Global Partnerships has been an initiative within the Adventist Church to place trained, self-supporting Adventists in creative-access countries, countries where conventional missionaries are not allowed or are in very short supply. Tentmakers are Adventists who use their expertise, profession or business to support themselves in these challenging areas for the purpose of discipling new believers and, where possible, planting churches. Today it operates within the office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference office.¹

¹For further information contact Gary Krause at krauseg@gc.adventist.org

²Notably Gottfried Oosterval, Wesley Amundson, and myself, at a Mission Institute session in Loma Linda, CA.
they became aware of the need for ESL, engineers of all types, college and university professors.

In 1992 I was invited to set up a temporary office at the General Conference and begin to put flesh on the skeletal idea of a tentmaking program. Names were gathered from various sources such as the Office of Volunteerism and the Secretariat, application forms were developed, countries and areas were prioritized, and contacts were made with other similar programs offered by various para-church groups operating under the umbrella of “Intent” that met annually to share ideas and resources. The organization ceased to exist in about 1999.

At that stage, the idea went dormant, probably because it did not fit any existing office or program within the denomination. It was probably too far out of the box and seemed, realistically, to lack the necessary structural controls.

In 1994, I moved from Silver Spring, MD to the Institute of World Mission (IWM) at Andrews University and was asked if I was interested in picking up the pieces of the tentmaking program. After minimal preparation the idea was launched at the Utrecht General Conference session. There was little to go on to build the program so it developed into a learn-as-you-go affair. It was still viewed as far outside the box of church structure, and it was discovered that many people in the Secretariat, the office most responsible for mission at that time, had difficulty grasping the concept.

Over the next few years a number of people were recruited and trained as tentmakers. These included educators, health professionals, ESL teachers, business people, etc. It was discovered that the tentmaking office did not have to find jobs for the people as they found their own and those people that required considerable “hand-holding” were generally unfit for tentmaking types of missionary work.

The training followed the standard IWM training curriculum and generally tentmaker candidates participated in actual institutes with additional hours that focused on specific tentmaker issues such as the relationship of work to witness, time management, and a biblical tentmaker identity based on Paul and the work of Priscilla and Aquila. There was also instruction on living and operating effectively in “creative-access” countries where proselytism is illegal. These self-supporting missionaries were given to understand that they were as fully “missionaries” as church-sponsored missionaries in calling, training, and commitment.
Sometime later the Middle East Union invited a few of us to visit their area and meet with expatriates already living and working in Oman and the UAE as well as other expatriates who would come from neighboring countries. Generally these expatriates were Philippinos, Indians, and Sri Lankans, but with also a sprinkling of people from Africa and Europe. At the height of the program tentmakers numbered over 120 missionaries, all working in countries where conventional missionaries were not allowed.

Admittedly the program had its weaknesses. To begin with there was little time or money available to regularly visit and update these missionaries. Secondly, tentmakers, like Priscilla and Aquila and Paul himself, tend to be a transient group. There is constant movement in and out of various countries, ideally necessitating regular training and updating of both new and more established people. Third, there was the difficulty on the part of church administrators to see how these tentmaker missionaries could be strategically integrated into their overall plans, and how they could cooperate with other church-sponsored missionaries. Another unavoidable weakness was the lack of any church control over tentmakers. It may be that if the Secretariat or the local unions had been more involved, providing regional retreats for the tentmakers that some level of “control” might have developed.

A CONVERSATION

A look at one tentmaker will help introduce a vision of what is possible, but also the challenges involved.

This past June (2010) a party visited groups of tentmakers in the Persian Gulf. Our assignment was to update and strengthen previously trained tentmakers and develop new tentmakers. One of the people we met was Mr. David Onchagwa.

Mr. Onchagwa is the Assistant Manager for Health, Safety, Security, and Environment at Texas A&M University. He is currently working at the campus in Education City, a 50+ acre campus in Doha, Qatar, in the Persian Gulf. He has a BA in Geosciences and an MA in Environmental Management. He is also the first elder of the Qatar Seventh-day Adventist Church. He worked at Columbia University in New York City before going there.

Qatar Foundation, www.qf.org, is the sponsor of all the universities at

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3The party included Jerald Whitehouse, Jerald Lewis, Peter Roennfeldt, Mike Ryan, and myself.
4Name used with permission.
Education City. The universities are George Washington University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Carnegie-Mellon University, Texas A&M University, Cornell University, and Northwestern University. The faculties are all from those universities and the students are from the entire world. The buildings are all of striking architecture and design. It occurred to me that if Education City is successful, it may be the best answer to the radical jihadis and Al Qa'ida types, who seek to direct Islam along the paths and lifestyle of Wahabbism, or reactionary 15th century Islam. As I toured Education City I was immediately reminded of and thrust into the reality of Thomas Friedman's recent book, *The World Is Flat, 3.0.* Here I viewed students and educators gathered from all over the world, engaged in the process of education and research in what may be the most “open space” in the Islamic world. I was surrounded by people speaking Arabic, English, Farsi, Bahasa, Hindi, Urdu, French, Russian, and Chinese among many others. The process of intellectual cross-fertilization was intense.

I had lunch with David, in the Education City cafeteria and we talked about his work and life in Qatar.

**BCM:** *David, where are you from originally?*

**David:** I am originally from Kenya, born a 3rd generation Seventh-day Adventist in rural western Kenya. After high school, I was trained as a grade school teacher and worked for twelve years before proceeding for further studies in the United States in 1989.

**BCM:** *Where did you work before coming to Qatar?*

**David:** After completing my studies in New Jersey, I worked for hazardous waste management companies for three years and then joined the Columbia University Medical Center as a safety officer for research. After five years at Columbia, I then joined Texas A&M University at Qatar as a Safety Coordinator.

