

the magazine of Southern Adventist University

spring 2026

# columns



## Transforming Lives for Eternity

Southern's new mission statement is four simple words, rich in meaning. | page 12

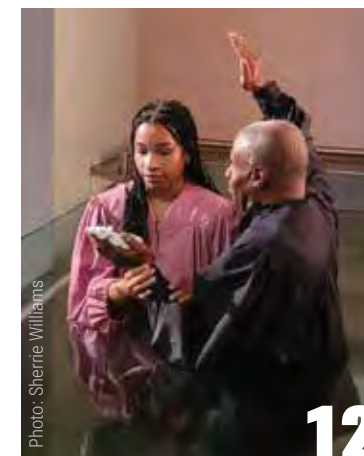


Photo: Katie McConnell

### For Our Neighbors

In honor of Martin Luther King Jr., 970 Southern students, employees, and alumni stepped into the Chattanooga community on January 19 to serve where help was needed most during the university's annual MLK Service Day. Volunteers tackled 54 projects, ranging from writing encouragement cards to building bunk beds and clearing trails. Here (from left), Daniela Sanchez, sophomore nursing major, Abby Smith, sophomore social work major, and Natalie Guerrero, sophomore nursing major, fill bags for displaced children at the Bags of Love project.

# contents



12



18



22

### features

- 12 | Transforming Lives for Eternity**  
Southern's new mission statement reflects the university's commitment to educate with Heaven in view.
- 16 | Opening Doors to Ministry**  
Religion students discover what it means to minister while being mentored as summer interns.
- 18 | Healing From the Inside Out**  
A nurse's calling becomes a mission for encouraging prevention, wholeness, and hope.
- 22 | Living Memoirs**  
The voices of student missionaries echo with faith, courage, and a calling worth remembering.
- 24 | Southern Cares**  
Southern students discover that service can change communities and each of them.

### departments

- 4** | Photo Essay
- 6** | Headlines
- 10** | Community Connection
- 26** | Beyond the Columns
- 30** | Department Spotlight

Cover: Kalicia Clements, associate professor in the School of Education, Psychology, and Counseling, prays with one of her students. Photo by Chino Zhao, junior nursing major.

### Connect with Southern Adventist University:

southern.edu • [youtube.com/SouthernAdventistUniversity](https://www.youtube.com/SouthernAdventistUniversity)  
[instagram.com/SouthernAdventistUniversity](https://www.instagram.com/SouthernAdventistUniversity)  
[facebook.com/SouthernAdventistUniversity](https://www.facebook.com/SouthernAdventistUniversity)

Volume 78 Number 1

**Executive Editor** Janell Hullquist, '05  
**Managing Editor** Becky Brooks, '03  
**Layout By** Crystal Preyer, '16  
**Alumni Relations Director** Cheryl Torres, '05  
**Editorial Assistants**  
 Isabella Dixon, current  
 Chehalis Eno, current  
 Julia Juler, current  
 Tina Frist Smith, '89 and '23

Photos contributed unless otherwise marked. Stock illustrations provided by iStockphoto.com.

**President** Ken Shaw, '80  
**Academic Administration** Robert Young  
**Financial Administration** Tom Verrill  
**Advancement** Ellen Hostettler  
**Enrollment Management** Jason Merryman, '99  
**Marketing and University Relations**  
 Ingrid Skantz, '90 and '16  
**Spiritual Life** Joseph Khabbaz  
**Student Development** Dennis Negrón, '85

**Send correspondence to**  
 columns@southern.edu

**Send address changes to**  
 Alumni Relations  
 Southern Adventist University  
 Post Office Box 370  
 Collegedale, TN 37315-0370  
 or email alumni@southern.edu

**Phone** 1.800.SOUTHERN  
**Fax** 423.236.1000  
**Email** marketing@southern.edu  
**Website** southern.edu

Scripture in this issue is taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

COLUMNS is the official magazine of Southern Adventist University, produced by Marketing and University Relations to provide information to alumni, Southern Union constituents, and other friends of the university. ©2026, Southern Adventist University.

## Preparing for Success

At Southern, students are prepared to excel beyond graduation—academically, professionally, and personally. Campus-wide rates of graduate school acceptance and employment in an area related to a students' chosen field remain strong at 95%, with the percentages rising to 98% and 99%, respectively, for business and nursing majors. Southern equips young adults for success in the workplace while nurturing growth in mind, body, and spirit.

**1:** Each semester, collegiates have the opportunity to network with participating organizations from a wide range of vocations during Meet the Firms and Graduate Schools. In Fall 2025, approximately 630 students met with 60 organizations during the event.

**2:** The Student Managed Asset Risk and Return Training (SMARRT) Fund reached a milestone of \$1 million in stock holdings in October 2025. The initial \$500,000 investment in 2019 remains part of the university's endowment, funding scholarships and student programs across the campus.

**3:** The new Miller Hall Nursing Simulation Center provides crucial training as learners develop skills and gain hands-on experience in nursing.

**4:** Last school year, undergraduates studying biology, business, and physics scored above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on comprehensive national tests, which measure students' critical knowledge, performance, and problem-solving skills.

**5:** Practical learning is a vital component across campus. In the Physical Therapist Assistant program, first-year scholars are paired with community members for weekly sessions that help them develop clinical and communication skills.

**6:** The Tutoring Center in McKee Library offers free tutoring to any Southern student, covering more than 70 upper- and lower-division courses.

**7:** Southern's thriving intramural program is a popular way for young adults to stay active and socialize outside the classroom, with a record 55% of students participating this school year.

**8:** At Southern, young adults have access to individual instruction and mentorship from their professors.

**9:** In a Fall 2025 campus survey, more than half of Southern undergraduates who responded report that they have engaged deeply with Scripture and experienced measurable spiritual growth.



1 Photo: Kaitie McConnell



2 Photo: Joelle Akiki



3 Photo: Kaitie McConnell



4 Photo: Joseph Hyde



5 Photo: Kaitie McConnell



6 Photo: Joseph Hyde



7 Photo: Yeju Gee



8 Photo: Chiao Zhao



9 Photo: Mila Bales

## Giving Day Donations Fund New Psych Pod

The psychology program within the School of Education, Psychology, and Counseling recently renovated its space to include a new student hub, a central area near professors' offices where students can gather to collaborate on homework or catch up with friends. The project was funded entirely through donations given during Southern's 2024 and 2025 annual Giving Days.

The newly named Psych Pod previously functioned almost exclusively as a workroom for teaching assistants. Now, the space features couches, desks, a snack bar, and a screen with laptop connections, making it a space for students to connect and share ideas.

"The new space feels so much homier," reflects Melissa Mendes, senior psychology major. "Because we can be here just studying or grabbing a snack, it's much easier to connect with professors as well as our classmates."

The updated Psych Pod is dedicated to the memory of Ruth Williams, affectionately known as "Mama Ruth," who served more than three decades as a professor. She was the longest-acting director of the program (between 1991-1995 and 2000-2022) prior to her retirement in 2022 and her passing the following year.

Cristy Pratt, '04, associate professor, studied under Williams during her undergraduate psychology studies at Southern and was later recruited by the beloved adviser to join the teaching faculty. She notes that professors Tron Wilder, '01, PhD, director of the psychology program, and Matt Tolbert, '01 and '05, PhD, were also students of Williams who benefited from her mentorship.

"Dr. Williams had a way with students and an ability to simultaneously connect with us and challenge us," Pratt shares. "What a mentor! Students would line up outside her office to talk to her. Because she encouraged a sense of belonging throughout the department, we strive to continue the vision she instilled in us by fostering the same type of environment she created." ■

— Chehalis Eno,  
senior English major



Faculty and staff attend the revitalized space's dedication in October.

## Computing Students Earn Global Recognition

Four May 2025 graduates from Southern's School of Computing presented their senior capstone papers at the Fall 2025 Future Technologies Conference (FTC) in Munich, Germany.

Computer science majors Meg Ermer, Abishur Moses-Pakkianathan, and Ivan Vakal, along with information technology major Edwin Regalado, earned the impressive honor. The achievement was particularly significant for Regalado, who became the first undergraduate information technology major from Southern to present a paper at a leading international technology conference.

