The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork" declares David in Psalms 19. Yes, the universe is bursting with praises of the great Creator God. Try listening to the birds, walking through the woods, plucking the pretty flowers, or watching the geese fly across the sky. They all sing of the wondrous power of God.

Introducing children to the grandeur and mystery of nature will inspire them to the joy of learning about the natural world and its Creator, as well as becoming keen observers of the world around them. Instead of gluing themselves to their electronic gadgets and sedentary habits, children and teens can be awakened to the fun outdoor activities that the natural world offers. Parents need to take the initiative to create awareness.

Ellen White in Child Guidance, p. 48 counsels parents that, "The little children should come especially close to nature. Instead of putting fashion’s shackles upon them, let them be free like the lambs, to play in the sweet, fresh sunlight. Point them to shrubs and flowers, the lowly grass and the lofty trees, and let them
COME, YE CHILDREN, HEARKEN UNTO ME: I WILL TEACH YOU THE FEAR OF THE LORD.  
(Psalm 34:11 KJV)

become familiar with their beautiful, varied, and delicate forms. Teach them to see the wisdom and love of God in His created works; and as their hearts swell with joy and grateful love, let them join the birds in their songs of praise.”

Joseph Cornell, one of the most highly regarded nature educators in the world, in his book Sharing Nature with Children, recommends the Flow Learning system when introducing children to outdoor education. It has four stages:

Stage 1: Awaken Enthusiasm – personal interest and keen alertness.

Stage 2: Focus Attention – learning depends on focusing attention on specific objects, looking and observing.

Stage 3: Direct Experience – taking time to hear, see, touch, smell and observe.

Stage 4: Share Inspiration – tell stories about nature that uplift and inspire, or tell stories from the lives of great naturalists.

While parents and teachers are encouraged to create awareness of the beautiful world of nature, children’s leaders can also provide nature fun. Why not try Nature Camp? Children’s leaders can organize nature camps whereby the children and teens can come apart for two to three days in a natural environment to enjoy exciting nature activities and direct experiences such as observing the birds, identifying the trees, walking barefoot in the sand, or studying the stars.

Let’s get our children and teens out of the house to experience the beauty and mystery of nature. Let’s draw their minds to the wonderful Creator of this vast universe and together we can sing Haydn’s great musical piece, “The heavens are telling the glory of God!”

Linda Mei Lin Koh  
GC Children’s Ministries Director

INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION  
North Colombia Union – CHM Leadership Training

Zoraida Perez, CHM director of the North Colombia Union organized an outstanding leadership training event on May 30 to June 1, 2019 on the beautiful island of San Andres. About 500 children’s leaders attended this training together with their children and spouses. Dinorah Rivera, IAD’s CHM director and Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director were the guest speakers, inspiring them to grow spiritually as children’s leaders so as to impact the children they minister to. Richard Aguilera from One Mustard Seed Ministry provided fun and interesting ideas for teachers to use in teaching children.

Special gifts in the forms of books and resources and money were awarded to the most active conferences that launched special projects to reach children. The conference or mission leaders who won the gift check were simply elated. It was indeed a motivational to inspire them to be creative in their ministry. Everyone left with great satisfaction and joy.

CHILDREN’S MINISTRIES NEWS (AROUND THE WORLD)

CHM Leadership Training at San Andres, Colombia
INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION

Italian Union – Children’s Outreach in Milan

Elsa Cozzi, CHM Director of EUD invited Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director to visit an interesting Children’s Outreach project in Milan, Italy, May 15-16, 2019. Operated by a husband-and-wife team, they run a daily after-school outreach program for children of other religious faith. The kids were excited to attend this two-and-a-half-hour program where they did crafts, listen to Bible stories and learn about values. They were proud to wear their red T-shirts every day as a special identity for their group. We praise the Lord for the passion of this couple.

Romania Union, Banat Conference – CHM Training and Children’s Festival

The Children’s Ministries director of the Banat Conference organized a great program for children’s leaders, parents, and children in Arad, May 17-19, 2019. Elsa Cozzi, CHM director of EUD and Linda Koh, GC CHM director provided training on the importance of connecting with children and teens, evangelizing post-modern teens, ministering to digital natives, etc.

