



Bonita Joyner Shields

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BUILDING

On Tuesday, February 24, 2012, the Fort Steuben Bridge, which linked the communities of Steubenville, Ohio, and Weirton, West Virginia (U.S.A.), went down into a sea of flames.

Due to its narrow lanes and deteriorating floors, the 1,584-foot bridge, built in 1928, had become obsolete.¹ Forty-five years earlier, in 1967, the Silver Bridge, a “sister” suspension bridge to the Fort Steuben Bridge, had collapsed, killing 46 people.²

Bridges provide a valuable service to the residents of their communities, enabling them to travel efficiently and safely to their destinations. Yet, as bridges become obsolete, they not only lose their relevance to the travel situation of the day, but, as illustrated above, can also become dangerous.

This special issue of the JOURNAL addresses an important topic in church and school life: *discipleship*. Unfortunately, Adventists and other Christians have not always built strong bridges joining these two entities, which have the task of discipling members and young people. But if we fashion a strong bridge between church and school, between pastors and educators (teachers), what a powerful structure will emerge! This type of bridge will help us all travel more efficiently and safely to our destination: “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).³

What would such a bridge look like?

In preparing this special issue, pastors and teachers collaborated to answer that question. We begin the issue with a pastor-teacher dialogue on discipleship, as Kathy Beagles and Gavin Anthony discuss why we need to build bridges between these two groups (see page 4). John Wesley Taylor V offers a biblical foundation that will help us to bridge faith and learning, and offers this challenge in the bridge-building process: “pastors must see their role as teachers of their congregations, while teachers are to understand their calling as shepherds of their flock” (see page 8).

The next section offers readers tools that pastors and teachers can use to accomplish the task of discipling and being discipled: the *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples*⁴ framework and the *Growing Disciples Inventory*. The framework and inventory do not seek to dictate a common “look” or “method” for discipleship. However, they do provide a common foundation on which to base our understanding and from which to implement discipleship training in the

lives of our students and church members, as well as in our own lives.

The last section of this special issue provides some glimpses of what the discipleship landscape looks like on the other side of the bridge. From elementary-age to college-age disciples; from new believers to long-time believers; and from home to school to church, discipling, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are making a difference in the lives of the people to whom the Lord has called them to minister.

Living and walking as disciples of Jesus Christ does not come easily. If it did, Jesus would not have needed to tell His disciples, “anyone who does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38). Of course, we know that it’s the power of the Holy Spirit that changes lives and empowers us to live and walk as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Merely talking about discipleship does not empower people. A framework and a spiritual inventory cannot transform lives. Using the “right” educational method does not change the heart. However, we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit to erect stronger bridges, support and consolidate the efforts of Spirit-filled pastors and teachers, and collaborate if we develop and use shared tools that enable us to not only baptize, but also “[teach] them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). The possibilities are endless. But of one thing we can be certain: As they collaborate to build these bridges, God’s people will have a much better chance of safely reaching their eternal destination, bringing with them the people they have discipled.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/neighborhoods/2012/02/fiery-demolition-ohios-fort-steuben-bridge/1315/>.
2. http://www.bridgemapper.com/bridge_detail.php?ID=997.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this editorial are quoted from the *New International Version* of the Bible.
4. In this issue, the official name *Together Growing Fruitful Disciples* will be shortened to *Growing Fruitful Disciples* or TGF^D.