Ermer and Moses-Pakkianathan collaborated on a paper exploring the role of artificial intelligence in studying, while Vakal and Regalado analyzed the business benefits of two virtualization software programs. Both research papers were submitted to the conference and accepted, despite rigorous competition from graduate students and industry professionals.

"I feel incredibly grateful and humbled," Vakal says. "This experience is a reminder of how faithful God is when we trust Him and work diligently."

In addition, a research paper by Corbin Weiss, '25, was accepted for presentation at the Computing Conference 2026 in London, England. Over the past four years, Southern



Students in the School of Computing learn the value of conducting research.

students have presented their research at several prestigious international events, including FTC 2022 and 2024, Computing Conference 2023, and the Intelligent Systems and Applications Conference (IntelliSys) 2023 and 2024. At IntelliSys 2024, Ryan Downs, '24, and Daryl Illangovan, '25, won the Best Presentation Award for their research on an advanced technology designed to combat AI misuse.

Professor Harvey Alférez, PhD, who teaches in the School of Computing and directs Southern's Center for Innovation and Research in Computing on campus, says, "The Holy Spirit guided us to work on these projects. It's amazing how all the dots connect and the pieces fit together when you put everything in His hands." ■

— Isabella Dixon,  
sophomore English major

## » by the numbers

Read full stories and find more news at [southern.edu/news](https://southern.edu/news).

30

years have passed since Southern's Graduate Studies program began in 1996.

4,861

pipes are part of the Anton Heiller Memorial Organ in Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists. It's been 40 years since it was dedicated on April 26, 1986.

11

religion professors preached for the North American Division's Pentecost 2025 initiative, joining more than 5,200 Adventist schools and churches.

\$1.36M

was awarded to Southern through a TRIO federal grant for Student Support Services, funding additional services to help students navigate college.

1,476

student workers were employed on campus during the Fall 2025 semester.

50

states were represented by Southern's undergraduate and graduate student body in Winter 2026!

## Design Student Wins Branding Contest for City of Collegedale

Two students and a professor from Southern's School of Visual Art and Design (SVAD) were finalists in the rebranding contest launched by the City of Collegedale, home to the university.

Laurissa Mancía, junior graphic design major, won first place and a \$2,500 prize on February 17. Runners up were Joe La Com, '05, MFA, associate professor in SVAD, and Larnell Samuel, senior graphic design major.

"It was a difficult choice, but we agreed on one that we felt would best represent our city for years to come," says Morty Lloyd, mayor of Collegedale. "I appreciate the faculty and the caliber of students that Southern produces. Well done!"

Led by Staff Planner Jason Allin, city commissioners and leaders sought a cohesive visual identity that reflected

Collegedale's spirit, history, landmarks, and community values. Contestants were asked to provide a full logo and branding package for the competition, which was launched last November and open to all students and residents of the city.

Entries were judged by a panel of city staff, local artists, and community representatives — with an eye toward creativity, originality, relevance to the city's identity, versatility across print and digital media, and use of color and typography in the design.

Mancía's designs will now be featured in City of Collegedale signage as well as on its website, promotional materials, and merchandise. ■

— Tina (Frist) Smith, '89 and '23, communication manager



Laurissa Mancía, junior graphic design major and winner of Collegedale's branding contest, holds her brand book.

## Southern Performs at Renowned Lincoln Center

Southern's Symphony Orchestra and Voices of Southern performed at Lincoln Center, one of the world's most renowned concert venues, on December 21 in David Geffen Hall, home to the New York Philharmonic.

"Performing on the same stage where so many notable musicians have performed was an incredible privilege for our students. I'm glad this could be part of their experience at Southern," shares Laurie Redmer Cadwallader, associate professor of music, who conducted the concert. "I am so proud of the drive, determination, and engagement our students showed during the weeks of preparation for

the Lincoln Center concert. I was also thrilled to witness the professionalism with which they all approached the rehearsals and the concert itself. They were truly outstanding."

The trip allowed students to represent Southern on a national stage while gaining firsthand experience in a professional performance setting. Opportunities like this reflect the School of Music's emphasis on combining rigorous academic preparation with meaningful performance experiences beyond the classroom.

"My wife and I were able to visit with excited choir members backstage before the concert, and they were

delighted for the opportunity to perform at Lincoln Center," says Ken Shaw, '80, EdD, university president. "I'm so appreciative that our conductor and students took time out of their Christmas vacation to share their God-given talents in New York City."

Southern's ensembles perform regularly on campus, throughout the region, and on international concert tours, but the Lincoln Center appearance stands out as a distinctive moment, serving as both a capstone to the fall semester and a memorable highlight of students' education. ■

— Becky (Baerg) Brooks, '03, editorial manager

## Communication Courses Expand Internationally



Ronald Stone (right), vice chancellor of Fulton Adventist University, meets with Gus Martin, director of Online Campus for Southern.

The School of Journalism and Communication (SJC) formed a partnership with Fulton Adventist University (FAU) in Suva, Fiji, to help students in the Pacific region enhance their communication skills.

"We are reaching out beyond our Collegedale campus and our country's borders to teach courses on the other side of the globe," says Rachel Williams-Smith, PhD and EdD, dean of SJC.

Southern now offers to Fulton students eight-week sessions online courses, such as Writing for the Media, Communication Theory, and Social Media Strategies, among others.

More than 70 students on Southern's campus majored in journalism and communication disciplines for the Fall 2025 semester, with 14 Fulton students — from Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Tonga, Gilbert Islands, and Solomon Islands — enrolled for the first session of online communication courses.

Nellie Manuca, FAU registrar, shares that feedback from Fulton students has been overwhelmingly positive. "This joint initiative has introduced advanced digital tools into communication courses, enabling students to monitor their progress in real time and remain actively engaged throughout their studies," she says. "It is transforming the learning experience for our students and represents a significant step forward in enhancing education through both technological innovation and regional collaboration." ■

— Julia Juler, junior English major

## [news briefs]

### Top-Ranked Program

Southern's adult-gerontology nurse practitioner program ranked No. 4 in Tennessee for 2026 at RegisteredNursing.org, making it a great fit for students who want to specialize in caring for aging adults.

### Ruth McKee School of Business

The new business building is on track to open in Fall 2026! To learn more about the project, visit [southern.edu/gobusiness](https://southern.edu/gobusiness).

### New Home for Math and Computing

Renovations are underway to turn the vacated Collegedale Academy Elementary building into the new home of Southern's Mathematics Department and School of Computing. Renamed Hefferlin Hall in honor of beloved professor Ray Hefferlin, PhD, it is tentatively expected to open in Fall 2027.

### Alumni Gather in New York

Southern's Alumni Association met up in New York City for a concert in Steinway Hall, a tour of the Steinway factory, and an alumni dinner in March. Our university holds the All-Steinway School designation.

### PTA Program Community Service

In March, students in the Physical Therapist Assistant program completed multiple community service projects in the area. They conducted ADA assessments, including reports of strengths and recommendations, at the local organizations Audobon Acres and Beacon Academy.

### Education Earns Murray Award

The School of Education, Psychology, and Counseling received the 2025 Frank Murray Leadership Recognition for Continuous Improvement. Presented by the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the award recognizes a perfect accreditation score with no stipulations or areas for improvement.

## Promoting Confidence and Connections

By Tina (Frist) Smith, '89 and '23, communication manager

Whether sliding across a zipline or learning the basics of caving, community participants in Southern's Adventure Program find unique ways to cultivate critical thinking and develop tenets of cooperation and resilience within safe outdoor environments.

"Life-changing experiences are the goal," says Tyler Hedges, '19, who serves as program director. "We hope that each session led by our staff leaves a person stronger, more confident, and more connected with others."

Housed under the School of Health and Kinesiology, the program first began offering a multifaceted approach to nurturing fun and unity between people, their Creator, and nature in 2005. Groups are required to work together to communicate and complete tasks, such as navigating a challenge course, ascending the 50-foot natural Goliath Wall on campus, or hiking a portion of the Appalachian Trail. Custom experiences offer hands-on education, executive leadership training, team building, high adventure, therapeutic adventure, and summer day camps.

Another important component of the program is that students majoring in outdoor leadership gain practical experience in the field while training under the mentorship of seasoned professionals as part of their education.

