2026 ASRS ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE

Adventist Society for Religious Studies Denver, CO, November 19-21, 2026

Reimagining the Church for a Changing World: Identity, Community, and Mission

Thursday, November 19

ASRS Reception Dinner and Presidential Address

Wright Room @ Appaloosa Grill
Street Address: 535 16th St, Denver, CO 80202, United States

6:00-7:15 PM	Reception Dinner
7:15-7:30 PM	Welcome and Announcements by President-Elect Katrina Blue, Pacific Union College
7:30-8:15 PM	Presidential Address 2026 Reimagining the Church (TBD) Tihomir Lazić, Newbold College
8:15-9:00 PM	Business Session I

Friday, November 20

8:00 – 9:00 am

Paper Session I: Reimagining the Church in a Digital Age

Room 205 – *Perception, Formation, and the Meaning of Technology*

Presiding: Tihomir Lazić, Newbold College

Paper #1: *Sacred Narratives and Silent Lands: Ellen G. White, Indigenous Erasure, and Adventist Memory*
Julius Nam, La Sierra University

Summary. This paper examines how Ellen G. White's portrayal of American origins obscured Native American dispossession, arguing that these historical omissions were foundational to Adventist identity and institutional development. Drawing on postcolonial perspectives, it urges the church to integrate Indigenous histories into its historiography and reframe its mission around justice, reconciliation, and shared belonging.

Paper #2: *A Glass or a Wall? Shame Avoidance and the Rise of Chatbots*

Marina Garner, Loma Linda University

Summary. Argues that shame-avoidance is a key reason people turn to AI for advice, care, and even relationships, since chatbots offer comfort without the relational risk of being judged. Drawing on Scheff and Bernard Williams on shame, it weighs the benefits and dangers of this dynamic for pastoral care and proposes that the church can offer what AI cannot: a shame-bearing community.

Paper #3: *Way-out to too Way-out: A Conservative Church Copes with New Communication Platforms*

Gil Valentine, Avondale University

Summary. A historical study of how Adventism has repeatedly adjusted to new communication technologies—from pamphlets and periodicals to photography, film, and television—often perceiving them as threats to identity and witness. It seeks to identify the patterns and processes of discernment that helped the church adapt, offering principles for navigating present and future change.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Room 203 – *Digital Ecclesial Practice*

Presiding: Oleg Kostyuk, AdventHealth University

Paper #1: *The Jesus Method for Social Media: A New Path for Discipleship in the Digital Neighborhood*

Mabio Coelho, Andrews University

Summary. Explores how the church can faithfully reimagine discipleship in an age of permanent connectivity, drawing on Manuel Castells's analysis of network society and the idea of the "Digital Neighborhood." Proposes a biblically grounded "Jesus Method" for digital mission—modeled on Christ's relational, incarnational engagement—that bridges online and offline community life.

Paper #2: *Civilizing Narratives in the Digital Church: Data Colonialism and the Future of Adventist Ecclesial Practice*

Jeffrey Gang, Loma Linda University

Summary. Argues that churches' post-COVID embrace of digital tools entangles them in structures of "data colonialism," with missional language functioning as a "civilizing narrative" that masks extractive logics and erodes pastoral responsibility. Using cases such as Life. Church and Gloo (behind the "He Gets Us" campaign) warn that Adventists are not immune and call for theological work to reimagine faithful ecclesial practice.

Paper #3: *Reimagining Baptism in the Digital Age: An Exegetical-Theological Analysis of Its Administration in the NT and Its Implications for Online Worship*

Suryanica Aristas Pasuhuk & Malalasoa Daniel Andrianjafimbeloarijaona, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

Summary. Fills a gap in digital-sacrament debates with a New Testament exegetical-theological analysis (Matt 3; Acts 8, 10, 22; Rom 6) of how baptism was administered and what Scripture essentially requires. Bring these findings into dialogue with digital sacramental theologians to ask whether baptism can legitimately be administered online—especially where a minister cannot be physically present.

Discussion (15 minutes)

9:10 – 10:10 am

Paper Session II: Identity: Who Is the Church?

Room 205 – *The Unaffiliated and the Search for Identity*

Presiding: Katrina Blue, Pacific Union College

Paper #1: *An Everlasting Gospel for Every Nation: The Three Angels' Messages as Missional Authorization for Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*

Zilan Holtmann, Andrews University

Summary. Argues that the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:6–12 give Adventists not merely a doctrinal identity but an explicit, universal missional mandate that speaks directly to the identity crisis of the religiously unaffiliated (the "nones"). Examines the sociological reality of the nones and draws concrete missional implications for Adventist communities.

