

Recorder



PATHFINDER
CLUB

**SPECIAL
EDITION**



Birth of a Mission

Say the word “Pathfinders” to an adult Seventh-day Adventist and an interesting thing might happen to their face. A faraway look captures the eyes as a gentle smile lifts the corners of the mouth.

What you won't see are the memories flooding that person's mind: visions of busy club meetings filled with young, happy faces; camping adventures in the great and mysterious out of doors; exciting learning experiences as new skills are introduced; and the sight and feel of carefully pressed uniforms adorned with sashes, buttons, and patches. You also won't hear the echoes of special songs being sung and eager voices reciting Spirit-based laws and pledges: words that helped form the very foundation of generations of lives.

While it may seem impossible to imagine today, there was a time when the Pathfinder Club ministry didn't exist within Adventism. There were no songs to sing, laws and pledges to recite, honors to earn, busy meetings to attend, camping adventures to enjoy, or uniforms to press.

What type of individual looked around and decided that such an outreach needed to

be created? As is often the case, such a realization took root in the minds of young people themselves, like the boy who faced an angry bully carrying a whip.

John was ten years old when he first started studying the Bible in earnest. He and his family joined the growing movement of “Millerites”—those who followed the teachings of reluctant evangelist William Miller. Small groups of such believers would often gather each Wednesday evening in their community to study their Bibles. John eagerly attended such activities and was thrilled by what he heard from God's Word.

One evening, after a hard day of work on the family farm, John was walking with an older gentleman, a Mr. Davis, to just such a meeting when they came to a small bridge spanning a rushing stream. Suddenly, a group of men appeared, their leader

Pathfinder Aim

The Advent Message to all the world in my generation.





Pathfinder Pledge
By the grace of God,
I will be pure and kind and true.
I will keep the Pathfinder Law.
I will be a servant of God
and a friend to man.



carrying a long, thick bull whip. He announced that he was going to “whip some sense” into Mr. Davis because of his crazy Millerite beliefs.

When John saw what was happening, he immediately stepped forward, positioning himself between the would-be attacker and his Bible-believing companion. “If you’re going to hurt Mr. Davis,” he said, “you’ll have to hurt me first.”

The bully, too ashamed to injure a young boy, relented and allowed the two to continue their journey.

John Nevins Andrews grew up carrying that fire for God in his heart, serving the church in many ways and in many places, becoming a missionary to Europe, where he died from tuberculosis in 1883 at the age of 54. All during his life, he had a special burden for young people and worked tirelessly to meet their needs within the fledgling Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Youthful fervor

This type of youthful fervor—this brand of dedication—also made itself known in the heart of 14-year-old Luther Warren. So passionate was he on the subject of youth involvement that in 1879 he helped organize the very first society in the Adventist Church dedicated solely to reaching the spiritual needs of his peers. He then spent his entire life working on behalf of that particular age group. He never forgot what it was like to be in their shoes—to face what they faced, needing to know that there was something more to life than the survival-of-the-fittest mentality that drove most of the people, young and old, in this world.

Both Luther and John also realized that the next generation of Adventist boys and girls desperately needed such guidance and encouragement. Their

Pathfinder Motto

The love of Christ compels us.

efforts laid the foundation for organizations to come, such as Missionary Volunteer Societies (MV), and church-created magazines like *Our Little Friend*, *Junior Guide*, *Primary Treasure*, and *The Youth’s Instructor*. Generations of Seventh-day Adventist children and teens have benefited greatly from their vision.

Starting in 1901, juniors and early teens played an integral part in the actual development and function of many Adventist youth programs. But it wasn’t always an easy task. They faced widespread apathy within the church. “Youth are to be seen and not heard” they were told again and again. “You can’t trust the young. They’re too wild to be in charge of anything.” But in their hearts they carried the same flame of commitment to the cause of God as did Luther Warren and John Andrews.

That same year, the General Conference put skin in the game by providing official recognition to the youth movement, and ministry to the young became an integral part of the Adventist organization.

California connection

By the late 1920s, many clubs and organizations for young people had been formed across the country, but there was no single ministry of like-minded individuals existing. All of that began to change when, in 1927, John McKim and Willa Steen of Anaheim, California, formed a club with the exciting name “Pathfinders.” This was followed, in 1930, by an additional club in nearby Santa Ana. There’s record of another such club in Loma Linda in 1937, as well as one in Glendale.

Then, in 1946, John H. Hancock, youth director for the Southeastern California Conference, launched a Pathfinder Club in Riverside. He created the Pathfinder triangle emblem and assigned a ministerial student, Francis Hunt, to keep things going while he and his wife, Helen, taught honors classes.

The following years were busy ones in the Pacific Union, with its Missionary Volunteer Council—made up of all the youth directors of the union conferences—holding leadership conventions and

brainstorming Christ-centered activities for young people. Henry T. Bergh, in the Central California Conference, launched 23 clubs in his territory!

In 1950, the General Conference took note of the success of the Pacific Union’s Missionary Volunteer director and his conference directors, and the GC adopted their program, officially naming it “Pathfinder Club.” It became a worldwide organization of the Adventist Church. The rest, as they say, is history.

Pathfinders is now a global ministry, impacting the lives of thousands each year. Church history reveals that young people prove their greatest value when they are both seen and heard.

Find a need and fill it

Which begs the question, “Do we still need something as time- and resource-consuming as Pathfinder Clubs in our church today?” Many would argue that such social gatherings may have lost their luster in this age of YouTube, Instagram, and distance learning. If a young person wants to know the difference between a granny knot and a square knot, there’s probably a YouTube channel dedicated solely to that subject.