"A key aspect of the Adventure Program is connecting with our local community as we train competent outdoor professionals," says Judy Sloan, PhD, dean of the School of Health and Kinesiology. "Some activities can be unnerving and adrenaline-building, so there needs to be a relationship of trust between our team and guests. Southern is all about the blend of education and service, so this program offers ways for us to give back while demonstrating a Christlike approach to life through positivity, support, and love for nature."



Adventure Program participants try out Southern's ropes course.

In the last two years alone, nearly 1,500 individuals have gone through the ropes course at the Outdoor Education Center on the south side of campus. Coupled with a successful operations review, the facility completed a positive annual inspection covering all elements, gear, and hardware to ensure compliance with the Association for Challenge Course Technology's safety standards. The resulting recertification allows the university to maintain an operating permit through the state of Tennessee.

Additionally, recovery groups have logged more than 125 therapy sessions in 15 months, representing a significant uptick in participation from this niche audience.

Clients benefiting from environmental education include hundreds of students from local as well as out-of-town schools. Proceeds from the annual McKee Southern 6 Trail Race each February provide adventure programming for youth from Title 1 schools in the area, including Chattanooga Charter School of Excellence Middle School, Sale Creek Elementary and High School, and Pleasant Grove Elementary.

"Our seventh-graders loved their ropes course experience at Southern—a first for many of our scholars!" says Lisa Johnson, school counselor at Chattanooga Charter. "Students enjoyed the excitement of the courses and felt a sense of great accomplishment when they overcame their fears to try new challenges. Thanks to Tyler and staff, our whole group felt welcome, safe, and supported."

After graduating from Southern, Hedges served five years as an athletic director at an academy in North Carolina before returning to lead the Adventure Program. "Being back feels like coming home because of my memorable and impactful experiences here as a student," he says. "Those are the reasons I'm committed to helping individuals connect, face challenges, and grow through the thriving and supportive environment of adventure programming."

Visit [southern.edu/columns](https://southern.edu/columns) for more information or to explore a group booking. ■



### Fit for Eternity

Unveiled outside Hulsey Wellness Center last November, the long-anticipated Fit for Eternity sculpture depicts Jesus jogging alongside two college students as a reminder that faith and well-being go hand in hand. The donor-funded bronze piece was championed by the late Phil Garver, '70, PhD, dean emeritus of the School of Health and Kinesiology, and created by Victor Issa, a prominent Seventh-day Adventist sculptor. It invites students and visitors alike to remember that God is always with them. Read more at [southern.edu/columns](https://southern.edu/columns).

# TRANSFORMING LIVES FOR *Eternity*

By Becky (Baerg) Brooks, '03, editorial manager



Photo: Staff

**SOUTHERN'S NEW MISSION STATEMENT REFLECTS THE UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT TO EDUCATE WITH HEAVEN IN VIEW.**

## WHAT IT *Means* FOR US



KEN SHAW, '80, EDD, PRESIDENT

"Every decision we make—academic, spiritual, and relational—is about shaping lives that matter not only for a career or a lifetime, but for eternity."



LASHAWN HORTON, '90, PHD, PROFESSOR

"I feel it is my duty to present the gospel and give students opportunities to act on what they hear. It is not a 'maybe' I will share Jesus; it is a duty for me."



ADAM HECK, PHD, PROFESSOR

"Becoming an adult is tough, and there will be mistakes. I hope students leave this place knowing that God is with them through those mistakes and loves them intensely."



LISA DILLER, '96, PHD, PROFESSOR

"As a historian, I'm equipping students to see others as fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God and to love and understand the cultures that have shaped who they are."



MICHAEL FINCH, PHD, PROFESSOR

"When I look at my students, I see world-changers as well as those who may be struggling. I hope I give the world-changers what they need and build up those who are struggling."



SUSY GARCIA, '00, SUPPORT NURSE

"Whenever I speak with students, I pray they would feel deeply loved, encouraged, and affirmed, knowing they do not have to walk alone."

Near the end of the fall semester last year, a student approached Kalicia Clements, associate professor in Southern's School of Education, Psychology, and Counseling, with a small but troubling concern. She had lost something important. They paused together to offer a simple, earnest prayer, asking Jesus to keep the item safe and help her find it.

When classes resumed in January, the student returned with unexpected news. She had found the missing item. For Clements, the moment marked more than an answered prayer. After class, the student shared a much larger request and asked if they could pray together again. Moments like this, she believes, reflect the deeper purpose of her work: strengthening students' faith in ways that shape their lives now—and for eternity.

These interactions happen across Southern's campus every day. Students' lives are transformed as they experience Christ-centered learning, nurturing friendships, engaged faculty, and a campus committed to faith and service.



Photo: Chino Zhao

Joseph Khabbaz (left), PhD, chaplain and vice president for Spiritual Life, baptizes Alden Thacker, junior computer science major, in January.

## ENDURING PURPOSE

Southern's Board of Trustees adopted a new mission statement in October 2025, articulating the university's enduring purpose as "Transforming Lives for Eternity."

The statement provides a memorable expression of commitment, while the accompanying narrative preserves the essential pillars that define Southern: *Dedicated to the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Southern Adventist University transforms lives for eternity by nurturing academic and personal excellence, encouraging a deep faith, cultivating a spirit of service, and fostering wholeness in mind, body, and spirit.*

"At a time when higher education is often pressured to define success narrowly, this mission clearly centers Southern on Christ, purpose, and long-term impact. It reminds us why

we exist and anchors us amid rapid cultural and institutional change," says Ken Shaw, president. "Academic excellence and spiritual development are inseparable. Academic excellence sharpens the mind, while spiritual development shapes character and purpose. Together, they prepare students to think critically, live faithfully, and serve meaningfully."

The new wording concisely captures the long-held belief that education not only prepares students for their contributions in the workplace but also shapes who they become. It affirms that academic, spiritual, and relational experiences matter far beyond a student's time on campus, with that perspective shaping how the university teaches, mentors, worships, and serves.





Students lead songs during Friday night vespers at Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists.

Photo: Chino Zhao

## A LIVED REALITY

While words within the mission statement are new, its substance is not. For generations, Southern has embraced a wholistic understanding of education.

“Southern has always educated the whole person: mind, body, and spirit. This mission simply gives clear language to a lived reality we see every day in our classrooms, worship spaces, service opportunities, and student relationships,” Shaw says.

This commitment is visible across campus: in classrooms, where academic rigor is paired with ethical reflection; in the wellness center, where students gain strength through perseverance; in worship services, where students grow in understanding of biblical principles; and in service opportunities, where learning connects with compassion.

As the university with the largest Adventist undergraduate enrollment in North America, Southern’s administration was pleased to see the results of a recently released study

affirming that Adventist higher education significantly strengthens the faith and spiritual commitment of young adults in the church.

The study, conducted by Strategic Resource Partners for the Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities, was shared at the association’s year-end meetings in October 2025. After surveying Adventist alumni from Adventist colleges and universities in North America, along with Adventist alumni who attended non-Adventist institutions, the research identified 31 core benefits, grouped into five major themes (see facing page), where alumni from Adventist-colleges consistently reported stronger outcomes than those who attended non-Adventist institutions. The themes revealed that Adventist universities offer an environment that is not only educational but also transformational.

Students themselves are evidence of this reality. Noah Esua, freshman computer science major, was baptized in

December 2025 after his first semester on campus. “My experience at Southern has been filled with so many life-changing moments,” he says. “I met so many individuals who have changed the way I view God, for the better.”

## THE LONG VIEW

“Transforming Lives for Eternity” lengthens the view of education’s impact, asking students to consider not only what careers they will pursue after graduation but also who they will become. Whether in healthcare, education, business, or ministry, alumni carry with them an understanding of work as a calling—a way to live out their passions and God’s purpose in their lives every day.

As Southern moves forward, its mission statement serves as both anchor and guide, grounding the university in what matters most and shaping lives that reflect purpose, faith, and service—now and for eternity. ■

# FIVE CORE BENEFITS OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION

Survey statistics show a striking comparison between alumni of Adventist colleges and those from non-Adventist schools, highlighting the strengths of Adventist universities like Southern.

