

## “Why Every Church Needs a BBQ”

by Pastor Manny Cruz

In Luke 15, Jesus provides a very clear description of God’s willingness to search for His lost children. He uses the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin to illustrate how far God will go to reach the lost. Jesus emphasizes the fact that God will “search until the lost are found”. In both of the stories the individuals doing the searching do not stop searching until the “lost” item is found. One beautiful truth in the story is that even though the sheep and the coin were lost, they did not lose their value. This reminds us that no matter how lost people are, they never lose their value in God’s eyes. Every person is a child of the King; everyone a prince, a princess. Independently of what bad things they have done or how much they have sinned, everyone is valuable in God’s eyes. That is why He does not stop searching.

As Jesus continues to relate this 3 part story, He introduces the parable of the prodigal son. Here Jesus points out that God, like the father in the story, is a loving, caring dad, who desires His children to come home, and when they do, He accepts them just as they are and receives them with a big celebration.

This parable is a wonderful lesson for us today. As the son returns home, the father in the story says to his servants: “Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.” Notice that he does not say, “Bring **A** fattened calf”. In other words, it’s not just any calf. The father says, “Bring **THE** fattened calf”. There was a specific calf, a special calf, a calf that had been set aside for the day when the son returned! This teaches us that as a church we need to be intentional about receiving the lost when they return. In other words, our church has to be a place where young and old are loved, accepted, tolerated, forgiven, encouraged. If we truly desire to be the church of God, we have to be ready to receive the lost when they come home. What is your congregation doing in this area? What does your church family do when a prodigal comes home? – This is why every church needs a BBQ.

For the next several years, the Arizona Conference Youth Ministries Team will focus on the Luke 15 principle: creating an environment where Adventist youth and their friends are welcomed, accepted and loved. How this will look, will vary from church to church, from youth group to youth group. Using Arizona Conference’s Mission Statement: “Light the World With Jesus’ Love”, we will build a youth ministry presence in every church. We will gather a team composed of Youth Pastors, Youth Leaders, Elders, Parents, Teachers, Pastors and of course teens and youth. This team will determine the overall vision of Youth Ministry in Arizona and together will

strengthen what is already in place as well as launch and grow new plans and initiatives. So if you smell the smoke, it's because we are barbecuing!