But other voices are sounding a welcoming call as well as a warning. Here’s what the leaders of the General Conference Adventist Youth Ministries say on their website concerning the philosophy of Pathfinders today:

While the Pathfinder Club exists primarily for youth, one of its basic purposes is to also bring together parents and church members through active involvement with the club and its members. Here the so-called generation gap disappears as young and old worship, work, and play together in a bond of common experience. Meaningful relationships are forged as leaders and counselors join with Pathfinders in sharing, building confidence, and working together.



The whole philosophy of Pathfinding is built on the premise that ‘children learn best by example, rather than precept.’ As they see leaders and parents model spiritual and social values, they too will aspire to develop high moral principles, loving and caring attitudes, and determination to excel in all their various pursuits.

Young people learn most effectively in a positive, happy, and secure atmosphere. The attitude of the club leaders is therefore a vital ingredient in guaranteeing the success and effectiveness of this ministry to youth. A failure to listen to and understand the needs of the young people will only erect barriers to real spiritual growth and development and may prove to be a contributing factor in making the church and its mission unattractive to the youth.¹

Personal insights

If you’ll allow this writer a moment of faraway gazing and memory flooding, my own journey through life includes many a Tuesday evening in the old James Street Adventist church in Syracuse, New York, a lifetime ago. There, cloistered with children my own age, I learned that church, school, and home can be bound together with timeless ties that transcend the world and its allures. I discovered that I was part of something valuable—something that could help me gain skills in subjects as diverse as rock collecting, radio building, bird

The Pathfinder Law

The Pathfinder Law is for me to:

1. Keep the morning watch.
2. Do my honest part.
3. Care for my body.
4. Keep a level eye.
5. Be courteous and obedient.
6. Walk softly in the sanctuary.
7. Keep a song in my heart.
8. Go on God’s errands.

identification, bread making, photography, and, yes, knot tying—all the while coming face to face with adults who reflected God’s love in word and deed.

Our camping trips demonstrated to me in ways no YouTube or Instagram video could that God is best seen in nature and in the caring attitude of church volunteers who made all the fun and learning possible.

Yes, I happily recited the Pathfinder motto, aim, pledge, and laws. Yes, those words echo in my mind to this day. Yes, I owe more than I can say to the people in my church who had the foresight and the sacrificial willingness to quietly slip into my life and offer guidance that I didn’t realize I needed until years later.

Pathfinders isn’t just about earning honors, learning skills, and socializing. It’s about helping to prepare generations of young people for the harsh reality that will come into their lives. It’s about allowing children to see that Pathfinder pledge and motto being lived out in the lives of those in charge of their club and their church organization.

Yes, the children in your church need a Pathfinder Club. So do the adults.

¹“Philosophy & Objectives,” Adventist Youth Ministries, <https://www.gcyouthministries.org/ministries/pathfinders/philosophy-objectives/>.

Additional sources of information:

<https://www.clubministries.org/pathfinders/pathfinders-history/>
<https://www.gcyouthministries.org/ministries/pathfinders/philosophy-objectives/>
<https://www.adventsource.org/store/pathfinder-club/leadership/program/pathfinder-story-pdf-download-35207>



Foundation for Service

Pathfinding—like any ministry aimed at children—begins with a basic premise: Kids need Jesus. This is immediately followed by another insightful truth: Kids want to be involved. When a church family combines those two objectives in an outreach to their young people, the end result can be summed up in one word: service.

Here’s how the General Conference Adventist Youth Ministries website explains it:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to understanding young people and training its youth for leadership and service to humanity. The Pathfinder Club is a church-centered spiritual-recreational-activity program designed for young people 10 to 15 years of age. Pathfinding appeals to this age group because its program features activities that meet their needs and interests. It is filled with action, adventure, challenge, group activities, and provides opportunities for the development of new attitudes and skills that produce personal growth, team or community spirit and a sense of loyalty and respect for God, His Creation, and His church.

Expanding on that commitment, the North American Division also offers Teen Leadership Training Programs (TLT) designed for young people in fifth through 10th grades, as well as older Pathfinders who are academy age (ninth through 12th grade). Each program trains young, growing minds for leadership roles in their church and community.

Level of activity

Visit any Pathfinder Club during one of its meetings and notice the level of activity taking place. Members might be busy preparing for a community outreach project, practicing to take part in a church function in the coming weeks, or attempting to earn one (or more) of the 400-plus established Pathfinder honors available. It’s all about action. It’s all about learning. It’s all about service.

Pathfinder honors provide both structure and motivation to club members. Each was designed with three specific goals in mind:

- Be a course of study that introduces a subject.
- Have practical value and enhance the lifestyle of the person pursuing it.
- Assist the person in his/her development as a well-

Dixie Plata's Give-and-Take List for Pathfinder Clubs and the Churches That Support Them