## 1. FAITH

Worship Engagement **1.4x** Deepened Spirituality **>2x**

Christ-Centered Learning **8x**

## 2. MENTORING

Values and ethics integrated in class are more than

**1.6x**  
GREATER

Faculty engaged in student success are more than

**1.7x**  
GREATER

Faculty who shaped their spiritual lives are nearly

**4.5x**  
GREATER

## 3. WHOLISTIC GROWTH

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WHOLE PERSON IS NEARLY

**1.5x**  
GREATER

INTEGRATION OF FAITH WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF LIFE IS MORE THAN

**2x**  
GREATER

## 4. FRIENDSHIP

Friends who strengthened their walk with Christ:

**1.6x**  
greater

Friends who attended worship together:

**2x**  
greater

## 5. MISSION

SENSE OF PURPOSE MORE THAN

**1.2x**  
GREATER

MORAL PRINCIPLES NEARLY

**1.3x**  
GREATER

SENSE OF GOD’S CALLING NEARLY

**2x**  
GREATER



Associate Professor Joe La Com (left), '05, MFA, works with Collins Fortuchang, junior web and new media design major.

Photo: Katie McCommel



Associate Professor Stephanie Guster talks with a student in Summerour Hall.

Lulu Chileya (left), sophomore biology major, is baptized by Manuel Gomez, '14, associate chaplain.



Photo: Sherrie Williams

# Opening Doors to Ministry

by Isabella Dixon, sophomore English major

Religion students discover what it means to shepherd God's flock while being mentored and challenged as summer interns in leadership.

Each summer, Southern's School of Religion invites theology and pastoral care majors to experience leading a church firsthand through the Summer in Ministry internship program.

For two months or more, students train under the mentorship of experienced pastors at participating Seventh-day Adventist churches across the country. In addition to gaining invaluable ministerial experience,

students receive scholarships to support their continued studies at Southern.

Program participation tripled during Summer 2025 to include 24 student interns. Greg King, '81, PhD, dean of the School of Religion, is grateful for the expansion. "This increased momentum is a blessing from God, opening the necessary doors to allow for training more pastors for the future," he says.

**Yeju Gee**  
senior theology major  
Opelika, Alabama

"Every interaction I had with church members was priceless, but there was a group of teenagers I got to know personally. They started to open up to me and would come and sit with me during services. They were engaged and asked questions about the Bible, and several were baptized this summer! Seeing changes in those kids throughout the summer was the best part of the internship."



**Brandon Gonie**  
junior theology major  
Scranton, Pennsylvania

"I really liked getting the hands-on experience of ministry. The best part was building relationships with families through home visitations and Bible studies."



**Genesis Tchakarov**  
junior theology major  
Calhoun, Georgia

"My supervising pastors were intentional with placing responsibility on me where I could learn and grow with little pressure."



**Skyler Perla**  
junior theology major  
El Mirage, Arizona

"It was exciting to get involved with many of the members' lives and help in more intentional ways, because my job was entirely dedicated to service."



**Seth Parker**  
sophomore theology major  
Nashville, Tennessee

"The internship gives you a better perspective of how the ministry works and prepares you for the future."



**Larissa DeOliveira**  
senior theology major  
Ooltewah, Tennessee

"The pastors were empowering and helped me to thrive and feel like a pastor myself."





# HEALING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

By Chehalis Eno, senior English major

A nurse's calling becomes a mission for healing—one that goes beyond treating symptoms and encourages lasting change through prevention, wholeness, and hope.



Lyndsay Wright, '25, DNP, teaches the benefits of lifestyle medicine to a new generation of nurses in Maryland.

Photo: Notre Dame of Maryland University

Lyndsay Wright, '25, DNP, had just started nursing school in Maryland when the value of lifestyle medicine came into focus for her.

"I was assessing my mom for an assignment and found really concerning signs and symptoms," she explains. Her mother soon visited a doctor and was diagnosed with Stage 3 kidney disease along with diabetes, high cholesterol, and hypertension.

Wanting a solution, Wright discovered research promoting lifestyle medicine as a way to manage her mother's symptoms. This medical speciality focuses on preventative care revolving around six key pillars of health: optimal nutrition, physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, connectedness, and substance avoidance. Filling a crucial niche in nursing, lifestyle medicine provides patients with a chance to take control of their own well-being, even in the face of chronic illnesses.

Southern was the first university in the nation to offer a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) with an emphasis in lifestyle medicine, and today it remains one of two universities that do. This unique fact is what drew Wright to enroll in the School of Nursing for her doctorate in 2023.

## SEEING PATTERNS

"When we found out about my mom's diagnoses, I went home and tore out everything in the cabinets," Wright remembers. "I got my mom to quit smoking, started walking with her, helped her find a less stressful job, and began building good habits in her life."

Now, more than 10 years later, her mother's health has significantly improved. "Since 2022, she's been off medications and cleared of her health issues," Wright shares. "I think this experience was God's way of telling me



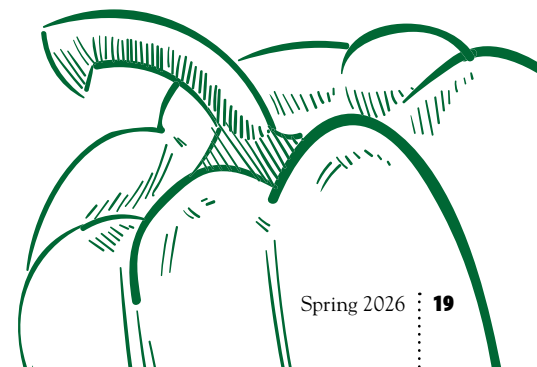
Southern's DNP in lifestyle medicine was the perfect fit for Wright's goals.

that nursing was the right path for me, because it opened my eyes to the struggles of my mom and others like her."

After completing her bachelor's degree in Maryland, Wright observed similar struggles in patients at the hospital where she began working. "I realized there are so many people, just like my mom, who don't know how to manage their chronic conditions, and it made me feel powerless because there was only so much I could do to educate them during a 12-hour shift," she explains.

Those feelings, along with her love for teaching clinical groups that visited the hospital, led Wright to pursue a master's degree and shift her focus to nursing education. "I could help more people if I not only took care of people at the bedside but also taught nursing students. That really inspired me to go back to school," Wright says.

She graduated in 2022 and began teaching at her alma mater, Notre Dame of Maryland University.





## TARGETING ALTERNATIVES

As she explored the possibility of pursuing a terminal degree, Wright's dean suggested Southern because of its DNP with an emphasis in lifestyle medicine. Primarily online, the program's only in-person requirement is a multi-day summer intensive, so the format would work well for Wright to continue working in Maryland.

"It was just a perfect fit," Wright says, noting how choosing Southern was probably the best decision she ever made. "Each one of my classes directly tied back to one or more of the pillars of lifestyle medicine."

Lilly Tryon, DNP, professor in the School of Nursing, explains: "Through courses such as Exercise Modalities, Culinary Medicine, and Psychosocial Health, graduates from the lifestyle medicine DNP program at Southern are prepared to assess, prescribe, educate, and coach patients and groups in positive health behavior change. We hope to empower our

students to treat the whole person—not just symptoms—and address the root causes of chronic diseases. We also hope they are inspired to point their patients and clients to God as the One who 'restores them to health and heals their wounds' (Jeremiah 30:17)."

In addition to lifestyle medicine, Southern also offers DNP emphases in acute care adult nurse practitioner (NP), primary care adult NP, MBA healthcare administration, nurse educator, primary care family NP, primary care psychiatric mental health NP, and general DNP.

Wright found herself at home in the program. "The faculty didn't just connect to me as a student but also as a fellow educator," she explains. "They often asked me to apply the information I was learning, both in clinical and classroom settings."



## SHARING SOLUTIONS

During her cumulative project, Wright decided to put learning into practice one step further, incorporating a lifestyle medicine seminar into the Fundamentals of Nursing courses that she teaches and assessing the outcomes on student behavior.

Andrew Richards, PhD, nursing professor at Southern, mentored Wright throughout her project. "We focused Lyndsay's work on teaching nursing students, because healthy nurses are much better prepared to guide and advise their patients," he explains.

In Southern's own program, healthy habits are encouraged through a nutrition course as well as specific content about the value of and techniques for self-care in students' Fundamentals of Nursing class.

