

## **EARLY ENDORSEMENTS**

Samir Selmanovic is just what we have needed to bring the spirit of Christ to bear in a fractured society. His attempts to create dialogue between peoples of different religious traditions is essential in a pluralistic society and is desperately needed in a world in which religion has become an instrument of war instead of actualizing its intended goal of being an instrument of peace. Here is a young man with vision and with the kind of drive and commitment that will enable his dreams to be actualized. He is bright and articulate and I am sure that he will be used of God in this project, living out the biblically-prescribed ministry of reconciliation.

~ **Tony Campolo**, author

Many of us feel that unless we can see vibrant new faith communities engaging with the urban culture of New York City, we are not ready to grapple with tomorrow's realities. The old line from the song - "If I can make it there, I can make it anywhere" - rings true in ministry. The problem is that relatively few people have the skills and ethos to survive, much less thrive and effectively minister, in the Big Apple. And even fewer have the desire!

My friend Samir has all of the above. If I weren't otherwise occupied, I'd strongly consider moving to the City and working alongside him. He's a powerful communicator, a strong leader, cross-culturally fluent, amazingly bright, widely experienced, theologically alive, and gifted to develop faith communities that bring together diverse people in the pursuit of mutual understanding, peace, and the making of a better world. I hope that many people will join me in trying to encourage and support him in a new and innovative venture in this important city at this critical time.

~ **Brian McLaren**, author

There is no question in my mind that the organized body of Seventh-day Adventist believers was ordained by God and has been a great blessing in this world and I work and pray for its success daily.

Nevertheless, as a people I think we have lost some of the "spiritual movement" consciousness, some of the vision that our early pioneers had. I believe

that the Adventist message at its best can and should impact the world in ways beyond what the institutional church is capable of. As such I am happy to endorse the urban ministry project that Samir Selmanovic is undertaking. He has the kind of vision and drive that in the right setting can bring the Adventist message and world view to the attention of people we could not reach any other way.

Nobody can promise success in a project like this, but I strongly believe projects like this should be attempted. Vision is developed by trying new things, even if they fail. I believe that God is moving on Samir's heart and I would encourage those of similar vision to support him in this effort and those who are concerned about his new direction to resist the temptation to make things more difficult. To quote one of our visionaries, "Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that is contrary to any human planning." (Ellen. G. White, TM 300)

~ **Jon Paulien**, author and Dean of the Faculty of Religion at Loma Linda University

In this time of monumental cultural change and the increasing marginalization of the church, discovering relevant expressions of the Kingdom of God becomes a high-stakes endeavor. Yet, these are the very explorations needed if the church is to be faithful to its prime-directive to follow Jesus into his mission-field. Courageous missional entrepreneurs must emerge who can incarnate the gospel in the marketplace in indigenous forms while remaining faithful to Scriptures.

I am delighted that my friend Samir Selmanovic is prepared to embark on such a journey of faith into the mission field of secular Western culture. He is uniquely equipped for its challenges. He has tasted something of cross-cultural conversations and the possibility of encountering God in the shared experiences and encounters with postmodern people. He has worked rigorously on developing the art of critical contextualization and the fostering of communities that embody the Kingdom.

I am pleased to endorse Samir's proposed endeavor to establish a Kingdom outpost in New York City. This bold and heaven-inspired initiative merits your prayerful support."

~ **Raj Attiken**, President of the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and founder of yearly leadership gathering, *National Conference on Innovation*

Samir is the most faithfully prophetic pastor in Adventism today. His vision and courage have inspired me now for over 6 years and his friendship has nourished my life and ministry. The mission that he and his family are about to embark on is the kind of faithful courage the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs right now.

Some will be puzzled by this. Some will even be outraged. It is unlike anything most people have ever heard of, let alone witnessed. Samir has consistently called our church back to its better self. His passion is to be more faithful, not less. After all, if a church that self-consciously embraces a remnant mission in the world cannot, at the end of the day, see fruit in a more peaceable community and a more hospitable world, what is the point?

I am proud to support this project. It is urgently needed and it will be an example, not only for other Adventist ministries, but other Christian ministries more broadly. What's more, this kind of embodiment of the gospel could change the world!

~ **Ryan Bell**, Senior Pastor of the Hollywood Adventist Church and the director of Re-Church Network

I have known Samir and Vesna since they first arrived in America to study at Andrews University, and had the privilege of being Samir's advisor in his doctoral studies. Of all my students, he was one of a small handful who excelled beyond all expectations. He has a brilliant, inquisitive mind, able to absorb both information and inspiration and still continue to be himself and stay rooted in his personal convictions.

His unquenchable thirst to learn became obvious as he prepared to write his dissertation. Months went by while I waited to read a draft of his first chapter. Whenever I asked him, he would say he had another two or three books to read and then he would begin. Finally, I said to him one day, "No more books . . . start writing!" And from there it was a wonderful journey of mutual discovery.

Through several years as a pastor, both in New York and in Los Angeles area, Samir has shown an uncanny ability to communicate with people of any faith or no faith and journey with them to an encounter with God. I have given my enthusiastic support to the idea of Samir's family returning to New York from the first moments the idea was discussed, because I know of no one more gifted by God with the specific strengths and talents to communicate with people in this multinational multicultural city.

And I am just one member of a growing Family Support Team who will take an exciting journey of faith with Vesna, Samir, and their two daughters as they share the gospel in unique ways to match a unique situation. I know I will personally grow by listening to the presentations he will put on his website, reading the books he is writing, and following reports of his continuing travel and speaking appointments

here and overseas. By supporting this ministry I will enter into these contemporary mission stories and make a difference where it is most needed today.