- Pathfinders help by keeping the church yard clean.
- Church members make friends of the young people and call them by name.
- Pathfinders in uniform help by taking up the offering.
- Church members make sure there is a spot for a Pathfinder bulletin board.
- Church members invite the club director to be a part of the church board meetings.
- Pathfinders in uniform carry umbrellas on stormy days to help people get from their cars to the church.
- Church members give a liberal offering for their Pathfinder Club.
- Pathfinders learn respect for God's house.
- Church members pray for individual youth.
- Pathfinders show God's love by helping disabled members.
- Church members provide something to take on campouts—cookies, oranges, etc.
- Pathfinders do the whole Sabbath service on Pathfinder Day.
- Church members personally thank staff and Pathfinders for their service.
- Pathfinders visit church shut-ins and take get-well cards they have made.
- Church members offer to be involved—teaching an honor, being a counselor, etc.
- Pathfinders volunteer to help in Cradle Roll or Kindergarten Sabbath Schools.
- Church members mentor youth.
- Pathfinder teens do secret acts of kindness, such as:
 - Mow the lawn of a member who has a broken arm.
 - Rake leaves for a busy single mother.
 - Paint a fence for an elderly member.
- Church members respect the youth and forgive their missteps.
- Church members remember that the most disruptive/active young person may one day become their pastor.

rounded Christian by directly affecting the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of life.

Honors are divided into categories that include arts/crafts/hobbies, health and science, household arts, nature, outdoor industries, recreation, spiritual growth, and vocational skills. Earning and displaying the patch that comes with completing the requirements for a particular honor leaves a lasting impact on young lives. It helps build self-esteem and potentially opens yet another door for service to the world.

But honors are only one tool in the hands of Pathfinder leaders who are determined to meet the following nine objectives of the ministry—a list that should bring joy to the heart of every parent of a Pathfinder-age child in your church.

1. Help young people understand that God and His church love them, care for them, and appreciate them.
2. Encourage Pathfinders to discover their own God-given potential and use their gifts and abilities as part of the great plan of salvation.
3. Inspire young people to give personal expression of their love for God through various outreach activities.
4. Make the number one priority of Pathfinder Clubs the personal salvation of every member.
5. Build a healthy appreciation and love for God's creation.
6. Teach specific skills and hobbies that will make lives meaningful.
7. Encourage members to keep physically fit.
8. Give opportunity for leadership development.
9. Foster growth in physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual life.

When such objectives are at the core of any activity or ministry, good things are bound to happen.

How to support Pathfinding

Pathfinder Clubs succeed best when they enjoy the enthusiastic support of their sponsoring church family.

I recently talked with Dixie Plata, who, along with her husband, Arnold, serves as a Pathfinder historian for the North American Division. Dixie was also a Pathfinder leader in the Pacific Union Conference (Loma Linda area) for many years before her retirement. Her answers to my questions reflect a lifetime of experience working with and for the youth of our church.

Once a Pathfinder Club is up and running, how can a church family best support the ministry, making sure that the young within their fold enjoy all the amazing opportunities that this global organization provides?

I think it's a matter of give and take between the church and the club. [See sidebar for Dixie's Give-and-Take List.] When working together, church members can make friends with the young people and learn to call them by name. My dad was famous for knowing kids' names, and it didn't matter how they dressed or if they showed up with purple hair. He knew them by name, and I think that's an important thing for our church members to do individually in support of kids.

What changes in the heart of children when someone "knows their name" and they see church members getting involved in their lives?

There are statistics that show that the percentage of young people who are called by name by the church members stay in the church longer or, if they leave, come back sooner because of their good relationship with others. It's important to interact with them on a personal level as much as possible.

How do church members fit themselves into the actual Pathfinder program? Usually, Pathfinder volunteers are asked to be involved. They can be club secretaries, they can teach honors, or they can be counselors. Even shut-ins who would like to help can be picked up by church members and brought to the meetings. When we were in Redlands, we had a woman who taught knitting to the kids. There were as many boys as



there were girls in the class. That woman was in a wheelchair. Someone picked her up and then took her back home for each meeting.

What changes in a child's attitude about God when they see Him represented by a Pathfinder organization? If you have good, Christian, Seventh-day Adventist leaders, the change is huge. Why? Because the child wants to have that same peace as the leaders have and be an active part of the ministry. We were coordinators after we retired here to Oregon, and I taught team leadership programs for a number of years. Those young people who attended are now married and often tell me, "What a difference it made that somebody paid attention to me and cared enough to talk to me." We have pastors and youth leaders in our division who were once our Pathfinders.

What about the adults who are involved in the church's Pathfinder Club? What changes in them? I think when Pathfinder Clubs are active and not just a place for babysitting young people, the adults who are involved—plus the adults who see them in action—realize how important their example is. I think it helps them stay on the straight and narrow, be more active, study more so they can share their time and talents with young people. You see a change in their level of loving and caring as they work with the kids. In the past, when non-church members saw our young Pathfinders and church members working together on community projects, they were astonished that there were no

cross words and everyone was just having a great time sharing and caring for and helping each other. They told us they'd never seen anything quite like that.

What do you say to a church whose members insist, "We can't operate a Pathfinder Club. We don't have a lot of talent in our church. We don't have a lot of professionals in our church. We don't have a lot of money in our church! How can we have a Pathfinder Club?" Well, I would say, if you have one child, you can start a Pathfinder Club. And that child can invite a non-Adventist to join. Then you have an outreach Pathfinder Club. Yes, it takes money and time. By the way, if you announce your needs from the front of the church, you probably won't get too many responses. But if you talk to church members one on one—"Hey, I saw that beautiful afghan you made. Would you teach crocheting to our Pathfinders?"—the results will be much better. We've worked in small and large clubs and discovered that God is there no matter the size. It doesn't take lots of money. It doesn't take lots of education. But it does take committed, Christ-centered people who want to help young

people be in heaven. At some small churches, people in surrounding communities show an interest in having their children be a part of the Pathfinder Club. Such clubs grow because God is behind it.