Wright presented her findings from her DNP project at a conference themed "The Heart of Healthcare" for nursing faculty at Kettering Health in Ohio, the Maryland Nurses Association Annual Convention, and Southern's DNP seminar last summer. "She definitely has a passion for using lifestyle medicine to improve lives," Richards says. "Her dedication to the project shines through in the final product."

After Wright marched in Southern's Summer 2025 Commencement, she reflected on how the program supported her every step of the way. "I'm so appreciative of all the faculty," she says. "I've had the best experience, and I felt so cared for throughout the whole program. This made earning my terminal degree so much more fulfilling."

Now, Wright incorporates lifestyle medicine into every class she teaches at Notre Dame. "My students know that self-care and the six pillars have to be the foundation before they can add anything else," Wright notes. "College was a time of transformation for me, and I hope that my students are also transformed."

Southern's Doctor of Nursing Practice in lifestyle medicine—with its exceptional perspective that focuses on the whole person, both in and out of medical care—allowed Wright to bring her aspirations to fruition. For her, the School of Nursing's program marked the perfect way to round out an educational experience forever marked by the power of healing, from the inside out, through a healthier lifestyle. ■

# PILLARS OF LIFESTYLE MEDICINE



### OPTIMAL NUTRITION

Poor overall diet quality is the leading single cause of premature death in America. The American College of Lifestyle Medicine recommends an eating pattern based on a variety of minimally processed vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.



### RESTORATIVE SLEEP

Unhealthy sleep is associated with a host of health issues, including increased risk of dementia and cardiovascular disease. Getting 7-9 hours of quality sleep each night powerfully supports chronic disease treatment and overall well-being.



### CONNECTEDNESS

Meaningful interactions are a key factor in happiness, longevity and the treatment of chronic diseases. Strong social connections, along with a sense of purpose affect physical, mental, and emotional health, and can even reduce the risk of depression and dementia.



### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is essential to offset a sedentary lifestyle, manage chronic conditions, and support overall health. Moderate aerobic and muscle-strengthening activity help prevent issues like osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.



### STRESS MANAGEMENT

Chronic stress can exacerbate symptoms of cardiovascular issues, depression, insulin resistance, and others. Stress management strategies are crucial for overall health as well as in the treatment of chronic disease.

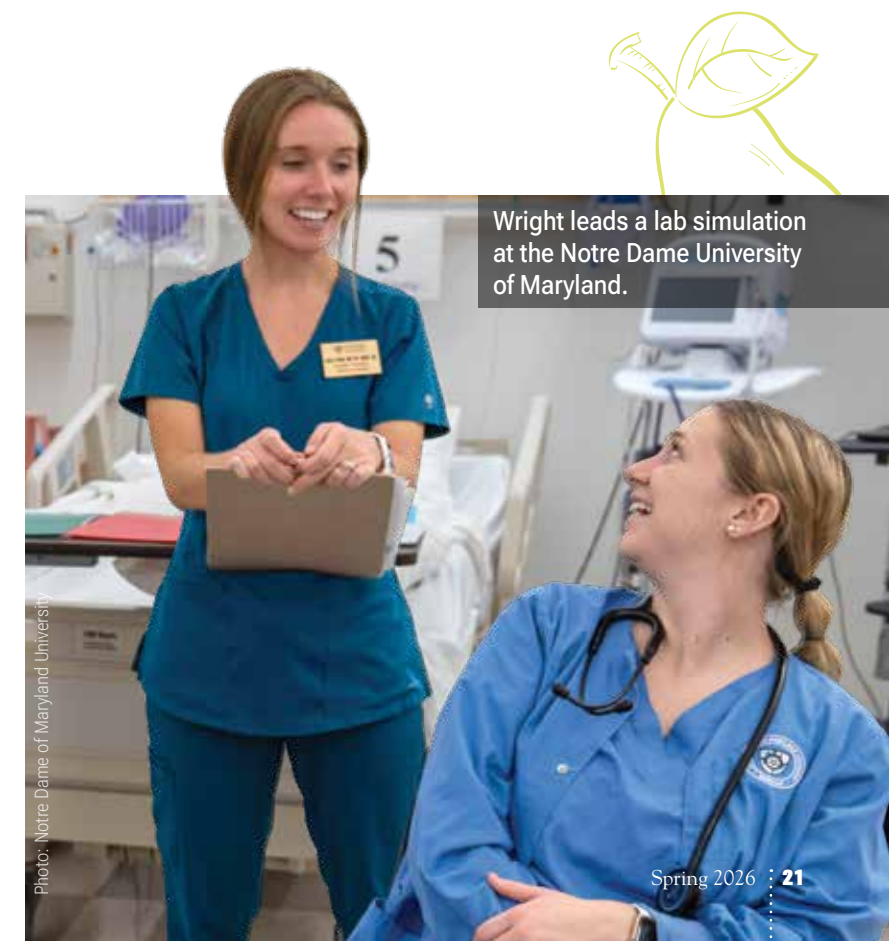


### SUBSTANCE AVOIDANCE

Risky substances like alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs dramatically increase the odds of death and chronic disease while also worsening the ill effects of many ailments. Avoiding risky substances is an essential element of health restoration.



Wright (right) stands with her mom at her 2025 graduation from Southern's DNP program.



Wright leads a lab simulation at the Notre Dame University of Maryland.

Photo: Notre Dame of Maryland University

# LIVING MEMOIRS

By Bethany Howard, '18,  
public services librarian,  
and Chehalis Eno,  
senior English major

Voices of Southern's student missionaries echo with faith, courage, and a calling worth remembering.

For nearly six decades, Southern students have answered calls to serve as student missionaries around the world. Now, thanks to a recent project by McKee Library called *Living Memoirs: An Oral History Collection*, their stories are being preserved for generations to come.

The initiative captures firsthand accounts from Southern's student missionaries dating back to the program's inception in 1967, including the joys, challenges, and spiritual growth that come from sharing Christ's love across cultures.

"We wanted to let our students and alumni tell their experiences of the mission field authentically in their own words," shares Bethany (Thornton) Howard, '18, public services librarian, who led the project.

Under Howard's guidance and with technical support from Research Services Librarian Jessica Spears, dozens of missionaries were interviewed by graduate research assistants Ali Leonor, '22, and Savanna (Gregory) Stowell, '24, to create a collection that highlights how missionary service shapes the lives, faith, and callings of those who participate.



Kasey Castellanos in Bolivia



Student missionaries in Palau

## BEING TRANSFORMED

The interviews capture deeply personal accounts of former missionaries, many of whom credit those experiences with deepening their faith and setting them on lifelong paths of mission work or service-oriented careers.

Harry Nelson, '70, whose story marks one of the earliest in the collection, credits his time as a missionary in Borneo with shaping his entire life's direction.

"The rich experience I had ... was just a stepping stone into not only enjoying a professional career as a medical missionary but also being a supporter for our worldwide Seventh-day Adventist work," he says. "I value my student missionary experiences as foundational."

Marty Miller, '83, accepted a call to teach on Majuro in the Marshall Islands during the early 1980s. Miller remembers the diversity of learning abilities in one classroom. "It was pretty staggering," he says. "Teaching was not easy, but it was one of the best experiences of my life." Miller credits his career in education to his formative experience on Majuro.

Nearly a decade later, Lori (Pettibone) Futcher, '94, taught at the same school as Miller, and her experience on the island also provided life lessons. "It was a chance for me to really grow up and mature," she explains. "It solidified that God did have a purpose for me, and I began to understand more about listening to the Holy Spirit."