The Children’s Festival was the highlight of the Sabbath afternoon program with children singing, playing musical instruments, praying and reciting poetry. At the end, Linda Koh then provided a seminar for parents.

Sunday was especially targeted at pastors and leaders of the conference to raise awareness and to re-emphasize the importance of ministering to children. The church was full with all pastors, elders, and church leaders present for the
AND SAID, ‘TRULY I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU ARE CONVERTED AND BECOME LIKE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.’
(MATTHEW 18:3 NASB)

seminars presented by Linda Koh and Elsa Cozzi. Many expressed their appreciation for the seminars and indicated their support of involving children in their churches.

Children’s Ministries training was organized for the leaders in Amman, Jordan from April 18-20, 2019 by Amal Fawzy, Liaison Leader for MENA. Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director was the main presenter for these few days touching on faith development of children, why we need children’s ministries, programming, etc. It was wonderful to have Pastor Rick McEdwards, President of MENA to present a special seminar on protecting children and abuse prevention.

Then they move to Erbil, North Iraq to visit the special project at Madaba where a passionate Children’s Ministries Coordinator operates a weekly program for non-Christian children. About thirty children gather at the church building weekly to learn about health, Bible stories, and Christian songs. It was an excellent outreach to children in the community from other religious faith.

MENA UNION

Children’s Ministries Training at Jordan and N. Iraq

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NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

Loma Linda University -- 3rd Global Conference on Health & Lifestyle

The Health Ministries held its 3rd Global Conference on Health and Lifestyle on the campus of Loma Linda University from July 9-13, 2019. The GC Children’s Ministries was requested to run a track for children’s health, presenting a total of 8-9 workshops. This year’s emphasis for the children’s health track was on the Mental Health of Children. Three mental health specialists Dr. Kiti Freier, Dr. William Murdoch, and Dr. Flavia Jorge, were invited to present workshops covering topics on mental disorders of children, childhood suicides and depression, emotional intelligence and self-regulation, drug-endangered children and human trafficking, and others. Drs. Linda Koh and Saustin Mfune presented the last two workshops on raising emotionally healthy children and redeeming the self-esteem of the African child.

Children’s Outreach in N. Iraq

Children singing with joy

Children’s Ministries training in Jordan

3rd Global Conference on Health and Lifestyle at Loma Linda

Children’s Outreach in N. Iraq

Children’s Ministries training in Jordan

3rd Global Conference on Health and Lifestyle at Loma Linda
Hyattsville Spanish SDA Church Vacation Bible School

Tanya Muganda, Administrative Assistant of GC CHM department was invited to participate in the Hyattsville Spanish SDA Church annual Vacation Bible Xperience, Jamii Kingdom, from July 9-14, which ended with a day at the park. This VBS was a great opportunity for outreach. VBS has touched many little lives who inspire us with their stories.

One child whose family had been absent for a while, brought all her family to the church. She wanted her family to be present on Sabbath at church because she was going to sing. Another child adores his father. His dad came back early from work, and his mother asked him if he wanted to stay with his father, or if he wanted to go to VBS, and the child responded, “I don’t want to miss my VBS!!” So he brought his father to the VBS. After the Pathfinder Camporee in Oshkosh, he will start coming to the Pathfinder Club.

Two little girls brought their dad to the VBS, because they had been coming with their mother. The father was very enthusiastic and liked the environment for his daughters. The mother now brings her daughters to Sabbath School.

It is amazing what our little ones can do through Jesus.

NORTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC DIVISION

Taiwan Adventist Mission – Children’s Leaders’ Training

About twenty children’s leaders gathered at the Sanyu Health Center on the campus of the Taiwan Adventist College, June 28-30, 2019, for a special weekend training event organized by Celeste Sha, TAM CHM director. It was a beautiful environment with a great healthy menu of delicious vegetarian food. Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director and Lisa Clouset, NSD CHM director involved the leaders in many activities in their presentations, thus keeping the children’s leaders fully engaged. They covered topics such as interactive storytelling, the spiritual growth of children’s leaders, positive classroom management, and others. Then on Saturday night, the leaders were given an opportunity to make some useful devices for their Sabbath school. Many made felt Bibles for their classrooms. They left with lots of resources for their ministry.
SOUTHERN AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN DIVISION

