

**KIDS IN DISCIPLESHIP:** Children, parents, and grandparents have intergenerational fun during a “Kids in Discipleship” program.



ICELAND: An Adventist church is established in this Western Islands community in the south of Iceland.



COURTESY OF ICELAND CONFERENCE

# Re-Formation *in* Iceland

By GAVIN ANTHONY

Seventh-day Adventists in Iceland are making discipleship a priority.

In 2006 the Iceland Conference created a new and separate department for discipleship. “We live in a world of crumbling spirituality and collapsing morals, a development that unfortunately infiltrates the church more than we would like to admit,” says conference president Eric Gudmundsson. “A concerted effort in resisting this development by promoting spiritual revival and Christlikeness among members—young and old—is thus of utmost urgency. Thus, the creation of this department.”

## Our Model

The Iceland Conference is building its discipleship model around spiritual formation, a term that identifies the focus of discipleship—the practical and spiritual re-forming of broken human hearts back into the image of Jesus.

In Romans 8, Paul explains the significance of spiritual formation. First, he identifies spiritual formation as

fundamental to God’s plans, for we have been “predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (vs. 29).\*

Second, Paul identifies the magnificent consequences of spiritual formation; that we “are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Third, Paul identifies his own passion for this work, being “again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

While spiritual formation explains the “what” of discipleship, the parable of the vine in John 15:1-17 shows us “how.” Jesus tells His disciples they will become fruitful only once they have learned how to “remain” in Him.

## Why Spiritual Formation Is Important to Adventists

Being spiritually re-formed by allowing the nature of the Vine to flow into us is not only foundational to Christian life but also is at the heart of the church’s prophetic calling. Let me explain.

**1.** *Spiritual formation calls for us to live an attractive Christian counterculture.*



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Throughout history people such as Noah, Elijah, and John the Baptist have called people to stop compromising with a culture antagonistic to God and to live the morals, values, and principles of the kingdom of Christ.

The final call to “come out” from a culture that is decadent and perverse under the power of the latter rain comes in Revelation 18:4. While focusing on important doctrinal issues, because this call is built on earlier calls, it assumes a call to “come into”—into a community in which God’s character is being reflected in real life. In Western Europe today we live inside a post-Christian culture in which people are hurting without God. So to foster a counterculture in which people are being authentically re-formed into the image of Christ is both evangelistically compelling and a fulfillment of our special commission.

**2. Spiritual formation provides the inspiration for intergenerational, community-based revival.**

Spiritual formation isn’t intended to be done alone. Because of the fracturing of our society, however, it often is. That’s why Paul emphasizes that it is in the community of the body we “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Because our culture aches for wholeness, restoring the spiritual community of the family addresses a desperate need. Spiritual formation within the family enables it to become a beacon of spiritual integrity that prepares the final way for our Lord.

**3. Spiritual formation is of national significance.**

Our Adventist combination of theology, morality, and ethics has always been unique, but with the falling apart of our culture’s moral fabric, it increasingly appears to be so. So who will call the people in the remote villages and fjords of Iceland to live inside God’s kingdom as God has defined it?

Within a few years of arriving, Oestlund (see sidebar) was producing a church paper that for a time had the

widest circulation of any paper in Iceland. In the same spirit, we are developing new possibilities for every Icelander—wherever they live and no matter what age—to become part of spiritual formation communities.

Our mission demands that we be accountable, not just to our churches but to our nation.

### The Evangelistic Result

Building spiritual formation communities is ultimately about intentionally reaching out to our neighbors with an invitation to experience a quality of life that can be found nowhere else. We want to have an impact on the quality of life within our churches, but our ultimate goal is to be a light within our nation. We are working on plans to provide online teaching and create virtual discipleship communities for people in far-flung areas. We are also working to personally reach every home in Iceland with a discipleship magazine and DVD that will help us begin to build contact in areas where no Adventist members currently live. Indeed, with a curriculum written specifically for Iceland, we are already seeing indications of interest in our material from other Christian denominations as well.

### Honoring God

Ellen G. White summarizes our vision: “The greatest work that can be done in our world is to glorify God by living the character of Christ” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 439). As we continue the greatest journey human beings can take—of being “conformed to the likeness of his Son”—God is honored, as in no other way. ●

To learn more about the spiritual formation work in the Iceland Conference, go to [www.reflectingJesus.org](http://www.reflectingJesus.org).

\*All Scriptures quoted in this article are from the NIV.

# The Beginnings of Adventism in Iceland

BY GAVIN ANTHONY

In 1897 the Denmark Conference sent David Oestlund as the first Adventist missionary to Iceland, an island located between the Greenland Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean with an area of about 103,000 square kilometers (39,758 square miles). On the voyage from Copenhagen, religious discussions began. As the debate intensified, an Icelander walked forward and began supporting Oestlund as he

argued for the seventh-day Sabbath and baptism. Oestlund asked the man afterward if he was a Seventh-day Adventist.

“Yes ... it so happens that we read *The Great Controversy* and began to keep the Lord’s Sabbath holy without having seen or talked to any Adventists.... [When] we saw ... that a missionary would be sent [to Iceland], and since we thought it would be hard for him to work alone, we

decided last spring to sell our small farm in America to travel across and help him.”\*

From this working of God’s providence, the work in Iceland moved forward. Today, out of Iceland’s population of just 300,000, approximately 575 Adventist members worship there and have established one church school.

\*Björgvin Snorrason, “Pastor David Oestlund and the Beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iceland.”