## CHANGING LIVES TODAY

The collection also includes more recent voices, such as junior business administration major Kasey Castellanos. Early in her life, her younger brother passed away due to medical complications, which took a toll on her spiritual life. Though she reconnected with God in high school,



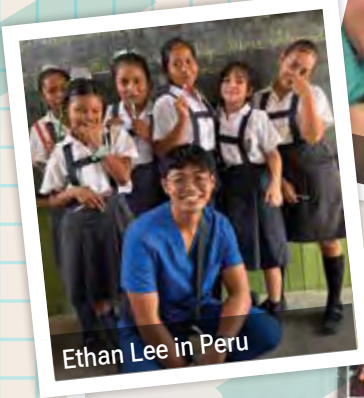
Abby Pagotelis in Pohnpei



Troy Poff in India



Aaron Beltran in Kosrae



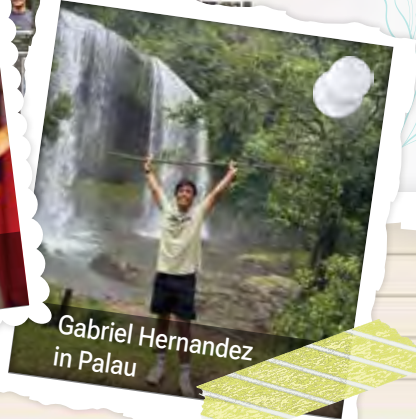
Ethan Lee in Peru



Kylie Root in Pohnpei



Liz Hilario at a Student Missions Vespers



Gabriel Hernandez in Palau



Addona Andio in Honduras



Photos: Staff and Office of Ministry and Missions

Castellanos still felt something was missing. A mission year to begin her college experience changed everything. Serving at Familia Feliz, a Bolivian boarding school for orphaned and abused children, she learned to rely fully on God.

"There were days when I was so physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted that I had to ask Him to give me the strength to go play with kindergarteners for hours," Castellanos says. "It's a lot easier now to ask God for help and for strength than before I went abroad."

For Castellanos, some of the most meaningful moments came from forming strong connections with the children. "One student told me she never really felt like she was relating to anyone on staff until she met

me," Castellanos recalls. "That's when I realized that my time in Bolivia wasn't for nothing. My tears and laughter were all part of God using me to bless those kids."

## PRESERVING A SPIRITUAL HEARTBEAT

Interviews in *Living Memoirs: An Oral History Collection* are preserved through audio recordings and transcripts, offering an inspiring glimpse into Southern's mission tradition and ensuring these experiences continue to impact future generations.

Visit [southern.edu/columns](https://southern.edu/columns) to listen to these powerful testimonies. ■

# Southern Cares

**With open hands and willing hearts, Southern students discover that service doesn't just change communities—it also changes each one of them.**

By Chehalis Eno, senior English major

Students at Southern are personally experiencing the words of Jesus in Acts 20:25: “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” thanks to the newest community outreach initiative on campus.

Launched through the Office of Ministry and Missions (OMM) in November 2025, Southern Cares made its official debut at Morning Pointe Senior Living in nearby Chattanooga, where 30 students and other volunteers shared a Sabbath afternoon church service with residents at the facility for the first time since the pandemic.

“We learn about Jesus at vespers and in classrooms, and we talk about Him in our small groups, but students need opportunities to live out the biblical principles of service to our neighbors,” says Joseph Khabbaz, vice president for Spiritual Life and chaplain of the university. “Southern Cares is one small way we can bring God’s love into the experience of the elderly, among others.”

Claire Jorgensen, freshman political science major, found excitement in continuing a tradition from her home church, where she often joined fellow members on Sabbath afternoons to perform music and engage with nursing home residents. “I love serving on Sabbath, because it brings the day’s joy to those who may not believe in or follow a day-of-rest tradition,” she explains.



Southern students embrace the opportunity to share God’s love with neighbors.



Sabbath afternoon outreach is a ministry to local seniors and a blessing to students.

“One woman told me, ‘I want to adopt this student,’” Khabbaz shares. “It brought her so much joy to get to connect with a young woman who reminded her that she matters.”

Before the visit, volunteers were given a resource with hymn lyrics and suggestions for how to interact with residents. Upon arrival at the assisted living facility, students led out in singing hymns, specifically asking residents for song requests. Jonathan Wolff, sophomore theology major, shared a brief inspirational message, and then students visited with residents individually.

Jorgensen was profoundly impacted by her experience conversing with a resident who had recently been admitted to the facility. “He reflected on his life with such fondness, because he chose to do things that he found important rather than prioritizing convenience or wealth,” Jorgensen says. “As a student who’s just starting that journey, I found his perspective so valuable.”

Romany Moussa, a senior biochemistry major who graduated in December ’25, found the service meaningful. “Being able to connect with residents reminded me that their experiences will be my own someday,” he reflects. “I found myself thinking about the importance of appreciating small moments and feeling contentment for what I have now.” Moussa appreciated being treated like a “grandchild” of the residents, who were eager to give advice and recount life experiences.

Organized service events and outreach such as Southern Cares allow university students to build empathy and discover a deeper sense of calling. “Here at Southern, we want to be a campus that goes beyond our walls,” Khabbaz explains. “Visiting shut-ins and giving students the chance to build those intergenerational connections is a really powerful way to accomplish that goal.”

“As we were wrapping up, the man I was speaking with said how nice it was to chat and wished us all well in our college experiences,” remembers Jorgensen. “He seemed so happy to have visitors, and I was grateful to be there, too.”

“I believe we were able to share profound joy with others, reminding the residents they are not alone, while also being blessed ourselves,” Moussa says. “Putting yourself out there can feel like a challenge at first, but don’t be scared—once you do it, you’ll love it, and whatever you give will return to you tenfold.”

“The students did a tremendous job, and we consider our first Southern Cares event to be a huge success!” Khabbaz notes. Based on feedback from the volunteers, he expects that the event will be repeated every semester.

Each service experience coordinated through Southern encourages participants to connect with the mission of Jesus, whether volunteering for nonprofits, ministering at local churches, or helping out in communities. ■



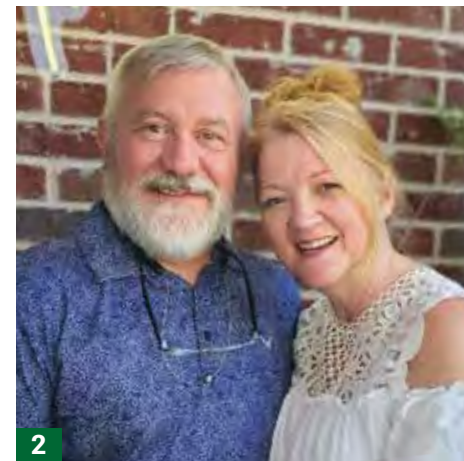
The Southern Cares initiative helps build connections between students and their community.



Romany Moussa (right), ’25, talks with a resident during the event.

## Alumni Notes

**'60s** **1** Jerry Gladson, '65, PhD, recently published his 18<sup>th</sup> book, *An Introduction to the Five Scrolls: Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (Gorgias Press, 2025). Of special interest to biblical scholars and pastors, this 500-page work is currently the most extensive study of this literature published in English. Gladson is Emeritus Professor of Religion and Integrative Studies at Richmond Graduate University in Georgia.



**'80s** **2** Rhonda (Fulghum) McGuire, '83, married her high school sweetheart, Greg, after graduation, and the couple spent two years living in Germany. Rhonda's nursing degree from Southern served her well, and she enjoyed her work as a nurse in the emergency and occupational health fields. Now semi-retired, she sings with the North Carolina Symphony and looks forward to performing at Carnegie Hall this summer. Their daughter is currently in medical school.



**3** Annabelle (Kendall) Randall, '84 and '86, is working at Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center in Columbia, Maryland, as a constant observer, monitoring at-risk patients to prevent injury. She is celebrating 22 years of marriage to her husband, Forest, and they are blessed to have eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

**'00s** **4** Jeremiah Adigun, '00, PhD, has recently started a new position as a professor of cybersecurity and information technology at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, Tennessee.



**5** Michael Campbell, '01, co-authored the recently published book *A Global History of Seventh-day Adventists*, which is the first major comprehensive history of Adventism in more than 25 years. Last year, he led the editorial team for the *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism*. His wife, Heidi (Olson) Campbell, '02, recently completed her PhD in history at Baylor University in Texas. In addition to helping with Pathfinders at the Spencerville Adventist Church in Maryland, the couple also proposed new Pathfinder honors on the history of the Sabbath and the Great Controversy.

**6** Saleisha (Williams) Averhart, '06, enjoys cooking for her family and has shared recipes and tips on her blog at [thenaturalfoodie.com](http://thenaturalfoodie.com). She recently published a cookbook, *Tasting My Way Through the Caribbean*, which has already appeared on Amazon's Best Sellers list in the Barbados & Trinidad & Tobago Travel category.



**'10s** **7** Xander Upham, '11 and '12, founded Logia Nonprofit Logistics in Chattanooga and was honored with a Distinguished Worldwide Humanitarian Award in 2025.