How has being involved with Pathfinders and the training of teens—and all of the other things that you and your husband have been doing for the youth of our church for decades—changed you and your attitude about God? We're more aware of the needs of our youth. I think it helps us keep stronger in the faith because in order to work with young people, you need to study and pray. If you're not praying, it's not going to happen. I think this work is something God has given us the heart, strength, and passion to do all these years. He can do that for anyone.



God does not call us to a service unless it benefits both the giver and receiver. Pathfinder Clubs are a prime example of that. In such one-on-one interactions, hearts are changed as Christian love becomes even more deeply rooted in everyone involved.



Those Who Lead

A journey on any public conveyance requires the presence of one particular person. He or she can be found in the cockpit of an aircraft, the bridge of a ship, behind the steering wheel of an automobile or bus, or in the engine cab of a train. Without this person, the journey would be impossible.

A church is no different. The role of captain, driver, or engineer/conductor mainly falls on the shoulders of one individual: the pastor. He or she has been given that job because those along for the ride feel that the skills this person possesses will make their spiritual journey more meaningful and productive.

Pathfinder Clubs need captains, too. While the church pastor provides the vital overarching support and guidance for the ministry, the club's director sees to its day-to-day operation. He or she is on the front lines, making sure the journey for each boy and girl is as joyful as possible. Then, when the church pastor and club director work together for the good of the children, wonderful things happen.

Insights and suggestions

To better understand the all-important role of the pastor in the Pathfinder ministry, I contacted Randy Hill, vice president for youth and young adult ministries for the Pacific Union Conference. His insights and suggestions for pastors—born from years of experience—can help bring about the best





possible outcome for everyone involved.

Here's what he had to say:



A significant portion of a pastor's church family may be involved in the Pathfinder ministry. It's almost entirely lay-person led, so the influence of the pastor is sorely needed.

As one of the official functions of the church, a club can serve as an evangelistic outreach as well as a guiding light for church members and their children. It's both an outreach and an in-reach ministry.

The pastor needs to be part of the team that helps organize the club as well as an avid supporter of each and every activity. Pathfinders is a ministry built with time, friendship, and a shared wonder at the world in which children find themselves. When pastors engage with kids at the level of, "Hey, let's

marvel at God's creation together," the bonds that are formed can be everlasting.

Contrary to what some believe, ministry to children is not all that complicated. Boys and girls love to play! This provides one of the best avenues for engagement with children—to enter into their world at their level. And when a pastor takes part in the play activities of the kids, the boys and girls are much more receptive to the gospel he or she is hoping to present.

Significant learning

Pathfinder play is tied directly to significant learning. As the pastor teaches, joins in the play, and tells exciting stories, a powerful and positive ministry takes place.

When children see an up-front leader of the church—someone they admire—taking time to be with them, they feel valued.

Besides sharing the gospel through play, telling stories, or simply showing up to be a part of the play/learning experience, any hobby or activity about which a pastor is passionate can open the door to additional interaction within the club. When an adult is enthusiastic about something, children tend to gravitate toward it.

So, if they see an adult excited about one of the honors—like model railroading, kite building, photography, music, bread baking, or model rockets—if the adult is enthusiastic, they will be, too.

A pastor can look at the curriculum that Pathfinders provides and check out the large selection of honors. Finding something that fits his or her talents and interest can throw open the door to service. It's a win/win situation.

But that interaction between pastor and child goes far beyond the enjoyment of working to earn honors. Pathfinders is a time in a kid's life when his or her character is being built. They're all trying to figure out who they are. To have a pastor—somebody they look up to—walk with them through experiences both good and bad is of extreme value. They learn that they're not alone; there's someone there to help them grow in Jesus.

I know of many examples of when kids got into trouble and it was a pastor who advocated for them and worked with them—who put a hand on their shoulder and said, "Come. Let's walk through this together."

Sometimes churches try to do too much, too soon. The full-blown Pathfinder program can

be daunting. Members should start at whatever level they're able to maintain on a regular and persistent basis. This is far more effective than trying to do it all, all at once. They can let the ministry grow. If the pastor starts it, and shows that he or she cares about kids, other adults in the church family will likely respond and step up to help. Waiting for somebody else to take the lead is fruitless.

"Hey kids, once a month we are going to go on a Sabbath afternoon hike!" If that's how you need to start a Pathfinder Club at your church, go for it!

Three-legged stool

We Adventist Christians have always taught that reaching children for Jesus takes a three-legged stool: school, home, and church working together. Pathfinding is a combination of all three. Activities are discussed at home, meetings are usually held at the church or school, and the school is often involved in club functions. Teachers can even assign less homework on "Pathfinder Nights," demonstrating solidarity with the program.





The perception of some that the ministry is still stuck in the 1950s is gradually changing. Pathfinders is morphing into a modern organization, and the pastor can be—and *should* be—an integral part of that wonderful and on-going transformation.

—Randy Hill, vice president for youth and young adult ministries for the Pacific Union Conference



Skills and abilities

What's it take to be a Pathfinder director? What skills and abilities are needed to stand before a roomful of energetic young people and engage both their minds and hearts on behalf of their Creator?

Let's ask an active leader for suggestions. Rachele Ellis has probably seen and heard it all and, with God's help, has prayerfully discovered solutions for keeping the club on track. Here's what she says:



Being a Pathfinder leader requires a unique blend of qualities and skills. First and foremost, a genuine love for working with young people is crucial. Patience, understanding, and the ability to connect with youth on a personal level are essential

to fostering a supportive and encouraging environment.

