

# **A Pathfinder's Journey**

*Reflections from a Lifetime of Pathfinder Club Ministry*

**Dixie Plata**

*A Pathfinder's Journey: Reflections from a Lifetime of Pathfinder Club Ministry*

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## *Dedication*

To Debra Brill, Vice President for Church Ministries of the North American Division. Debra has been a mentor and a leader to so many. Debra was the one that kept telling me I needed to write down my stories. If you have heard me speak, you have most likely heard me say that I didn't like the fact that I was getting old. I got to thinking that if I wasn't the age I am, I would not have known many of the leaders in Youth Ministry in the General Conference and in the North American Division. These individuals include C. Lester Bond, Eldine W. Dunbar, Theodore E. Lucas, Laurence A. Skinner, John H. Hancock, Henry T. Bergh, Lawrence Paulson, Harry Garlick, and so many others. These men had a heart for youth and for God that they shared with young people down through the years. They influenced my life.

Thank you, Debra, for showing me what a true Christian leader is like and for mentoring me in so many ways you were not even aware of. May God be with you always.

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# Foreword

The beginning of the Youth Ministry Historian displays began in the late 1970s, in the Southeastern California Conference, at the same time Dixie was living in Loma Linda. She put together displays of old Master Comrade scarves, slides, pins, and emblems, as well as the blue Friend, red Companion, and green Explorer scarves, slides, pins, and emblems. These displays were first shown for Pathfinder Sabbath at the Campus Hill Church in Loma Linda, California. The next year, the displays were larger, so several teen boys built six display cases which were used to protect the items. Old reading course books and certificates were added, as well as baptismal items. These cases are still in use more than 36 years later.

Dixie was a collector from an early age. She began her collection with a bar of soap with the Pathfinder emblem and a songbook with Pastor John H. Hancock's signature. Her Pathfinder membership card from 1952 is also part of her early collection. Sharing these memorabilia generated interest from all ages, the stories of the history for each individual item were added along with seminars, and the traveling exhibit was launched. From this small beginning, the collection has grown to include thousands of items, including books, leaflets, honors, pins, patches, uniforms, and much more.

When Dixie married Arnold Plata in 1982, Arnold added his collection of Missionary Volunteer and Junior Missionary Volunteer manuals. These items joined the growing collection of pins, patches, uniforms, and booklets that Dixie had collected. The Platas' neighbor at that time was James R. Nix, Historian and current director of the E. G. White Estate. Jim encouraged the Platas to put their displays together and share youth ministry with others.


World and North American Division Youth Directors, as well as private individuals, have given items to Arnold and Dixie through the years, knowing that their collections would be shared. The Platas have shared displays in North, South, and Inter-America for dozens of Camporees, Pathfinder Sabbaths, fairs, and churches, as well as for leadership conventions. Sharing how God has led and continues to lead in the lives of His people has been their mission.

It is with grateful hearts that Arnold and Dixie wish to thank the hundreds of individuals that have shared items, their youth ministry, and Pathfinder stories.

A very special thank you goes to Brad Forbes and AdventSource for supplying the Platas with the latest honors, patches, books, and other items so that the exhibit may be up to date as well as historical.

Thank you, friends. With grateful hearts, we look forward to the Second Coming and the awesome "Pathfinder reunion" in heaven where we can spend time with Jesus, our Master Guide.

*Arnold and Dixie Plata  
Coordinators for Historian Ministry of the  
North American Division Youth Ministry Department*



1897-1917



# In the Beginning

The beginning of youth societies was organized by Luther Warren and Harry Fenner in Hazelton Township, Michigan, in 1879. The second was a society organized twelve years later by Meade MacGuire in Antigo, Wisconsin, in 1891.

A systematic organization of the young people of the Seventh-day Adventist Church came about as a response to appeals from Ellen G. White, written from Australia on December 19, 1892. The bulletin was presented on January 29, 1893, at the general council meeting and in part stated: “We have an army of youth today who can do much if they are properly directed and encouraged...”

The church in Adelaide, Australia was the first to respond with the organization of a Young People’s Society under the leadership of A. G. Daniells. Soon, Young People’s Societies sprang up in North America and elsewhere overseas.

In 1893, the Young People’s Society of Christian Service was organized in College View, Nebraska, at Union College, “to secure the increased spirituality of the young people, their enlistment in all missionary activity through existing channels of work, and their elevation to a higher plane of living and thinking” (Matilda Erickson {Andross}, *Missionary Volunteers and Their Work*, p. 13).

In 1894, the first Sunshine Band was organized under the leadership of Luther Warren in South Dakota and in 1896, and several bands in the state held a convention.

The Ohio Conference led the others in giving formal recognition of the young people’s groups. During the summer of 1899, at camp meeting, a resolution was passed, forming an organization of “Christian Volunteers” who signed a pledge of service which read: “Recognizing the preciousness of God’s gift to me, I volunteer for service for Him anywhere in the wide world that His spirit may lead, and in any form of service that He may direct.”