**8** David Orvek, '16, PhD, graduated from Indiana University on December 19, 2025, with a doctoral degree in Music Theory.

## Weddings & Family Additions



**1** John, '98, and Laura (Monzon) Tubbs, '99, are looking forward to celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on June 24, 2026.

**2** Tereno, '08, '11, and '12, and Alexandra (Wilson) Forbes, '10, were married in Pembroke Pines, Florida, on September 13, 2025. They live outside Chicago, Illinois.

**3** Pieter, '15, and Georgia (Standish) Damsteegt, '15, welcomed Diana Ansje to their family on May 16, 2025. She is much adored by her older sister, Kathryn. The family lives near Baltimore, Maryland.

Alexandru, '14, and Kerry (Juliano) Francu, '15, welcomed Amos into their family on May 1, 2025. The family lives in the Hartford, Connecticut, area.



**4** Arthur, '17, and Rachel (Brouhard) Harper, '18, welcomed Noah into their family on October 3, 2025. The family lives outside of Augusta, Georgia.

Zach, '21, and Jillian (Mounce) Roberts, '21 and '23, welcomed Amelia into their family on September 26, 2025. The family lives near Charlotte, North Carolina.

**5** Paul, '21, and Nicholetta "Nikki" (Litten) Wear, '22, met at Southern, thanks to a friend who set them up. Paul was in Gym-Masters, and Nikki joined multiple groups on campus. They stayed busy rock climbing, camping, finding waterfalls, and spending time with friends. They now live in Georgia, where Nikki is the event coordinator at Cohutta Springs.

**6** Denver, '24 and '25, and Isabella (Beaumont) Nelson, '24, have welcomed two children into their family: Sadie Grace on November 6, 2024, and Steven on January 24, 2026.

**Correction:** In the Fall 2025 issue, we mistakenly noted that Southern Sweethearts Phil, '76, and Debby Worley, '75 and '77, celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in June 2024. It was June 2025. Congratulations again!



We'd love to hear from you, and so would your classmates!

Send updates about additions to your family, accomplishments, marriage, professional recognitions, or other news you'd like to share to:

Alumni Relations:  
[southern.edu/alumniupdates](http://southern.edu/alumniupdates)

P.O. Box 370  
Collegedale, TN 37315-0370



# Remembrance

**1 Ronald M. Barrow, PhD**, passed away on September 7, 2025. He served Southern as director and later vice president for Admissions for nearly 20 years, retiring in 1998. Under his leadership, the university introduced the PreviewSouthern and ViewSouthern programs. He was instrumental in creating the SmartStart program, establishing the 1.800.SOUTHERN phone line, and guiding Southern's transition from a college to a university. He served on the committee that selected the name Southern Adventist University and oversaw the design of the current university seal. With notable foresight, he filed the original paperwork to secure [southern.edu](http://southern.edu), helping to ensure Southern's strong identity in an emerging digital era. Known for his creativity in branding, he and his team were among the first to wear embroidered shirts featuring the new university logo and department names. Many of the scholarship programs, enrollment strategies, and student success initiatives introduced under his leadership remain foundational to Southern's recruitment and retention efforts. He was loved by his students, colleagues, and family. He especially enjoyed building projects and woodworking, and he was a stickler for precision and quality. He was preceded in death by his wife, **Colleen (Parsons) Barrow**, a former nursing instructor at Southern, and his son, **Gregory Barrow**, attended. He is survived by three sons, **Ronnie Barrow**, '83 (Kitty), **Brent Barrow**, '82 and '86 (Kim), and **Doug Barrow**, '86 and '89 (**Beth (Bishop) Barrow**, '84); seven grandchildren, including **Zack Barrow**, '15, **Joshua Barrow**, '15, and **Morgan Nedley**, '15; and one great-granddaughter.

**2 Patricia Lea (Mooney) Dittes**, '68, died on December 31, 2025, at the age of 80 in Richmond Hill, Georgia. Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, she graduated from Southern with a bachelor's degree in nursing and maintained close relationships with her classmates throughout her life. Her career lasted 51

years and included work in obstetrics, home health, and operating rooms. In 1981, she earned a master's degree in public health from Loma Linda University in California. In the final years of her career, she specialized in wound and ostomy care, managing a wound center in Nashville, Tennessee, and providing consultation to doctors and home health agencies. She is survived by her husband, **Albert Dittes**, '67; her children, **James Dittes**, '93, and **Julie (Dittes) Gates**, '94; and five grandchildren.

**3 Paul William "Bill" Dysinger**, '51, MD, passed away at age 97 on March 30, 2025, surrounded by family in his home. He was born on May 24, 1927. After graduating from Southern Missionary College, he earned his Doctor of Medicine from Loma Linda University in California in 1955 and his master's in public health from Harvard University in Massachusetts in 1962. He worked from 1961 to 1988 at Loma Linda University, where he assisted in founding the university's School of Public Health. Prior to retirement, he was the senior health advisor for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. He traveled to 122 countries as part of his work and spent time living in Cambodia, Tanzania, Singapore, Pakistan, and Yemen. He had a large heart for the poor and underserved and was passionate about preventive and lifestyle medicine, missions, and the connections between physical and spiritual well-being. He wrote two books: *Heaven's Lifestyle Today* and *Health to the People*. He was an active member and elder at Martin Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church in Centerville, Tennessee. He was preceded in death by his wife, Yvonne Minchin Dysinger, in 2024. He is survived by his sons, **Edwin Barrow**, **Wayne Barrow**, '82, **John Barrow**, '87; daughter, **Janelle Edwards**; sister, **Ruth Harris**, '52; 14 grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

**4 Evelyn "Evie" Loretta (Folger) Fowler**, '74, was born on February 2, 1953, in Silver Spring, Maryland,

to **Dorothy Elizabeth Folger**, attended, and **Arthur Francis Folger**. She passed away on February 1, 2026—just one day shy of her birthday. She lived a life defined by care, devotion, and a deep, abiding love for others and found joy in simple, beautiful moments. She took the greatest pleasure in seeing her family laugh, relax, and enjoy themselves. Caring for others was her passion. She had a gift for making people feel seen, valued, and special. Education and service shaped much of her life. She was an alum of Beltsville Adventist Elementary School and Takoma Academy in Maryland, later attending Southern, where she earned her bachelor's degree in nursing. At Washington Adventist Hospital in Maryland, she built an extended family, sharing life's milestones, sorrows, and celebrations. For 42 years, she served with compassion, dedication, and quiet strength before stepping into a well-earned retirement. She was preceded in death by her parents; her brother, **David**; her son, **James Jr.**; her stepdaughter, **Avis Aylor**; and her husband, **James Sr.** She is survived by her daughters, **Janelle and Joy**; her son-in-law, **James**; and five grandchildren.

**Ollie Mae (Metts) Giles**, '62, of Greeneville, Tennessee, passed away at age 84 on November 19, 2024. She is survived by her husband, **Stanley Giles**, '62; son, **Allen Giles**, '93; and daughter, **Dee (Giles) Toppenberg**, '90 (**Kevin**, '90).

**5 Dennis Schreiner**, attended, passed away peacefully on December 20, 2025, surrounded by family in Collegedale, Tennessee, after a 15-month battle with cancer. He was born on March 2, 1954, in Richmond, Virginia. He attended Richmond Junior Academy from 1968 to 1970 and graduated in 1972 from Powell County High School in Kentucky. In 1980, he studied theology at Southern Missionary College while working at the Village Market. He later studied social work at Memphis State University in Tennessee, while working nights at a Suicide Crisis

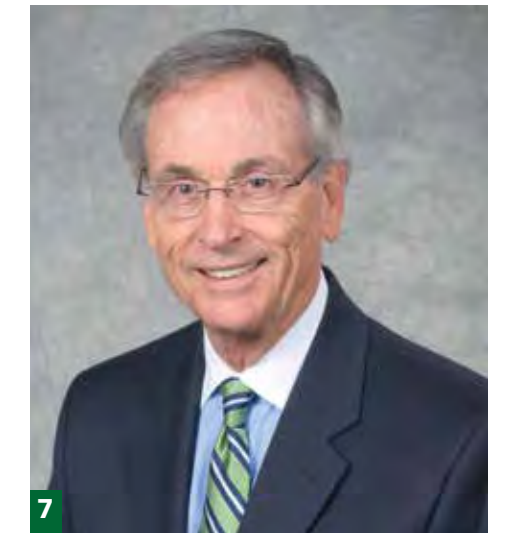
Center. He spent the first portion of his career in the construction industry, honing his skills as a master craftsman. In 1997, he returned to Southern as the director of the Service Department, where he spent the next 23 years mentoring and joking with hundreds of students and crew. His spare time was filled with travel, photography, biking, hiking, family, and woodworking. He was an excellent teacher, a wonderful husband, a loving father and Opa, a hilarious companion, and an ever-competitive hiker and biker. He was preceded in death by his parents, **Leroy and Dorothy**, and brothers, **Jimmie and Ronnie**. He is survived by his wife of 35 years, **Kathy (Randall) Schreiner**, attended; son, **Austin Schreiner**, '09 (**Katrina (Spears)**, '08 and '17); daughter, **KD (Schreiner) Owens**, '16 and '18 (**Ryan**); three grandchildren; and a multitude of other loving family and friends.