Establishing a new fellowship in New York will be approached by Samir with the utmost respect for his spiritual cradle, the great Advent movement. He will support that structure with his words, actions and tithe, while learning from other traditions and boldly stepping out of conventional modes of outreach.

The creation of a new spiritual, dynamic ministry in New York City is a challenge that only one in a million could fill. I believe God has called Samir, Vesna and their two lovely daughters to this immense task. They go with my prayerful and financial support. I hope you will support them in the same ways.

~ **Roy Naden**, Professor Emeritus, Andrews University

The large cities of the industrialized world constitute the new frontier of Adventist mission. The Church, with the blessings of God, has been tremendously successful in evangelizing the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America which have been the primary frontier of missions for more than a century.

But, despite repeated urgings by Ellen G. White over the last decade of her life, the Adventist Church has neglected the cities as Western civilization has become increasingly urbanized. The time has come, if the Adventist Church is still serious about “finishing the work,” to address the challenge of urban mission.

Considerable progress has been made in recent years in planting churches among newly arrived immigrants from many nations, who constitute a significant minority in the cities (15% of the New York metropolitan area). Historically African American churches continue to carry on an evangelistic ministry in many communities in the cities (20% of the New York metropolitan area), but there is virtually nothing being done to reach the majority of the population of these cities.

The challenge of the postmodern city mission is the topic of much discussion among Adventist leaders, but fear of risk-taking seems to hold back the organization from taking any significant steps. Samir and his family are offering themselves as missionaries to be sent to this new frontier. They are proposing a method similar in many ways to that which is being used overseas by Adventist Frontier Missions. They deserve the support of every believer who is serious about the mission of Christ in our world!

~ **Monte Sahlin**, author, church growth consultant, and Vice President for Creative Ministries in Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

In mid-2006, my wife and I were exploring a personal investment opportunity when we received Samir's invitation to join the financial support team for this project. We made the choice to invest in this project with him and his family instead of the other opportunity we had been considering.

For a number of years, Samir has been to me a pastor, mentor and friend, despite the distance. I am excited and inspired by his vision for a new kind of faith community, by his passion for the people of New York, and by his and his family's radical commitment to joining in with the kingdom of God as it might be expressed in that part of the world. Samir is a gifted communicator, a sparkling thinker and a leader with heart.

The world, the church and the kingdom of God need this kind of re-imagining and willingness to take risks. We are looking forward to being a small part—by our support, our prayers and our (Australian) dollars—of this faith adventure as it unfolds in the coming months and years. May God lead and bless.

~ **Nathan Brown**, Editor, *Signs of the Times* (Australia & New Zealand)

I have been inspired by the vision of the "Faith House Project" in Manhattan and am excited by its mission to engage the Christians, Jews, Muslims, and atheists living and working together in an urban setting. This proximity will inevitably lead to learning that cannot be accomplished otherwise and to honest discussions about God/Allah that would allow everyone to grow.

When, as Christians, we take Jesus' twofold command to love God and neighbor as definitive of our ethics and spirituality, it places a safe and expansive limit on the beliefs we can affirm. When the primacy of love is insisted on, imagine the difference it will make in the way the Faith House brings hope and responsible action to the world. Although we may doubt our ability to accomplish this, Samir is right when he asks, "Who can stop God from teaching us how to live together in community?" The state of our world cries out for projects like this.

At La Sierra University our motto is "From Diversity, Community." As far as we are concerned, we will want to send students to the Faith House to learn about peace and social justice activism and to experience the patience, kindness, trust, and hope that can only grow in a loving community dealing with challenges like this.

I respect and endorse this bold attempt to take up God's call. While all of us will benefit from the fruits of this project, Samir is putting everything on the line. His family should be given all the support that they need. This effort can only succeed when sympathetic individuals and organizations "put their money where their mouth is." Please join me in supporting this endeavor of love and hope.

~ **Lawrence T. Geraty**, President, La Sierra University, California

I believe the vision of Faith House is a prophetic one. There is a dire need for dialogue and bridge building in the world. I am happy to be a part of such a genuinely Christian and prophetic ministry. In my work as a professor of religion and a pastor, I meet many people seeking a meaningful way to connect with God. I pray that this new ministry will provide the safe place such people need, and thus become an effective tool in the hands of our All Merciful God!

~ **Johnny Ramírez-Johnson**, Professor of Religion, Psychology, & Culture,  
School of Religion, Loma Linda University

"Brave" and "bold" aptly describe Samir's vision of inter-religious understanding and reconciliation. The mission to bring together the monotheistic religions while candidly maintaining one's own faith commitment is a challenging task. To combat obvious strife and rampant misunderstanding is sure to draw questioners and detractors. None of us knows where this will lead, but we know the goal is right. The title that seems most appropriate to me is "peacemaker." Jesus blessed such people and said they should be called "the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). What Jesus blesses, I would like also to bless, and to encourage all to pray for.

~ **Jon Dybdahl**, previous president of Walla Walla College and a member of  
2010 Edinburgh Planning Group

In my estimation, Samir and his family are taking on a very noble and very difficult task. Those who minister and work in settings where Christianity has to dialogue with other religions know that Faith House is necessary. It will require vision, courage and special ability only God can give. I believe Samir has all of those. May God bless him and his family as they make this sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom.

~ **Samuel Leonor**, international speaker, chaplain of La Sierra University