Joyful Young Melodies prepare for 2nd SID Leadership Convention

The leadership of Joyful Young Melodies, a children’s singing group ages 4 to 14 and based in a small town of Gweru in Zimbabwe, invited Dr Saustin Sampson Mfune, GC CHM Associate Director to help them put final touches to Musical Journey, a drama Dr Mfune co-authored with his son, Dumisani Mfune and will be performed at the 2nd SID CHM Leadership Convention to be held in Livingstone, Zambia, the home of one of the seven wonders of the world, Victoria Falls. The Leader’s Convention will be held from 26th to 31st August and the drama will be performed in the evening of August 30. Mrs Malungu has done a great job with her singing group in preparing for the presentation this drama. When Dr Mfune arrived on the 8th of August, there was excitement in the 7th Street SDA Church in Gweru where the children practiced. Shouts were heard, “Uncle Saustin is here.” The local Conference Officers joined the practice sessions the three days Dr Mfune worked with the group. And the Union President, Pastor Tapera came to witness the practice session on Sabbath Morning, 10th August and encouraged the Joyful Young Melodies to keep up with their good work. “You have really put our Union on the world map,” concluded Pastor Tapera. Mrs Madeline Madembo, the Union CHM Director, thanked Dr Mfune for spending 3 days with the Joyful Young Melodies. “Your presence seriously motivated the young singers,” concluded Mrs Madembo.
Over five thousand people attend Solusi Camp Meeting, Zimbabwe

The month of August in Zimbabwe is for Camp Meetings and people gather in thousands in different areas across Zimbabwe. The South Zimbabwe Conference, which is headquartered in Bulawayo City, held its Camp Meetings about 2 kilometers past Solusi University Campus which is some 40 Kilometers West of Bulawayo city.

It’s not unusual to meet Impalas or Kudus crossing the dusty road as one drives or walks from Solusi University Campus to the Camp Site. The Solusi University campsite meetings were divided in three groups; adults, youth and children. One of the speakers for this Camp Meeting which run from August 11-17 under the theme Holy Spirit Faithful Guide was Dr Saustin Sampson Mfune, GC Associate CHM Director. It was a moving experience to see some six thousand adults, who most of them had camped around the meeting arena, gather daily to listen to the word of God. There were about 600 children and two thousand youth who also met in their arenas. A young man, a gifted puppeteer, inspired the kids with his puppeteering skills. About 75 people were baptized at the end of the Camp meeting. One could see that the Holy Spirit faithfully guided the meetings.

SOUTHERN ASIA-PACIFIC DIVISION

Central Philippine and Southern Philippine Union Conferences hold a Bi-Union Leadership Training

Ma’am Pagunsan, CHM Director of CPUC and Ma’am Caderma, CHM Director of SPUC, brought 15 CHM leaders from their Unions and met at CPUC Union Office from June 7-9 for a leadership training dubbed Dynamic Leadership for End-Time Children. Though the gist of the training was level 7 certification program, other topics covered were Teaching Concepts...
of SDA Theology to Babies, Philosophies Challenging Christian Parenting, and Sabbath School Classroom Methods and Ideas. Dr Saustin Sampson Mfune, GC Associate CHM Director was the main facilitator of the meetings.

Though there were only 15 leaders, the fellowship was great. Ma’am Pagunsan, the host of the meetings should be commended for a work well done.

with seminars from Level VI of the leadership certification program. Dr. Koh presented an inspiring sermon on Ellen White on Sabbath, identifying some of the ineffective methods of introducing Ellen White to our children.

All the conference/mission directors received a set of Bible felts and other resources for their ministry. They were all very grateful for such resources that would enhance their effectiveness.

NPUC Children’s Leaders

Sabah Mission – Children's Ministries Leadership Training

Over two hundred children's leaders and teachers attended a mission-wide convention on June 12-14, 2019 at the Pioneer Church on the compound of the Sabah Mission. Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director and Saustin Mfune, GC Associate CHM director were the guest presenters, covering all seven courses from the Leadership Certification Level 4 curriculum. The leaders were excited and eager to learn, never skipping out on the courses. The mission CHM director, Rozelene did an outstanding job in organizing this training event.

