services online, making the idea seem less strange.

A couple of conferences where the students had planned to do evangelism were contacted and were open to the concept of digital meetings. The ERC produced a new series of eight sermons titled "A New Beginning." In July 2020 the ERC held its first digital evangelistic campaigns in collaboration with the Southeastern Dominican Conference. Six theology students participated, and 45 churches registered for the event. There were daily planning sessions during the series with student evangelists to prepare for that evening's meetings. Every night a Southern student also provided music. As a result of this endeavor, 43 people gave their lives to Jesus!

This first effort laid the foundation for further digital campaigns. Since then, the ERC has organized three more digital meetings in other parts of the world.

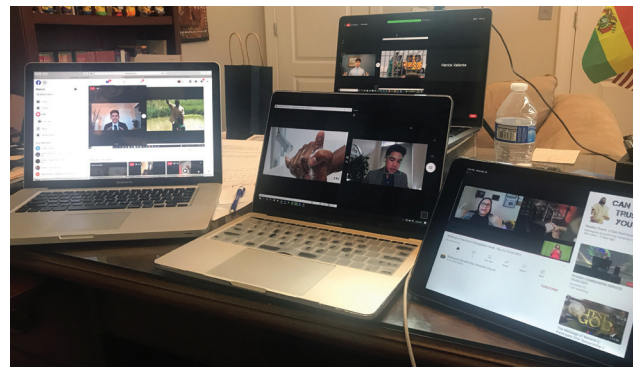
Digital evangelism has inspired Southern students to grow in their ability to use technology to spread the gospel. For instance, junior pastoral care major Rhett Seitz, who preached online in Kenya, stated: "Going into the series, I had zero technology experience, and I struggled at first. Throughout the week, I became more adept." Rhett witnessed nine baptisms in the church that hosted his campaign, and the church is looking forward to having him preach a live series next May.

Digital evangelism has resulted in a broader audience. Senior theology major Fernando Portillo, who preached in Santo Domingo, said: "Digital evangelism was better than I expected, because we've reached many people we wouldn't have otherwise reached."

In the past the ERC sent a student to preach in just one church, but digital evangelism has allowed students to preach to multiple congregations at the same time. For example, Fernando preached to the members and friends of a dozen churches watching the series via Facebook, with 12 decisions for baptism.

It is exciting to see the students' eagerness to continue investing their time preaching the good news and to witness how God uses them in powerful ways. It is especially thrilling to have students from various majors serving God by doing evangelism!

While it will be a joy to participate in in-person evangelism again, it is wonderful to see how the Lord can use His people to do effective soul-winning through the use of technology!



# THE DEAN'S PAGE

## Spiritual Lessons from a Round of Disc Golf

A recent humorous and humbling experience highlighted for me the value and relevance of several texts from Scripture. My wife, Mary, and I were taking a brief getaway from our regular responsibilities for some relaxation and recreation. The Christian retreat center where we had gone to spend a night, the Whitestone Inn, has a disc golf course on its picturesque grounds. Disc golf, also known as Frisbee golf, is a sport in which participants throw a plastic disc from a tee pad in the direction of a metal basket on a pole located some distance away. The purpose is to get the disc into the metal basket in as few throws as possible. Sometimes the level of difficulty on a particular hole is increased by having obstacles such as trees and bodies of water located between the tee pad and the metal basket, making it more challenging to reach the basket with the disc. As is the case with real golf, the lower the score, the better.

The weather was beautiful on this particular day at the retreat center, so my wife and I decided to play a round of disc golf. Now, neither of us is very skilled at this particular sport, not having done it much previously, but we thought it would be a good way to get outside and have some fun engaging in a relaxing recreational activity. So we went to the retreat center office and obtained the discs that are available for their guests to borrow.