Paper #2: *Recovering the Ekklesia: Liberating the Church from the Antichrist*

Keith Burton, AdventHealth University

Summary. Argues that Jesus launched a boundary-crossing "assembly" (*ekklesia*) oriented to liberation and solidarity, not the self-preserving institution the church became through doctrinal gatekeeping and alignment with power. Provocatively suggests the true *ekklesia* may be more visible among the "spiritual but not religious" and in justice movements than within the institutional church, which must be willing to learn from them to represent Christ.

Paper #3: Becoming a Church of Belonging for Generation Z

Kenley Hall, Andrews University

Summary. Responds to the roughly 70% of young adults leaving the Adventist church by examining how Gen Z's "metamodern" worldview—marked by doubt, questions, and uncertainty—reshapes faith and belonging. Argues the church must redefine belonging away from strict doctrinal orthodoxy toward surrender to a transcendent center that embraces doubt as a component of faith. Discussion (15 minutes)

Room 203 – *Ecclesiology: Structure & Authority*

Presiding: Ross Winkle, Pacific Union College

Paper #1: *Running Together, Arriving Differently: Authority in Tension in the Johannine Vision of the Church*

Laslo Gallusz, Newbold College of Higher Education

Summary. A theological narrative-critical reading of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John's Gospel, centered on the scene where they run to the empty tomb together yet do not arrive together. Argues that John resists concentrating authority in a single figure, modeling a complementary, relational vision of ecclesial authority well suited to a culture suspicious of institutions.

Paper #2: *The Missional Theology of the Letter to the Ephesians: Its Implications for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church*

Leo Ranzolin, Loma Linda University

Summary. Exegetes Ephesians' exalted "cosmic ecclesiology"—the church as the locus of God's reconciling of all things—and argues its present-oriented eschatology should reshape the Adventist doctrines of the church (#12) and second coming (#25). Contends this integration would balance Adventism's "hyper-eschatology" and empower present, world-engaging witness.

Paper #3: *William Tyndale and a New Adventist Congregationalism*

John McVay, Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Summary. Takes Tyndale's rendering of ecclesia as "congregation" as a starting point to ask whether a hierarchical, congregation-wary Adventism should reconsider its ecclesiology in an age of loneliness and isolation. Conducts an exegetical review of key New Testament passages and sketches the shape of a new Adventist congregationalism.

Discussion (15 minutes)

10:20 – 11:20 am

Paper Session III: Engaging a Divided World: Justice and Mission

Room 205 - *Justice and the Public Square*

Presiding: Olive Hemmings, Washington Adventist University

Paper #1: *Using Computation Analysis to Examine Racial Colorblindness in SDA Sermons*

Jillian Royal, Cornell University

Summary. A sociological study using natural-language processing and critical discourse analysis (in Python) on SDA sermons livestreamed 2019–2022, asking when patterns of racial "colorblindness" appear rather than engagement with racial inequality. Grounded in color-blind racism and the racialization of organizations, it examines how Adventist preaching addresses social issues within the congregation and beyond.

Paper #2: *Christian Nationalism: A Threat to Religious Liberty and Social Justice: The Adventist Prophetic Response*

Isaac Olatunji, Oakwood University

Summary. Offers a prophetic Adventist critique of Christian nationalism, reading its fusion of religious identity and political power against Revelation's warnings of end-time religious-political coercion. Argues Adventist eschatology provides a framework for resisting political idolatry and warns of threats to religious liberty and a possible return to "Jim Crow 2.0."

Paper #3: *The Retributive Complex: Rethinking Divine Justice and the Church's Role in a Divided World*

Tammy Wiese, University of St. Andrews

Summary. Argues that a "retributive complex"—the interlocking beliefs that merit can be measured, punishment is necessary, suffering has value, and God's justice is fundamentally retributive—persists because it "feels right" and distorts the church's grasp of grace. Drawing on Gregory of Nyssa, Mary Midgley, Simeon Zahl, and Ellen White's "circuit of beneficence," it asks whether shalom is only a heavenly ideal or a present pursuit.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Room 203 - *The Church's Mission and Witness to the World*

Presiding: John Jones, La Sierra University

Paper #1: *Radical Sameness: Moravian Economic Separation and Integration and its Lessons for "New" Ecclesiological Movements*

Andrew Tompkins, Andrews University

Summary. This paper explores how eighteenth-century Moravian mission enclaves in North America struggled with economic self-sufficiency, often falling into debt or becoming absorbed by trade profits despite seeking separation from mainstream ecclesiastical structures. By examining these financial entanglements, the study draws lessons for contemporary Christian groups seeking to establish independent movements away from existing ecclesial institutions.