North Philippine Union Conference – CHM Leaders Convention

A union-wide leaders convention was organized by Norlin Cadapan, NPUC CHM director on June 7-9, 2019 for about one hundred children’s leaders. The theme of the convention was “Faithfulness to His Prophets—Be Inspired, Be Equipped.” Special guests included Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director, Dr. Orathai Chureson, SSD CHM director and Miriam Andres, retired SSD CHM director. They equipped the children’s leaders.

Meetings in progress

Sabah Mission CHM Leadership Training
Sabah Mission – Children’s Camp

Over five hundred children and teens attended this mission-wide children’s camp held on the campus of the Sabah Mission Secondary School, June 14-16, 2019. Guest speakers included Linda Koh, GC CHM director, Saustin Mfune, GC Associate CHM director, Orathai Chureson, SSD CHM director, and Debbie Chan, SAUM CHM director. There were lots of activities, seminars and opportunities for children from various churches to connect. Based on the theme, “Walking Like Jesus,” all seminars and talks were directly related to the children and teens toward living and walking like Jesus in their lives. At the end many committed themselves to follow Jesus.
AND SAID, ‘TRULY I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS YOU ARE CONVERTED AND BECOME LIKE CHILDREN, YOU WILL NOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.’

(MATTHEW 18:3 NASB)

Singapore Conference – CHM Leadership Training

About forty enthusiastic children’s leaders and teachers attended the two-evening leadership training on June 17-18, 2019. Cynthia Teo, CHM director of the conference organized an excellent event bringing together so many leaders even during the weekdays. Dr. Linda Koh was the main trainer touching on important topics such as health, stewardship, interactive learning, nature education, and teaching Ellen White to children. The participants had a great time getting involved in interactive activities and at the end they all received many resources for their ministry. Thank you, Cynthia for your leadership.

Thailand Mission – Children’s Camp

Hanna Detwinya, CHM director of the mission organized a huge children’s camp on the campus of the Chiangmai Adventist Academy, Chiangmai, Thailand, on June 20-23, 2019, with the theme “Children of God.” More than 1,000 energetic and active children attended this mission-wide children’s camp. The children were divided into two groups—primary and teens. Guest speakers Dr. Linda Koh, GC CHM director and Dr. Orathai Chureson, SSD CHM director and Debbie Chan, SAUM CHM director spoke with the two groups alternatively. The highlight of the camp was an excellent cultural show with dances from the different parts of Thailand.
WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION

Dr Saustin Sampson Mfune teaches at Babcock University, Nigeria

As from June 23rd to July 5, Dr Saustin Sampson Mfune, GC CHM Director who also serves as adjunct lecturer for Adventist University of Africa, AUA, taught a course entitled Children, Youth and Young Adult Ministry to 21 Masters’ in Chaplaincy students at Babcock University, Nigeria.

AUA should be commended for developing this class which include topics such as Theology and Philosophy of children, Faith development and communication among the children and identifying characteristic stages of developmental growth and applying appropriate forms of ministry for each amongst many others.

Some 300 children gathered in one of the auditoriums at Babcock University. Dr Saustin Sampson Mfune, GC CHM Associate Director, was the guest speaker. Sister Oluwafunmilayo Adegbenle, the local Conference CHM Director was the brain child behind this successful children’s day. Dr Mfune captured the kids with his skills of storytelling. The songs “Shorty- Shorty” and “African Children” stole the show.

At the end of the Divine Service, a number of children committed their lives to Jesus.

As the children parted at the end of the day, one could tell that they wished the day had been a little longer. The leadership should be commended for organizing this day for children.
As a 747 Jumbo Jet feather-touch landed at Dulles International Airport in Virginia, USA, a confident sounding voice of the pilot came through the intercom as he proudly said, “Science has overcome gravity and we have safely landed on autopilot.” As the plane meandered to the terminal building, a thought on raising children came into my mind. While technology enabled the pilot to program the plane to land on autopilot, we cannot do the same for our children. Parenting for heaven does not have a hands’ free technology. It is never on autopilot. You are always engaged. Your children are always following you.

I once heard a story of a family which lived by a busy road. They had 3 children and the youngest was four years old. Across the road from their house was a park. One Sunday afternoon, the parents decided to take a walk to the park. Their children did not want to go with them because they were busy enjoying their favorite TV children’s Christian program.