**BCM:** *What sort of work do you do?*

**David:** Here at Texas A&M University at Qatar, I work as the safety officer for all the laboratories. I facilitate new training for all the new employees and students before they get to work in the labs, and inspect and provide the needed equipment for the labs. I manage the hazardous chemical waste generated from all the labs in our institution. I also investigate incidents and

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accidents that may occur in the labs. The crisis management program is part of my duties.

**BCM:** How does your work here in Qatar differ from previous work environments in the U.S.?

**David:** My work is different here in Qatar because of several reasons. Just to name a few, this region of the world doesn’t have the safety culture like in the U.S. or Europe. Most workers assume that everything is safe to use or work with except for those who have worked in the gas and petroleum industry where safety is a paramount issue. The North American and European safety laws and regulations are far more elaborate than the way it is here. Training workers on safety here takes a long time to have the safety culture established than in the West.

**BCM:** Previously, you worked at Columbia University in New York City. How does Doha compare with the U.S.?

**David:** Working at Columbia in New York City is not comparable to Doha at all. Columbia is an Ivy League school where I would see lots of people from all parts of the world. It was a crowded world but Doha is just a small place even though you have people from almost all parts of the world. My work load at Columbia was huge whereby I managed two seventeen storey buildings with over two hundred lab spaces compared to Doha where we have about twenty operating labs. My duties at Columbia were quite confined but here they are really diverse. I could say there is a lot of social life in New York City, you are able to spend time visiting places, parks, travelling on the subway, and the weather are all things that will be part of your life, but Doha is very small with limited social or entertainment settings.

**BCM:** What sort of people do you work and associate with here in Qatar?

**David:** Here in Qatar, I deal with people from almost every part of the world but mostly from the Arab world. They are really good people to work and associate with. Most of the time we have these misconceptions when we don’t get to know people.

**BCM:** We are here, eating, in the central Education City cafeteria. It looks like a page out of Thomas Friedman’s book, *The Earth is Flat 3.0*, being played out in widescreen, HD, and 3D. Is this setting the new global reality?

**David:** Sure, We can see a new global reality here. People from all parts of the world with diverse cultures congregate here and work as teams.
BCM: David, how would you describe this new reality? How is it different from the past?

David: Here you get to understand people and learn how you interact with them. You learn to cope with changes. Here there is a required balance of different cultures. It is not like in the U.S. whereby everyone comes and more or less as they please. Here greater sensitivity is required. You come and do what will make your associates comfortable without offending anyone, and you learn from each other.

BCM: Your wife works there in Qatar also. How is her work part of that new reality?

David: My wife has had wonderful experiences of being a kindergarten teacher. She has been a better witness. She has been able to speak to parents who have issues with their kids’ learning. She has been able to assist parents in solving some of the problems which would not be solved by teachers from this region. One parent has really expressed her appreciation for my wife because she didn’t think that her son would ever speak but within two months my wife was able to help this child to start pronouncing words which he never did before. These particular parents have insisted that their child will have to stay in my wife’s class.

BCM: To some this is the end of the world. Are there many Adventists in Qatar?

David: There are more than one hundred regular church attendees every Sabbath. There are others we know who do work on Sabbath and have been seeking permission to attend church services but have not been able.

BCM: Where are they from?

David: “Many of our church members come from the Philippines, others come from India, Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Australia, Lebanon, Spain, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and many other countries of the world. All these people are here because of work. They work in various sectors of the country. Some are teachers, nurses, information technology engineers, construction workers, business experts, and accountants, just to mention a few.

BCM: How are you able to express your Adventist faith in your work here in Qatar?

David: This really depends on who you are talking to. Most people know that we are Christians but they don’t really understand what type of
Christians we are. At times we have to explain to them when they find out that there are things we do which other Christians don't do so they want to find out why we do or don't do something. It is quite challenging if you have to speak to Muslims about this but most times very few really try to find out about your faith unless you have a special friendship with them."

BCM: Do you see yourself as a “missionary” in Qatar? And, if so, what are your goals?

David: All Christians, wherever they find themselves, are missionaries. People's daily lives cannot be separated from their beliefs. As you live, work, and interact with people, somehow you are going to affect them someway. You are a missionary except you do not have the name tag on your shirt. My major goal is help someone to see how good the Lord is and that he or she can be saved by accepting what Jesus has done for them.

BCM: If someone wanted to do what you are doing now, how would they go about it?

David: I believe you have to ask God to give you a vision and then give yourself to the Lord to be used. It is the willingness to be used that really matters.

BCM: This discussion is being printed in a book of interest to missionaries and missions scholars. What counsel would you have for these readers?

David: You do not need to be an ordained minister to be a missionary. You can't preach openly here but you can preach a wordless sermon on God by showing his goodness to the world. I see people who have everything but lack the happiness they think will be coming from what they have. Show mercy, kindness, and hope where you find yourself. They will ask you why you are different and then you can tell them what you believe. Let God use you as his vessel.

I thanked David for the lunch, his time, and his insights. There was no doubt in my mind that I was talking with a 21st century Paul, a “tentmaker” who uses his expertise to take work in a different (and difficult) culture with the purpose of meeting new people, making disciples, and extending the boundaries of the Kingdom of God.
THE CHALLENGE

What could happen, I mused, if another ten committed Seventh-day Adventists were to join David in Education City to meet, mingle, eat with, talk, and share their beliefs, their convictions, and their Lord with all these other people gathered here to seek new knowledge and insights and to make sense of the world?

What would it take to visit the educational institutions represented at Education City, identify mission-minded Adventists in those institutions, and train them for effective mission at “the center of the world”?

When will we have the will and the resources to engage the Islamic world seriously?