It also helps if you can get the parents to engage. This creates the best outcome for the child.

Leadership skills play a pivotal role. These skills include the ability to organize activities, delegate tasks, and guide the club effectively. Flexibility is key, as each Pathfinder

is unique. Adapting to diverse personalities ensures a positive experience for everyone involved.

There's never a dull moment when well-laid plans go awry. The kids aren't the only ones who learn in a Pathfinder club.

Spiritual depth

Spiritual depth is fundamental. A Pathfinder leader should embody strong moral values, a growing faith, and a commitment to nurturing the spiritual health of the youth. Pathfinding is not just about conveying information. It's also about inspiring a personal connection with Jesus. You can't share what you don't know.

In my experience as a Pathfinder leader, what works best is creating a sense of community within the club. Building relationships with each Pathfinder and fostering teamwork instills a sense of belonging. Incorporating a variety of engaging activities—both recreational and spiritual—keeps the club dynamic and appealing. To do this, you must know your kids—their likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses.

To encourage someone to become a Pathfinder leader, I would emphasize the transformative impact it has on both the leaders and the youth. It's

an opportunity to make a lasting difference in the lives of young people, helping them develop lifelong skills, solid friendships, and a strong foundation for their faith. And the blessing one receives—to know that you've been able to be a part of that child's spiritual growth—is beyond words.

—Rachele Ellis, director of Wind Valley Arrows Pathfinder Club, Ellensburg and Cle Elum, WA



Just how long do the memories of being in a Pathfinder Club last? The answer isn't measured in months or years. According to many older adults, it's measured in lifetimes.

"I loved Pathfinders. I have great memories of getting my tree honor! My mom passed away when I was 11 years old, and I remember her helping me find leaves from different trees on a Sabbath hike. Silver maples always make me think of her."

—Lisa Emerson-Anderson, Minnesota

"Pathfinders was a great experience for me. I loved the camping outings, and most important to me was someone who taught us how to knit! I liked learning knot-tying too, and later used some of those knots doing macramé. I thought it was a wonderful way to share good times with



church and school friends. To this day I appreciate those who were dedicated to what it took to keep Pathfinders going. I have a photo of playing music with a group from our church at a camporee in Florida. On that stage with me is the man I am now married to! Our families were both at that event about 35 years ago."

—Barbara King Gleaves, North Carolina

"I started the first Pathfinder Club in the Upper Columbia Conference around 1953. When I pastored the church in Wenatchee, Washington, I recruited the National Guard to train the Pathfinders how to march. The club won the marching contest at the North Pacific Union Conference Camporee."

—Curtis Miller, Washington

My own memories of my Pathfinder days in Syracuse, New York, center on the volunteers who lent their time and talents to our club. We learned so much from them. Our church pastor taught the photography honor. Another member showed us how to build working radios that received local stations. Photography and radio show hosting/production has been at the core of my career for over 50 years, but those skills and passions took root sitting at the feet of those who cared enough to share

their talents and interests with a bunch of kids. I own them a deep debt of gratitude.

Which begs the question: Are *you* ready to change lives for God? Are *you* ready to make memories that will last a lifetime? Launching or taking part in a Pathfinder Club will help you do just that. God can take your loaves and fishes and multiply them to help feed young people and prepare them for a life of service.



Leaders Under Construction



What can happen to a normal, everyday Seventh-day Adventist Christian who accepts the challenge of becoming a Pathfinder leader? Cindy Johnson, Pathfinder director in Othello, Washington, learned a thing or two about kids, God, and constructing leaders. This is her story in her own words.



Why am I in Pathfinders? The answer is simple: God asked me to join His ministry to young people. At first I resisted—even politely refused. But then I prayerfully stepped out in faith, and here I am, 35 years later, still working on His projects, still doing my best for Him.

Did I know it all in the beginning? Absolutely not! I was a newly baptized Seventh-day Adventist. However, I learned much and grew in faith along the way, asking for God's guidance constantly. He has blessed both me and my efforts, and I continue to rely on Him each and every day. I discovered that Pathfinding builds faith in kids and the staff who guide them.

We are the "Othello Outreacher" Pathfinder Club. It's an "outreacher" club in more ways than one. Most of our club members go to public school. Most are non-Adventist or attend no church at all. Many are the kids of the kids who attended Pathfinder meetings decades ago and

were later baptized as adults.

I'm here to tell you that my greatest joy is to hear a Pathfinder's first prayer and then have the opportunity to nurture that boy or girl as they grow in Christ.

Evangelists through example

Each of our club staff members serve as evangelists through example! We know we're being watched very carefully. That may be why, when we baptize a Pathfinder, members of his or her family are often baptized right along with them. They've seen Christ's love demonstrated. Our church members repeatedly insist that Pathfinders—along with its younger cousin Adventurers—are our church's most effective evangelistic tools, with high retention rates.

Imagine giving a Bible study to a certain Pathfinder while, unknown to that child, the pastor begins Bible studies with her mom at the same time. Then, imagine the surprise on the girl's face when her mom steps into the baptismal tank with her. Not to be left behind, her brother is baptized less than a year later.

Family baptisms happen frequently at our church.

What it takes

So, what does it take to be a Pathfinder leader? It takes total trust in God. None of us have all the skills, insights, and energy necessary to effectively work with young people and the challenges they face. But God does, and He willingly leads the way.

