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# On the Cutting Edge of Ministry

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## On the Cutting Edge of Ministry

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

**D**ave Oakley is a pastor who cuts hair for a living. And he loves it. After earning his Master of Divinity from the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Dave moved to Puyallup, Washington — a town whose name only locals can correctly pronounce — and began to pastor a church. After three years, he decided that role wasn't for him.

He and his wife moved back to Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Dave decided to do something he'd always thought would be fun: being a barber.

Though he'd looked into it previously, all of the required haircuts for certification happened on Saturdays. Oakley decided to call again, and was pleasantly surprised to find they'd changed haircutting days to Monday through Friday.

"The time was right," says Dave. "The required haircuts were no longer on Sabbath, and the owner of this little barbershop on the Andrews campus was looking to sell out for retirement after 50 years."

After 1,000 haircuts, 2,000 hours of practice (500 of which were solely shaving), a written exam and a practical exam to demonstrate competency, Dave had his certification. Now he serves up to 250 clients each month in his two-station campus barbershop, and has cultivated relationships while trimming beards for the last eight years.

But he doesn't just cut hair.

"I consider this shop my pulpit," says Dave. "You build a rapport with your clients over time. You talk about their family, their lives, interests they have. Then you bring in some elements of Christianity — the reality of who God is and what he means to us."

Some clients share grief over the loss of a lifelong spouse, others talk about trauma from childhood abuse, a family member with Alzheimer's, or their own diagnosis of cancer.



*Dave Oakley has his Master of Divinity and considers his barbershop his pulpit.*

Christa McConnell

One man confided to Dave, during a haircut, that he was contemplating suicide.

"We all have our hurt and pain," says Dave. "I listen and share God's love and comfort with them in whatever way I can. I want to be a blessing to the people I serve."

Though many are faculty, staff and students, a good 20 percent of Dave's clientele are community members. After getting to know his regulars, Dave looks for ways to introduce the Revelation Seminar DVDs and Bible study packets he keeps on hand.

"The Lord has opened a lot of doors for me," he says. "I use my running time to connect with God each morning. I ask him every day to help me speak to my clients in such a way to make them want to put their hands in his."

Recently, a young man took a Revelation Seminar DVD from Oakley. After watching it, the man gave it to his minister to watch. Then the man accepted a Bible study packet from Dave, which he also proceeded to share with his minister. The minister said, "You're going to be an Adventist, aren't you?" and the young man replied, "No, I just want to be able to contend with the barber."

"The Bible talks about how Paul watered seeds and Jesus brought them to fruition," says Dave. "You have to be open and willing to share your faith. Then let it be and see what God does."

Becky St. Clair is media communications manager in the Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.