Paper #2: *Seeking the Welfare of the City: Reimagining the Missional Community and Identity of the Church in Contemporary China*

Chuanshan Liang, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

Summary. Examines how China's tightened "Sinicization of religion" policies and a resulting "exilic mindset" are reshaping church structure, identity, and mission. Using Jeremiah 29:1–7 and a case study of an Adventist house church in Wenzhou, it reframes the church's identity around faithful presence, service, and witness that "seeks the welfare of the city" rather than withdrawing from it.

Paper #3: *Inroads to the Islamic Community. Reimagining Church Outreach to Muslim Neighbors*

Sean Facchinello, Federal Prison, US Army Retired Chaplain (LTC)

Summary. Drawing on the author's experience in military chaplaincy and prison ministry, proposes reimagining the local church as an outreach post to Muslim neighbors, especially those affected by war. Highlights shared religious practices and common experiences of being misunderstood as bridges for community, humanitarian support, and witness.

Discussion (15 minutes)

11:30 am – 12:00 pm Business Session II, Room 205

12:00 – 1:00 pm Lunch Break

1:00 – 2:00 pm

Paper Session IV: Community: Identity and Praxis

Room 205 – *Radical Honesty, Adventists, & Identity*

Presiding: Jim Wibberding, Pacific Union College

Paper #1: *Staring into the Abyss: Analogy, Honesty & the Scribal Wisdom of 2 Samuel 21-24*

Eden Samaniego, University of St. Andrews

Summary. Argues that the intertextual relationship between Deuteronomy 31–34 and 2 Samuel 21–24 demonstrates a hermeneutic of "radical honesty," wherein biblical authors critically confronted institutional failures, compromised leaders, and covenantal ruptures without abandoning their inherited tradition. It contends that this ancient scribal posture provides a model for contemporary Adventist communities to navigate post-institutional disillusionment, fostering renewal not through apologetics or reinvention, but through brutally honest stewardship of a flawed tradition.

Paper #2: *Religious Scrupulosity (Religious OCD) Among Seventh-day Adventists: Lived Experiences and Qualitative Insights*

Elise Harboldt, Kettering College

Summary. Argues that religious scrupulosity—a maladaptive subtype of OCD characterized by intense salvation anxiety and ritualized coping—manifests with distinct theological and hermeneutical dynamics within Seventh-day Adventism. Drawing on qualitative interviews, existing literature, and personal experience, it contends that identifying these contextual factors can help the church rearticulate and embody its theology in ways that foster psychological flourishing rather than distress.

Paper #3: *Who are the Adventists? Letter and Spirit*

Jim Walters, Loma Linda University

Summary. Argues that while early Adventism uniquely blended Scriptural literalism with a radical, Spirit-led reform movement, twentieth-century fundamentalism stifled this dynamic ethos by enforcing rigid traditionalism and inerrancy. To confront modern transformations, it contends that the church must embrace both its traditionalist and progressive wings

by using sociological frameworks to accommodate diverse perspectives while returning to the primacy of the Great Commandment.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Room 203 - *Forming the Next Generation*

Presiding: Zane Yi, Loma Linda University

Paper #1: *Between Storytelling and Structure: The Early Church as Model for Spiritual Discernment for the 21st Century Church*

Eike Mueller, Newbold College of Higher Education

Summary. No abstract submitted. Based on the title, it appears to examine the early church as a model of spiritual discernment—holding narrative/"storytelling" and institutional "structure" in tension—for the contemporary church. Recommend requesting the abstract from the presenter to confirm.

Paper #2: *How the Concepts of Truth and Identity Change in the pre-modern, modern, post-modern, and post-human Western and Adventist Contexts*

Tamara Pispisa, Italian Adventist University

Summary. A comparative sociological analysis of how the concepts of truth and identity shift across pre-modern, modern, post-modern, and post-human paradigms—and how, in plural societies, these paradigms coexist and intertwine rather than simply succeed one another. Asks how the Adventist message, shaped in a modern context, can be communicated to those operating within a postmodern, "relational" understanding of truth.

Paper #3: *Reimagining the Church through Discipleship in Adventist Higher Education: Integrating Faith and Learning for Christian Identity, Community, and Mission*

Herbert Liessi, Northeast Brazilian Adventist University

Summary. Proposes Adventist university campuses as strategic ecclesial spaces where Christian identity is formed through discipleship and the integration of faith and learning. Draws on the author's doctoral research at a Brazilian Adventist campus, correlating spiritual well-being, perceived social support, and religious attitudes, to argue that campus spirituality shapes both academic life and students' relationships with God and the church.