Other than both of us having some rather poor throws of the disc, which went far from their intended paths, and neither of us having a par score on any hole (par is the average score a good player will achieve on a specific hole), the round of disc golf was both enjoyable and uneventful. At least, it was uneventful until we got to the sixth hole. Hole 6, which measures 240 feet from tee pad to target basket, features an ample-sized pond between the tee pad and the target basket. I knew that neither of us was capable of throwing the disc over the pond, and not wanting to risk losing a borrowed disc, I instructed my wife to take the safest route and stay well away from the water. "Make sure you throw it off to the side, and take the longer but safer route," I intoned.

My wife dutifully followed my counsel, and her disc landed safely in the grass, well away from the pond. At that point it was my turn to throw my disc, and I stepped forward, took careful aim, intending to avoid the pond, gave a mighty toss to my disc—and did exactly what I had clearly told my wife not to do. Incredibly (at least to me), my throw, which started out in the right direction, drifted well off its intended course and landed right in the pond! I stared in disbelief. How could I have done something so dumb? Even though I found a long bamboo pole, the borrowed disc was well away from the edge of the pond, so far out that I was unable to pull it back to shore. What a fix!

As I struggled with how to retrieve the errant disc and later

contemplated my predicament, my mind reflected on three Bible verses that seemed relevant to my situation. First, Romans 7:15 declares, "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."\* If it is true that a carefully aimed throw of a flat, round disc can veer off course, how much more is it the case that in a complex, sometimes confusing world, our lives frequently go astray! Even though we have noble intentions and lofty goals, we often fall short of meeting them. In our human nature we are weak, fallible, and prone to failure—unless our connection with divine agencies and resources remains constant and unwavering. Of course, we can be thankful for God's grace when we fall short of following His will.

A second pertinent verse is 1 Corinthians 10:12, which warns, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." There I was, warning my wife to play it safe and stay away from the pond, and lo and behold, I threw my own disc into it. That was a salutary lesson for me. If it can happen on the disc golf course, it is even more likely to happen in the hurly-burly of life. If I think that I have nothing to worry about and am in a position of strength, or that I am spiritually impregnable, I need to watch out—to beware. In the very areas of life in which I caution others, I am myself liable to fall. This lesson serves to remind us to be humble, stay close to Jesus, and rely on His strength.

A third verse germane to my situation is Galatians 6:1. It states, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." I am glad to report that my wife, who had followed my admonition to steer clear of the pond with her disc, said very little when her husband violated his own instruction. In keeping with Paul's counsel, she was gentle and gracious. There were no smug remarks, such as, "I can't believe you did that!" In fact, she even wisely suggested that I allow some time to pass in the hope that a breeze would blow the floating disc to the shore of the pond and save me from wading in to retrieve it, which is just what happened!

Thus ended my disc golf adventure. Though my score was very poor, I had a richer understanding of three important Bible verses and how they intersect with everyday life.

\*All quotes from Scripture are from the English Standard Version.



Greg King, dean



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## GRADUATE PROGRAM GOES HYBRID

The pandemic forced the 2020 summer graduate classes to move online, resulting in the largest number of students in the history of the graduate program! As a result, an opportunity was realized. Online classes mean more flexibility and fewer travel expenses. However, online classes also have limitations: some classes are better taught in-person. We needed a hybrid approach.

A hybrid approach offers both short-term summer intensives and strategically designated online classes. It offers excellent in-person interaction and online flexibility. This makes it easier for students from across the country to be part of the School of Religion's (SOR) program and also enables graduate students to take the program year-round. In other words, the SOR can offer the same high-quality in-person intensives that are the hallmark of the program, even as engaging online content for certain classes is developed.

Some of the program's upcoming online classes include God and Human Suffering, Jesus as Healer, Biblical Counseling in the Local Church, Theology of Missions and Evangelism, The Gospel of John, Studies in Romans, Revelation, Studies in Psalms, Marriage and Family Life Coaching, and more! The SOR also partners with the School of Business to offer three online business classes.

To register, go to [southern.edu/graduatestudies](https://southern.edu/graduatestudies). If you would like more information on the School of Religion Graduate Program, please contact Susan Brown at [sbrown@southern.edu](mailto:sbrown@southern.edu) or at 423.236.2033.