We have a lot of high school teens in our club. They're navigating through life, questioning all the "whys," and trying to determine just how they fit in. They ask, "Who is God? Can He really help me?" To participate in that arena is a real privilege. But it requires patience, understanding, and constant communication with God.

Sometimes those precious teens fail. They make bad choices or leave the church. But many come back and become pastors, teachers, lay

Every Church Needs a Pathfinder Club Because...

"With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world!" (Ellen White, *Education*, p. 271).

I remember walking the streets of our community at Christmas time with our Pathfinder Club doing food collection. Our kids would run from house to house, sharing with our neighbors who we were and what we were doing. Others in the group sang carols from the sidewalk.

We came up to a house with a fence that had a "No Soliciting" sign hanging on it. When the owner heard our singers, he came out to enquire what was going on. That was the moment our kids needed to give him our message of hope and love.

As a church, we have one mission—to reach others with God's endless love. There's no better group of people to deliver that message than our precious Pathfinders.

—Mario and Patty Hernandez, county coordinators for San Bernardino County

church workers, and parents who want their kids in Pathfinders. You hear them share their stories or testimonies around the campfire or in sermons from the pulpit. We praise God for every victory.

At his request, I visited a former Pathfinder in prison. He said he remembered his Pathfinder experiences his first night in his cell. Those memories kept him company as he began his frightening, lonely time behind bars.

Years ago, I was told by concerned church members to kick a certain Pathfinder out of the club because he was hopeless. But I couldn't do it. If I did, who would help him? Not his parents, not his school, not society! The club was his only hope.

Today, he's an active member of our church. Many Pathfinders stay faithful and continue their journey through Teen Leadership, Master Guide, church leadership, and lay ministries. They become church workers, missionaries, Pathfinder leaders, and godly parents. Our Pathfinder Club helped build their Christian foundation.

With all my heart

I love these kids with all my heart. I pray for and with each one, spend time with them, encourage them, cry with them, and challenge them to serve God. And, in order to build relationships, I visit their families in their homes no matter what faith they belong to. I attend their school functions and text pictures of our Pathfinder activities to them and their parents.

Every Child Needs a Pathfinder Club Because...

Our children are in God's thoughts. The Pathfinder ministry is designed with the child's growth and development at heart. Right along with our basic needs such as shelter, clothing, and food, we need to belong. In a world where children struggle to fit in and find their true identity and purpose, Pathfinder boys and girls hear, learn, and experience a sense of belonging, identity, and purpose. They discover God's love through a combination of caring community and Holy Spirit-guided exploration.

The Psalmist puts it this way: "How precious are your thoughts about me, O God" (Psalm 139:17, NLT).

We see some of those godly thoughts materializing in Pathfinder Clubs where kids enjoy a safe place to grow in "wisdom and stature."

—Mario and Patty Hernandez, county coordinators for San Bernardino County

Then, I continue keeping in touch long after they've "graduated" from Pathfinders. I've been to their baptisms and weddings, and I've held their newborn babies. It's exciting to be a part of God's family.

Yes, Pathfinders builds rich church relationships. And there are unique perks! You get to do all the fun kid stuff like camp in a tipi at 16 degrees F., go hiking, attend Camporees, play crazy group games, study the stars, sing around the campfire, backpack the Grand Canyon, watch geysers at Yellowstone, visit other countries (like the South Pacific Division Camporee or a mission trip to Mexico or Belize), and—one of my favorites—attend the Pathfinder Bible Experience "Bible Bowl" event sponsored by the North American Division.

Studying, learning, and constructing leaders with Pathfinders! I love it. I love it all!

—Cindy Johnson, director "Othello Outreachers"
Pathfinder Club, Othello, Washington



How does attending meetings, earning honors, taking part in nature outings, and interacting with others your own age help construct men and women who willingly and enthusiastically give back to society? How do those many Pathfinder activities guide young people right into a life of service?

Eddie Heinrich, youth director of the Northern California Conference, shares some insights for how this amazing transformation takes place.



One of the youth programs we have here in the Northern California Conference is called "Leaders in Training."

What we've noticed over the years is that, instead of just doing things for young people, if you say to them, "Hey, here's a task. I'd like you to do it," and then you walk with them and help them accomplish their goals, they'll amaze you with their skill and dedication. That's the kind of modeling that worked for me when I was a teenager.



When I showed up at a summer camp long ago, the youth director said to me, "Here's the manual for learning how to drive the school bus. On Friday, you're going to go down and take the test for your bus driver's license so you can drive campers around all summer." So, I carefully studied the manual, took lessons from a staff member who was a professional driver, passed the test, and have spent the last 30 years driving school buses at summer camps.

Often, we don't give young people enough credit. We don't think they have the skills to do certain tasks or accomplish certain goals. But, if you have high expectations of a kid, and you give them the tools to do the job, most will rise to the occasion.

Some church members might say, "Kids today. They're spoiled. They've got their noses buried in their phones, in social media. How can we teach them anything?" My question to them is, "Have you asked them to do something—something hard, something out of the ordinary? Have you tried to engage them?"

Yes, kids are distracted by technology and social

connectedness. Most of the time, it's because we adults are not providing clear expectations of what we want them to do or challenging them with difficult tasks. So, by default, they go with what's easy.