**6 Larry W. Williams**, '65, passed away on January 8, 2026. He taught in Southern's Social Work Department from 1983 until his retirement in May 2000. Born on May 24, 1938, in Niles, Michigan, he devoted his life to Adventist education and to serving others. He and his beloved wife of 60 years, **Nellie Jo (Patterson)**, attended, met at Adelphian Academy in Michigan and were married on July 7, 1960. Together, they built a family and a legacy of faith, service, and commitment to Christian education. He earned his Master of Social Work from the University of Georgia and later taught at Pacific Union College in California before joining the faculty at Southern. During a pivotal season when the department was pursuing accreditation, he chose to set aside his doctoral studies to help secure the program's future. His selfless commitment strengthened the foundation upon which the department continues to stand today. He is remembered not only as a professor but also as a mentor and advocate who modeled compassion, integrity, and Christ-centered service. Whether helping families in crisis, supporting those in need, or quietly sharing his own resources, he lived out Southern's mission of service. He found joy in God's creation—especially in time spent in Cades Cove in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee—and treasured his role as husband and father. He was preceded in death by his wife in 2021. He is survived by three of his children: **Heather (Williams) Neal**, '92, associate professor in the School of Health and Kinesiology, **Baron Williams**, '88 (**Sherrie (Platt)**, '93), and **Greg Williams**, '88 (**Karen (Sullivan)**, '89).

**7 Benjamin R. Wygal**, 2023 honorary alumnus, PhD, passed away peacefully at age 88 on February 8, 2026, surrounded by the family he loved and supported unceasingly. Born in Childress, Texas, he began his schooling in a one-room schoolhouse in West Texas and, through dedication and perseverance,

rose to become a college president by the age of 32—a testament to his intellect, vision, and commitment to learning. He served for 16 years as president of Florida Junior College at Jacksonville. He continued his career in executive and community leadership roles, including serving as president of Life Care Centers of America and vice president of Health and Wellness at Adventist HealthCare in Maryland. Ben's favorite role, however, came later in life. For 23 years, he served as assistant to the president at Southern, where he joyfully promoted the university throughout Chattanooga. He deeply loved Southern and found great fulfillment in mentoring, encouraging, and

supporting faculty, staff, and especially students. His wisdom, kindness, and genuine interest in others made him a cherished presence on campus. Ben shared 69 years of marriage with his beloved wife, **Reika**, building a life grounded in love, partnership, and unwavering support. He was a devoted father to his daughters, **Kimberly (Wygol) Miller**, '80 (**Harry**, '79), and **Kelly Wygal**, '81 (**Christine Stephan**), and a proud grandfather to **Ashley (Miller) Deitering**, '11 and '23 (**Andrew**), **Cicely Miller**, '15, and **Emily (Miller) Newman**, '20 (**Jay**). He was preceded in death by his parents, **Loyd and Pernecia Wygal**, and his brother, **Jimmy Wygal**.



All memorial gifts may be mailed to:  
Southern Adventist University  
Advancement  
P.O. Box 370  
Collegedale, Tennessee 37315  
or shared online at  
[southern.edu/give](http://southern.edu/give).



## A Legacy of Learning and Leadership

By Chehalis Eno, senior English major

For more than 50 years, the E.A. Anderson Lecture Series has been part of the School of Business at Southern, bringing students and community members together to learn from skilled professionals about how to integrate faith into business and find success in the field's broad and shifting landscape.

"I'm always interested in how I can leave the greatest impact on the communities around me," says Collin Emde, junior business administration major. "Southern does a great job of bringing in speakers who give different perspectives on how a business career affects the world."

The annual lecture series convenes on Mondays during second semester. Each week, a new presenter shares personal experiences and provides attendees with valuable insights, emphasizing how to live out Christian beliefs and values on the job. In 2026, scheduled speakers included a leader from one of the largest Adventist health networks in the United States, owners of a top-rated wedding venue in the area, and the head of a local nonprofit. These free lectures also provide community members with opportunities to gain knowledge about topics of interest and pursue Continuing Professional Education (CPE).

Local alumni Peggy (Davis), '75, and Harold Elkins, '66, frequently join lecture sessions to earn CPE hours for maintaining Harold's certified public accountant license. Peggy taught business classes at Southern from 1988-2002 and toured the sawmill facilities near Atlanta run by E.A. Anderson, the namesake for the series. Both students and faculty benefited from those field trips, glimpsing beyond the administrative aspects of a prominent business to better understand its inner workings from the ground up.

"We love having community members on campus, so they can see what Southern is all about



Sean Lemon, '11, senior vice president of Ambulatory Services and Network Development for AdventHealth's Southwest Region, speaks for an E.A. Anderson Lecture in March 2025.

and learn how faith shapes and grows careers," says Lisa Kuhlman, '10, School of Business professor and lecture series organizer. "It's especially important for everyone to hear the stories of entrepreneurs, both the ones who triumphed quickly as well as those who failed, recovered, and later found success."

Bo Smith, '88, an information technology specialist who lives a few miles from campus and currently serves as Southern's scuba instructor, still remembers the lecture given by Frank Abagnale Jr., subject of the autobiography *Catch Me If You Can*, in the mid '80s. "The stories and experiences he shared have stayed with me all these years, especially as I've worked in areas of security and compliance," he says.

Emde attended the lectures last year to meet requirements for his business seminar course. "I connected with business leaders and motivational speakers from across the United States and was pushed outside my comfort zone to initiate conversations with them," he explains. "I now have a better understanding about real life and the variety in prospective work available to me." Specifically, Emde recalls a lecture by Fred Bentley, who provides strategic consulting services within the senior care industry. "It was an honor to hear from someone who is regularly in contact with some of the biggest names in legislation."

Southern alumni are often invited to lecture. "Many graduates have gone on to do incredible things—attend ivy-league graduate schools such as Harvard or Pepperdine, start major companies, make a huge impact on the world—using the foundations they built at Southern," Kuhlman says.

Notable speakers who've recently returned to campus include Kevin Christenson, '16, head of Hope Studios, who gave tips on navigating commerce and creativity in cinema. Attorney Jonathan Cherne, '07, shared his experience defending religious freedom before the Supreme Court, and Chief People Officer Susie Jamerson, '03, gave a shoutout to her Southern roots in a presentation titled "From Brock [Hall] to the Boardroom." ■



### A New Chapter

After 10 years in the workforce, TLeah Edwards, '26, was ready for a career change and felt God leading her to Southern. Now, she celebrates completing an associate degree in graphic design and looks ahead to the future. At the Spring 2026 Commencement on May 10, the university honored 385 undergraduates, including 15 students who completed two majors or degrees. Another 20 students graduated with master's degrees, and three students received doctoral degrees. Welcome, graduates, to Southern's Alumni Association!

# SAVE THE DATE

Honor Classes: 1946, '56, '66, '76, '86, '96, '01, '06, '16



## Weekend Highlights

- Alumni Awards
- Workshop Sessions
- Departmental Gatherings
- Honor Class Reunions
- Car Show and Family Fun Day
- And much, much more!

*Featured Speaker: Ken Norton Jr., '96 and '97*



[southern.edu/homecoming](https://southern.edu/homecoming)