No sooner had the parents crossed the road than they heard a loud sound of screeching brakes. They turned just in time to see their four-year old son thrown up in the air and land with a loud thud on the road. They dashed to their son who lay face up on the road, blood oozing from his mouth, ears and nose. In a faint labored voice and looking straight in the parents’ eyes, their son said, ‘Mom and Dad, I was following you.’ And the parents almost said together, ‘But we did not know that You were following us.’ And that was it. Those are the last words which came from the lips of their son. He died.

Parent and teachers, whether we know it or not, our children are following us.

In the 2015 GC Session Adventist Review bulletin number 4 reported that in the last 50 years, that is from 1965-2014, out of 33,202,016 people who have been members of the SDA church, 13,026,925 have left the church. On May 31, 2017, I interviewed David J. B Trim who authored the article and is the GC Director of Archives, Statistics and Research (ASTR) inquiring as to how many of the 13 million who left the church were born Adventists. He told me that they are about 4 million. This is about 32% of the people who had backslidden. On October 4, 2018, I again visited the GC ASTR office and met Kathleen Jones. I wanted to find out what was the three-year trend, that is from 2015 to 2017 after the San Antonio GC Session. I learned from Kathleen that during the 3 years, the church baptized 3,970,287. But during
the same period, we lost 1,494,166. I requested Kathleen if she had statistics of people who were born Adventists and had left the church during this 3-year period. She informed me that they did not have that information because their statistical requirements during this period did not request for that information.

As one looks at the 2015-2017 negative trend, should this trend continue at this rate without any interventions, it suggests that at the end of 50 years, that is from 2015 to 2065, we are likely to lose plus or minus 24,902,766. This would be 11,875,841 members more than those we lost in the period 1965-2014. And though we don’t have figures for this period of people who were born Adventists and have left the church, unless some miraculous intervention takes place, it does suggest that we are probably going to lose more than 4 million children who were born Seventh-day Adventists during this 50-year period. Scary.

The above scary observation is reflected in the July 2008 Ministry Magazine by A. Allan Martin, referencing Paul Richardson in this way. He writes that while the median age of Canada and USA populations is 36/37 years old, the median age of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church of the same countries is 58 years old. Though there has been some disputes over these statics, some researchers suggest that by just observing the trend in North American Division and Divisions in Europe, one cannot dispute the fact that we have a graying (greying) church. This has led to the coining of the term Graying Adventism. Roger Dudley, probably in his now outdated study published in his book Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church: Personal Stories From a 10-Year-Study suggest that we are losing 40 to 50 percent and even higher of our Seventh-day Adventists teen-agers and young adults in North America.

One would think that with all the Certification programs, Pathfinder Activities, Sabbath School and many other programs we have as a church targeting our Children, Pathfinders and Youth, and money being spent in crisscrossing the world conducting all kinds of seminars, we should not be experiencing such hemorrhaging within our own ranks. But to the contrary.

While there may not be a one-size-fits-all solution to this problem, drawing from some 20 reasons given since the first retention summit convened at the General Conference in 2013 which include “failure of fathers to interact with their children” as pointed out by Valuegenesis - European study, Vance Ferrell’s observation of the access to internet which has increased knowledge in our youth in revealing church weaknesses which they did not know before and “hypocrisy by older church members,” as observed by Dudley, Roger, Gan-Theow Ng, and postmodernism, this has led me to write a book entitled: Graying Adventism: Connecting the Disconnect. In my book, I am principally focused on children born in SDA families up to age seven discussing ideas which can be implemented to lessen the exodus of our children. The ideas include:-

- When does parenting begin?
- How we act as if parenting is on autopilot.
- Mimetic Theory where I discuss the power of imitation. There is no small action before your children.
- Teaching SDA Theology concepts to babies.
- How little bodies become persons.
- Power of praying parents. Jacob’s prayer changed the heart of an angry Esau who had harbored anger against Jacob for many years. Genesis 32 and 33.
- Can our children who have left the church come back to the fold? Conversion is real. The prodigal son came back after living a wild life. Luke 15:11-24. God has promised to provide a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26. In this last chapter, I also become vulnerable by briefly discussing my Christian journey and how some Missionaries and my tireless parents played a role in bringing me back into the church.

It is my hope that this book will be a great tool for parents and teachers.