Willing to be taught

I recently held a weeklong seminar here in the Northern California Conference where we had 400 kids, including 65 juniors and seniors from high school, in attendance. We spent three days teaching them how to give Bible studies and how to build group dynamics. Then they spent the rest of the week leading small groups as they accomplished various goals. If we hadn't invited them to attend and learn, they would've stayed home and played on social media. But because they were willing, and so were we, they learned new social and leadership skills—abilities that will follow them for the rest of their lives.

The speaker at our program was a freshman in college. She taught and preached. A local church could do that: pick a couple of kids and tell them, "We want you to preach a sermon. Here's your topic." Then you let them wrestle with the subject matter. You guide them and mentor them. This way, they can take part in both Sabbath School and the church service.

Too often, those of us in leadership don't want to give kids the opportunity to lead or to teach. Why? Because we want to do it ourselves or we feel that kids won't do it exactly the way we want it done. But here's a fact I've discovered: Kids learn best from kids.

Teaching aids

Leadership is all about confidence. If you say to an older kid, "I want you to teach this honor to the younger boys and girls," and then you give them the tools they need to do the job, you'll find they're very good at it.

Yes, they're going to make mistakes. But who doesn't? How are you going to learn from your



mistakes if you're not allowed to make any?

What would I say to a church member who doubts the ability of a kid to accomplish a worthy goal? First, have grace. Know up front that kids are not going to do things the way you might do them. Second, different doesn't mean wrong. Third, provide a safe environment where failure won't be devastating. This would be a good time to remind the Pathfinders that Thomas Edison didn't get the light bulb right the first time either.

If we don't give our kids opportunities to try something and fail in a safe environment, the

world is more than happy to provide an unsafe environment in which they can fail.

The last time I checked, the church is supposed to be a safe environment where members, young and old, can ask questions, learn and grow, and figure out what they believe. There was a time when all of us didn't know what we know today.

If you provide mentoring and that safe environment where kids know they have someone who'll give them opportunities to learn, teach, and share their faith through service, that beautiful Christian growth will take place and leaders are born.

I have a Pathfinder leader who, after I ask him to do something, I'll look over and he'll have three kids doing what I asked him to do. Could he have done it himself? Sure! Could he have done it quicker and better? Probably. But those kids would not have learned new skills.

—Eddie Heinrich, youth director of the Northern California Conference



That's what leaders under construction looks like.



Safety Standards Create Happy Kids

There's absolutely nothing more important to the heart of a Pathfinder director and his/her staff than the safety and health of those in their charge. That's vitally important because protecting energetic, creative, and fun-loving boys and girls can sometimes be a challenge.

Child safety comes down to two main tasks: 1) minimizing potential incidents and 2) being prepared for emergencies.

Adventist Risk Management (ARM), the health and safety organization established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, offers detailed guidance and powerful tools for assuring that Pathfinders remain safe and happy while enjoying their many adventures. This includes camping trips and special events, as well as regular meetings.

Each Pathfinder Club follows stringent guidelines established at the local, conference, or union levels based on the ARM standards. When a child joins a club, he or she is stepping into an environment protected by careful planning and commonsense regulations, each designed to keep parents and guardians informed and their precious children

out of harm's way. These guidelines have been established in four major categories as presented at AdventistRisk.org.

Activity planning

For any travels beyond the church property, permission must be obtained from the parents or guardians of each club member. The permission slips include allowing the child to receive medical care if needed. Also, parents sign a release if the club plans to take pictures of the fun and distribute them either online or in print.

Travel issues

Children are taught to follow "prevention tactics" and abide by the rules and regulations of the journey. Vehicles used must have been recently serviced with no outstanding recalls in place. When cars or vans are rented, they must come from reputable companies where the vehicles have been professionally maintained.

Travel insurance is always secured before any trip. ARM can provide the right policies for various travel plans.



Every Church Needs a Pathfinder Club Because...

If camping, social events, and food is all we think about when we hear the word “Pathfinders,” then we are missing something important. Pathfinder Club ministry is more than just corralling youth for camping trips to give parents a little break. Being a Pathfinder is walking with God and learning the skills that will shape who that boy or girl will become and how they prioritize their life in order to keep God first.

As adult church members, we tend to put kids in the background in order to receive our spiritual feeding. But church is for everyone, including children and youth. They need direct, relevant information for addressing the issues they’re dealing with, including sex, drugs, peer pressure, spirituality, suicide, the future, grades, being a Christian, etc.

Every church needs a Pathfinder Club ministry to help guide the children and youth in the right direction as they navigate the awkward stages of adolescence. Pathfinders teaches that the Christian way of life can be both fun and relevant. It provides an atmosphere for parents to talk to their teens concerning critical issues. It’s also a ministry to others. A child can share his or her experiences in the club with friends, who then share that information with their parents. It’s a connection that grows and grows.

—HP and Diana Kang, leaders of the Loma Linda Korean Pathfinder Club

Keeping kids protected

Sometimes, in this sinful world, boys and girls need to be sheltered from the potential dangers of human interaction. If the local church doesn’t have a Child Protection Plan in place, one can be created using the carefully prepared guidelines provided by ARM. The needed information and forms are all available at AdventistRisk.org. Due diligence in this area is critical and goes a long way toward keeping kids safe and protected.

Health and safety guidelines

ARM encourages Pathfinder Club leaders to participate in basic lifesaving training in the event of a medical emergency. First aid, CPR certification, concussion awareness and prevention, and the use of automatic external defibrillation units and other health and safety equipment are strongly suggested.

If club members participate in sports games and activities, leaders must know what to do if an injury occurs, how to treat minor mishaps such as sprains and pulled muscles, and when to seek medical attention. Of course, the children are constantly trained in ways to prevent such injuries in the first place.