Discussion (15 minutes)

2:10 – 3:10 pm

Paper Session V: Healing and Belonging in a Broken World

Room 205 - *Healing, Grief, and Compassion*

Presiding: Zdravko Plantak, Loma Linda University

Paper #1: *"With Healing in Its Wings" (Mal. 4:2): Reimagining the Bible for a Broken World*

Sigve Tonstad, Loma Linda University

Summary. Argues that reimagining the church for a changing—and broken—world should begin with reimagining the Bible as a book of healing, framed by Malachi 4:2 and Revelation 22:2. Proposes giving Scripture priority in identity construction, community formation, and mission, as a remedy against brokenness and against a reductive, "messianic" faith in technological transformation.

Paper #2: *Reimagining Presence: Adventist Chaplaincy and the Liturgical Form of Grief in Wartime*

Ukraine, Valentyna Kuryliak, Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Science

Summary. Studies how Ukrainian Adventist chaplains conduct funeral and memorial ministry—especially for soldiers missing in action—and develops an interconfessional, accepted memorial model marked by brevity, gratitude, and respect for state rituals. Based on six expert interviews, it shows church presence being reimagined across confessional boundaries while remaining pastorally disciplined, publicly intelligible, and doctrinally grounded.

Paper #3: *Known by their love?*

Karen Holford, Trans European Division

Summary. Observes that Adventists are known more for teachings on law and prophecy than for love and compassion, despite Jesus's Great Commandment. Drawing on the current science of compassion and the story of the Good Samaritan, it asks how compassion might transform the church's commission and make it a community genuinely "known by love" in a fractured world.

Discussion (15 minutes)

Room 203 - *Rethinking Church and Community in a Post-Church Age*

Presiding: Young-Chun Kim, Pacific Union College

Paper #1: *My Jesus and I: Why do I need the Church?*

Erhard Gallos, Andrews University

Summary. Addresses the "spiritual but not affiliated" question of whether one needs the church at all, testing it against Old and New Testament visions of community (*qahal*, *ekklesia*, synagogue). Draws on Hans Küng's Die Kirche to argue the church is a living community—always reforming (*ecclesia semper reformanda*)—and asks what that means for Adventism today.

Paper #2: *Reflections on the Institutional Church*

Denis Fortin, Andrews University

Summary. Revisits Avery Dulles's classic Models of the Church—institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and community of disciples—fifty years on. Argues that the institutional model has become dominant in Adventism amid recent tensions over authority and compliance and draws on Dulles to weigh each model's strengths and weaknesses and to avoid common institutional mistakes.

Paper #3: *Algorithms of Redemption: Reimagining Community and Theological Imagination in the Horizon of the Second Advent*

Michael Swenson, Microsoft

Summary. Argues that social platforms and AI are not neutral but formative spaces that shape belonging and identity—often fostering fragmentation, isolation, and extraction—within a broader "post-church" condition where traditional sites of belonging no longer hold. Drawing on Adventism's history of mediated witness, its eschatology, and Sabbath as an interruption of "technological time," it calls for a movement from "algorithms of oppression" toward "algorithms of redemption."

Discussion (15 minutes)

3:10 – 3:30 pm Business Session III, Room 205

3:30 – 5:10 pm Sectional Meetings

Room 205

3:30 – 4:20 pm

Christian Theology and History: Martin Hanna, Andrews University

New Testament: Erhard Gallos, Andrews University

Old Testament: Oliver Glanz, Andrews University

Philosophy and Ethics: Marina Garner, Loma Linda University

Practical Theology: Ernest Furness, Northern California Conference

World Religions/Missiology: John Jones, La Sierra University

4:20 – 5:10 pm

Black Theology Group: Olive Hemmings, Washington Adventist University

Women in Theology Group: Lena Toews, Union Adventist University

Friday Evening, November 20

6:00 pm Adventist Scholars' Supper/Vespers by NAD Ministerial Department
Location: Mile High Adventist Academy

Ticket link: Home | NAD Adventist Scholars Vespers & Dinner

Sabbath Worship, November 21

Location: Denver Convention Center, Room 601

9:30 -10:45 am Sabbath School Panel Discussion: "The Church Reimagined" with Tihomir Lazić

10:45 – 11:00 am Break

11:00 am Worship

Sermon "*Ḥesed*, Crumbs and Threshing Floors" Kendra Haloviak Valentine, La Sierra University

12:30 pm ASRS Photo