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8-2023

## **Ten Years of "The Tent": Elementary Students Embrace and Share Their Faith**

Briauna Skinner

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Stanton Witherspoon

▲ Seventh and 8th graders from Ruth Murdoch Elementary School in Berrien Springs, Michigan, were responsible for much of the planning and production. From May 12–21, they set up, preached, greeted, prayed, ran the livestream, took photos, led the praise and worship, and more.

# Ten Years of “The Tent”

## ELEMENTARY STUDENTS EMBRACE AND SHARE THEIR FAITH

**FOR 10 DAYS IN MAY, STUDENTS FROM RUTH MURDOCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN BERRIEN SPRINGS SPEARHEADED A SERIES OF EVANGELISTIC MEETINGS IN A LARGE TENT ON THE CAMPUS OF ANDREWS UNIVERSITY.**

This year was the tenth time The Tent, as it's known, was held. This year's theme was “This is Our Faith.” It was led by 7th and 8th graders who were responsible for much of the planning and production. From May 12–21, they set up, preached, greeted, prayed, ran the livestream, took photos and more.

### Preachers Made It Personal

Losa Poua, an eighth grader, was one of the 12 speakers and she decided to talk about body issues. “I struggled, and sometimes still do struggle, with loving and accepting my body.”

By sharing, however, she felt God speaking to her. I definitely feel like I've found something that I want to continue to do, but only if God is with me as I go,” she said.

Another eighth-grader, Briana Skinner, said she asked God to give her a topic that would help others and help her at the same

time. “I thought maybe I would preach on forgiveness or patience,” she said. “Little did I know that God would choose a topic that I had been struggling with for a long time. I am glad that God chose the topic of the End Times for me, as it really helped my relationship with Christ.”

### Baptisms

Every year decisions for Jesus are made, and this year was no different. Ten baptisms were lined up but two more were added as the days went by. There were also 38 decisions made by students to live for Christ.

Gadi Igaso, another one of the preachers, also decided to get baptized. Her mother flew in from Papua New Guinea and she was baptized by an uncle who told the audience about Gadi's journey to this point, which included losing her dad to COVID.

Her decision for baptism marked a turning point. The eighth grader had been having second thoughts about whether to take the stage to preach but after her baptism she realized, “I wasn't fighting the battle alone.”

### Students Wrote Their Own Music

Each year The Tent has a specific theme and this year for the first time students wrote the theme song. The songwriting process was done through a mini course called “Intro to Worship Leading: Leading through Writing,” which was taught by seminary student Peter Flores.

“Songwriting is a creative process, so students were given a theme and encouraged to come up with lyrics they were proud of,” said Flores.

The lyrics took two weeks to complete and every student either wrote or inspired the writing of lyrics. The students also helped to create the melody. “I helped facilitate,” Flores said, “but the heavy lifting was done by the inspiration of the students.”

### History of The Tent

God has really worked through Ben Martin, Pioneer Memorial Church associate pastor, in the founding of The Tent. Ten years ago, as a seminary student, he was helping at Ruth Murdoch teaching Bible and witnessed the students getting deeper and deeper into studying the Word. But he also noticed something troubling.



▲ Gadi Igaso was baptized the day before she preached.



▲ Ben Martin baptizes Keila Bowerman

“At Ruth Murdoch, there are lots of people asking questions like, ‘Would you like to get baptized,’ and ‘Would you like to choose Jesus?’ But who is asking the kids who go to public schools? Nobody’s even asked them. So there are lots [of students] in the community who nobody is asking.”

The idea of an evangelistic series to reach students outside the Adventist schools came to him while sitting in a seminary class.

“I immediately realized that this would be a terrible idea because it was going to be a lot of work,” he said. But he persisted and approached the Ruth Murdoch junior high teachers who acknowledged the amount of work but said, “Let’s do it!”

As he looks back, he reflected: “I couldn’t imagine that we thought this would still be going 10 years later, but I think it is an awesome opportunity for kids not only to think through what they believe and share it with others but also to find ways to get involved with ministry. I think it is incredible for all kinds of leadership.”

When asked what The Tent meant to him, Pastor Ben concluded that it’s evident that God has faithfully been at work. “I think it is a powerful reminder that God can use absolutely everyone and anyone who is willing. Seeing Him work through junior high students and seeing Him show up year after year and night after night is just a powerful reminder of His willingness to work with us when we give Him that opportunity.” ■

**Briauna Skinner** is an incoming freshman at Andrews Academy. She enjoys reading, writing and baking. Her dream is to become a writer.

# Mixed Reports from Lake Union Business Meeting

EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES;  
RECORD TITHE, MEMBERSHIP GROWTH CONTINUES

ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, THE LAKE UNION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CONVENED IN BERRIEN SPRINGS, MICHIGAN, FOR THE SECOND OF THREE MEETINGS HELD ANNUALLY.

The 37-member committee includes representatives from the five conferences who are tasked with helping to develop and direct the work of the church in the Great Lakes region. Members include local conference administrators, church employees, lay leaders, as well as the presidents of Andrews University and AdventHealth Great Lakes.

As president of the Lake Union, Ken Denslow chairs the meeting, which is focused on the day-to-day work, as well as long-term strategies for fulfilling the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### Education Challenges, Strong Pathfinder Performances

One of the main focuses of the union for the next several years is school enrollment. As such, North American Division Vice President for Education Arne Nielsen was present to shed light on enrollment trends in the division. He said enrollment is almost back to pre-COVID levels.

Today, there are fewer schools but more students, and the reason is because there aren’t enough teachers. Smaller schools have closed, and some teachers went to larger schools.

More specific stats are available at [v1.adventisteducation.org/stat](http://v1.adventisteducation.org/stat).

A discussion ensued on how to address the teacher shortage. Nielsen said more studies are being done, but one factor is that COVID has taken a toll on teachers’ emotional wellbeing.

Youth Director Ron Whitehead spoke of Newsweek magazine naming Camp Akita and Camp Au Sable as two of the best summer camps.

Additionally, the Division-level Pathfinder Bible Experience hosted 16 teams from the Lake Union. The Stevensville Church put forth three teams who placed first, a first at the Division PBE. “The congregation invested in them, and we see amazing returns,” said Whitehead.

Dental clinics are back, starting with one in each conference. Randy will oversee the on-site clinics but since he is now busy running the Indiana ABC, Carmelo Mercado has accepted the role of planning the clinics.

### Successful ASI Gathering

General Vice President Carmelo Mercado reported on the recent ASI Lake Union gathering featuring Neil Nedley and the new leadership voted. More than \$15,000 was raised for Karen refugees, Weimar Institute and FARMSTEW ministry.

### Growth and Risks for AdventHealth Great Lakes

President Thor Thordarson says he is focused on making sure the U. Chicago AdventHealth partnership is working. Many things are going well, including high ratings and growth in market share. However, there are areas of risk, such as high turnover due to the heavy workload.