So, what does all the protection and planning listed above look like? I asked Manny Cruz, director of youth and children’s ministries for the Arizona Conference to share some insights into how the Pathfinders in his area stay safe in our decidedly dangerous world.



How do your Pathfinder Clubs help protect the safety and health of their members?

In Arizona, we’ve been very blessed to have a conference treasurer who is also our risk manager. Every Pathfinder Club and every

Adventurer Club has to have a Certificate of Operation (COO) if they’re going to participate in any club activity. One of the requirements for receiving a COO is to have all club volunteers go through a careful screening process that includes an extensive background check.

The Certificate of Operation is a North American Division requirement, so all of the conferences in the division must issue a COO for a local club to operate. It’s an important step for keeping our kids safe.

As you know, you get a bunch of kids together and they’re going to be bouncing off the walls. How to you protect children in a children’s environment? There’s potential for accidents, for disagreements, etc. How do you control all of that? Some of these situations are going to happen any time you have activities that involve kids. That’s just part of it. However, our objective is to minimize the risks.

The way we do it here in Arizona—and I know other conferences do it as well—is to offer leadership training every year. We do one session

Every Child Needs a Pathfinder Club Because...

We need a manual.

Have you ever put IKEA® furniture together? I have to use the assembly manual. Those step-by-step instructions make the process much easier.

Pathfinder Club ministry is the manual we all need to help kids put their lives together. Yes, every child is different. That’s why the program offers more than 400 different honors using various skill levels and topics. Those skills are what our children will need to navigate through adulthood.

Learning about one’s self through outreach to the local community, in-reach to develop a stronger bond between peers, or reflecting God’s image by walking the walk and talking the talk is all part of being a Pathfinder.

—HP and Diana Kang, leaders of the Loma Linda Korean Pathfinder Club



in October, one in January, and one in August. At every training program, we invite Adventist Rick Management to come and do a seminar on safety. Some presentations cover the basics like don't play with fire, knives, etc. Others are more in-depth and address such subjects as protecting children from any type of abuse, be it emotional, physical, or sexual.

Even during the pandemic, we had our training programs via Zoom. Through the years, we've had a great response from our volunteers and leaders.

Any time we do a conference or event that includes kids, we always include security measures, especially if it's an overnight trip. One of our volunteers works for the Sheriff's Department, and it's pretty nice to see him at the camp. It gives an extra sense of security to everyone who is there.

Part of the training that Adventist Risk Management offers is how to deal with active shooters. Unfortunately, this is part of modern reality and knowing what to do is essential.

Also, at any off-site function, we have volunteer

medical personnel with us. It may be a parent or church member who wants to serve.

And we're very strict when it comes to transportation. Several years ago, Adventist Rick Management began to discourage the use of 15-passenger vans. So, we use only seven-passenger vans, or we'll borrow our academy microbus. It's a larger vehicle with more stability. The health and safety of our kids is always on our minds.

When a church faces the launching of a Pathfinder Club and all of the safety and organizational hoops that need to be jumped through, is it worth it? Does the end justify the means? Oh, it's definitely worth it! One of the things that I believe—and I mention this all the time—is that, when it comes to children and young people, rarely will they remember a sermon when they get older. What they do remember are experiences. Most adults who were raised in the church remember summer camps, a Pathfinder Camporee, a Pathfinder Fair, or a Youth Week of Prayer. We try to promote experiences. The Pathfinder Club

ministry is, in my opinion, the best ministry that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has to offer. I can't think of another organization that is as structured and effective as the Pathfinder Club ministry.

Pathfinder people are very committed. There's a saying: "Once a Pathfinder, always a Pathfinder." This is so true. Some people I know have been involved in the ministry for 50 or 60 years!

It's a wonderful ministry for the children because of the experiences and mentoring that happens naturally and organically. When you have a counselor that's responsible for a group of kids, they will do everything together. When he or she is there to help each child fulfill all of the requirements for a new honor patch or learn how to set up a tent or cook over an open fire, that builds long-lasting relationships.

I'm 54 years old, and I can tell you that when, in my imagination, I go back to the Glendale Spanish church and my Pathfinder days there, I remember experiences like the snow trip that we made one winter into the Angeles National Forest. Those are

the memories that the Holy Spirit will use as young people grow and mature—memories that remind them of the love of God. The Pathfinder program introduced me to God in a way that changed my heart. I'm a Seventh-day Adventist because of those experiences.

How they were treated, how they were part of a group or community, and all the other things that Pathfinder Clubs offer will be remembered by a boy or girl forever.



You can't spend eight hours in a van with other kids and staff members and then spend a weekend in a tent and not develop relationships. Pathfinders provides such opportunities over and over again.



Is your church family ready to start creating lifelong memories for your boys and girls—memories that the Holy Spirit can use to construct a deeper understanding of God's love in their hearts both now and in the years to come?

If you're ready for Pathfinders, Pathfinders is ready for you! You'll find all you need to know about launching a club in your home church at <https://www.clubministries.org>.

Here you'll discover detailed descriptions of all the different and exciting aspects of Pathfinding, such as "How to Organize a Club," "Club Membership Requirements," "Achievement Classes," and those important "Pathfinder Honors."

Next, contact your local conference youth director to get the ball rolling. Check this out and be inspired: <https://www.adventistfaith.com/media/recorder/pathfinders-october-2022>.

May God bless you as you start building experiences and tomorrow's leaders, today.

