

Struggle Over Faith

DOMINICA | July 20



Zarrah

Twenty-one-year-old Zarrah has considered herself a Seventh-day Adventist for as long as she can remember. She did not grow up in an Adventist home. She did not go to an Adventist school. But her babysitter was an Adventist and started taking her to church when she was 3.

Zarrah loved going to church with the babysitter, whom she called Auntie Freda.

At church, she learned Bible stories and memorized Bible verses.

When she came home, she recited the Bible verses to her mother.

Mother didn't know any Bible verses by heart, and she was impressed to hear the little girl repeating the Bible.

She encouraged Zarrah to keep going to the Adventist church.

But when Zarrah reached school age, Mother enrolled the girl in an elementary school operated by her own church. That was when trouble broke out.

Zarrah immediately balked at a school rule requiring children to recite a prayer to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The school principal was surprised. But when Mother explained that Zarrah went to the Adventist church, the principal didn't

insist that she recite the prayer. The principal even told the teachers not to trouble Zarrah over her beliefs.

Four years passed.

But then a new teacher scolded Zarrah when she saw that all the children except for her were reciting the prayer at a school event.

"Why aren't you doing it?" she asked the 8-year-old girl.

"I'm a Seventh-day Adventist," the girl said.

The teacher didn't care about the reason.

"The school rule is that you should recite the prayer," she said. "You have to abide by the school rules."

Zarrah started to cry.

When she got home, she told Mother about what had happened.

Then Mother became upset. She called the principal and, the next day, came to school to talk to her.

Now it was the principal's turn to become upset. She spoke sternly with the teacher.

The teacher stopped scolding Zarrah, but she found other ways to make her life difficult. If Zarrah raised her hand to answer a question in class, the teacher refused to acknowledge it. The teacher wouldn't call on Zarrah even if her hand



was the only one that was raised.

Zarrah felt very uncomfortable going to school and seeing the teacher.

She told Mother what was happening, and Mother decided to transfer her to an Adventist school.

But when Mother called Ebenezer Seventh-day Adventist Primary School, she learned that there was no room for any new students. Mother refused to take no for an answer. She explained the situation to the principal, and Zarrah was accepted as a new student.

Even though Zarrah didn't have any friends when she arrived at the school, she was happy. She could worship as she believed.

A year passed, and Zarrah gave her heart to Jesus in baptism at the school. Then her mother and older sister were also baptized.

Today, Zarrah is a teacher at the Adventist school.

“One of my goals is to help children who struggle in situations similar to mine,” she said.

At home, she also follows the example of Aunt Freda. She takes a 7-year-old neighbor girl to church every Sabbath, and the girl returns home to tell her mother everything that she has learned. The mother is impressed and wants her daughter to keep going to church with Zarrah.

Zarrah said that her experience is evidence of God's faithfulness.

“My testimony is that when you stand up for God, He will stand up for you,” she said. “Also, it is important that you know Jesus for yourself. No matter how small you are, if you are called by God, don't decline that call. Put Jesus first.” 🌍

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help Ebenezer Seventh-day Adventist Primary School move to a new, larger building in Dominica's capital, Roseau. The school, which was full when Zarrah's mother wanted to enroll her, remains crowded and in need of a larger facility. Thank you for planning a generous offering to help make that possible.

Story Tips

- Show Dominica on the map. Then show Dominica's capital, Roseau, where the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help construct an elementary school.
- Watch a short YouTube video of Zarrah: bit.ly/Zarrah-IAD.
- Download photos for this story from Facebook: bit.ly/fb-mq.
- Share Mission Posts and Fast Facts from the Inter-American Division: bit.ly/iad-2024.
- Know that this mission story illustrates the following objectives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "I Will Go" strategic plan: Spiritual Growth Objective No. 5, "To disciple individuals and families into Spirit-filled lives"; Spiritual Growth Objective No. 6, "To increase accession, retention, reclamation, and participation of children, youth, and young adults"; and Spiritual Growth Objective No. 7, "To help youth and young adults place God first and exemplify a biblical worldview." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.

Fast Facts

- Dominica is home to the largest indigenous population in the East Caribbean. Around 3,000 Kalinago (called "Caribs" by colonists) make Dominica their home.
- Dominica's national symbol is the critically endangered sisserou parrot (*Amazona imperialis*), and it appears on the national flag. In 2019, it was estimated there were only about 50 mature individuals left in the wild.
- For many years the Dominican economy was dependent on banana exports, but recently the government has begun promoting the country as an ecotourism destination.
- Cricket is a popular sport on Dominica, and the island competes in test cricket as part of the West Indies cricket team.

By Andrew McChesney