In 1900, the young people of Germany formed a youth organization within the church; in 1901, societies were organized in Iowa. In 1903, Young People’s Societies were begun in Germany; in 1904, a manual on the young people’s work was published, Young People’s Society report blanks were sent out; in 1905, there were Young People’s Societies in England, the Cook Islands, Trinidad, Africa, in the French Latin Field, Jamaica, West Indies, and in Canada.

The General Conference Committee recognized the need of coordinated leadership and asked Flora Plummer of the Sabbath School Department to take on this challenge in 1901. This arrangement continued until 1907, when because of the rapid expansion of youth activities, the General Conference council, meeting in Gland, Switzerland in May, voted “a special department, with the necessary officers, be created.” It was known

as the Young People's Department of the General Conference (General Conference Bulletin 1909, p. 327). Milton Earl Kern, who had been active in youth leadership in the Midwest, was appointed chairman of the new department (1907–1922) and Matilda Erickson its secretary (1907–1920, when she married Pastor Andross and moved to Inter-America). A seven-member advisory committee was also appointed.

At a Sabbath School and young people's convention held at Mount Vernon, Ohio on July 10–20, 1907, a distinctive name—Young People's Society of Missionary Volunteers (MV)—was chosen for the youth organization. At the General Conference session of 1909, a resolution was passed with plans for a separate Junior Missionary Volunteer Society (JMV). Training of leaders followed this resolution that youth, ages 10–16, would have a program just for them.

There was rapid growth the first ten years of the department's history, including these highlights:

- 1907 Young People's Day in the church calendar began January 26th  
A Standard of Attainment course for senior youth  
Senior Reading Course was begun  
Progress reports from Africa and British Guiana were received
- 1908 Morning Watch calendar was inaugurated  
Junior Reading Course began in October  
MV Societies began in Tahiti, Singapore, Norfolk, Fiji, and Portugal
- 1909 Junior Missionary Volunteer Societies (JMV) organized for ages 10–16  
Missionary Societies organized in the Scandinavian Union
- 1910 Missionary Societies began in Bermuda
- 1911 MV Leaflets Series began  
German and Japanese Reading Course began  
Missionary Volunteer Societies organized in Korea  
Boys Clubs began in Takoma, Maryland and Lincoln, Nebraska
- 1912 Missionary Volunteer Societies organized in the Philippine Islands, South America, and Central America  
Meade MacGuire was appointed as a field secretary for MV/JMV Societies
- 1913 Spanish Morning Watch began  
Spanish Reading Course began  
Missionary Volunteer Societies organized in China and Budapest, Hungary  
C. L. Benson was appointed Assistant Secretary for the Youth Department
- 1914 Junior Society Lessons were prepared  
Morning Watch Calendars were developed in Danish-Norwegian, Swedish, and Chinese  
Australia began publishing their own Morning Watch Calendar  
Reading Course in Danish-Norwegian and Swedish languages  
Ella Iden-Edwards wrote a Junior Manual, which was published

Newly formed Church Officer's Gazette began to carry programs for senior and junior youth meetings

The first overseas convention of young people's workers met in Shanghai, China

- 1915 English Senior Bible Year began  
Korean Morning Watch first published  
Junior Standard of Attainment was begun  
An important council dealing with the rapidly developing work of the young people's department convened in St Helena, California  
J. F. Simon was appointed a Field Secretary  
Mrs. I. H. Evans became an office secretary
- 1916 First MV census in the history of Seventh-day Adventist Youth was launched  
MV Societies were reported in the Bahamas  
Union MV Departments were given responsibilities of the societies in their regions
- 1917 English Junior Bible Year begun  
English Primary Reading Course established  
French Reading Course begun in Haiti  
A special issue of The Youth's Instructor commemorated the 10th anniversary of MVs  
Ella Iden became an assistant secretary

There were many other new ideas and individuals involved in working with the youth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, including Arthur Spalding and Harriet Maxson Holt, who became the Junior Secretary (Director) of JMV's 1920–1928.

# Youth's Instructor

In the early years, the young Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders were involved in writing and printing materials for lay persons and pastors to help them understand and share the truths of the Bible. James and Ellen White, along with Joseph Bates, had cofounded the new denomination. Through much study, prayer, and dedicating their lives to Jesus Christ, the company of believers grew to be the church that it is today. The believers studied, prayed, and searched for the truth.

Ellen White was given insights on many issues, which helped them to know that their conclusions were right. She was impressed that young people needed materials also. Can't you just imagine that Ellen would have said, "James, I was told that you should write a paper for young people." James had no experience in publishing materials for young people and most likely thought he was too busy and didn't know where to begin. Finally, in faith, he stepped out and in 1852, James White began publishing *The Youth's Instructor*, the first paper for young people.

Though the magazine was for young people, hundreds and even thousands of adults read the magazine and kept in touch with the worldwide church through this medium.

The magazine contained articles to help guide youth to wise choices in life, Bible lessons, and character-building stories. *The Youth's Instructor* also contained stories for juniors, as there were no other materials for young people at that time. God blessed the efforts of these faithful individuals and *The Youth's Instructor* became an important part of Seventh-day Adventist family homes. *The Instructor*, as it was often called, was published for 118 years and only ceased publication in 1970, when *Insight* became the church's paper for a new generation of young people.

