

# MARKHAM WOODS CHURCH *of Seventh-day Adventists*

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*encourage,  
instruct  
and nurture  
so that  
each of us  
can become  
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*The*

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## *Markham Woods Church—it's a good family to belong to*

Rising above the mists of New York Harbor stands one of the world's most famous landmarks, the Statue of Liberty. Engraved on a tablet inside its base are the words: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me . . . ."

Nestled among the trees along Markham Woods Road in Longwood, Florida, stands a beautiful building that houses a unique congregation, the Markham Woods Church. Artistically displayed in the church's hallway are the words: "The mission of the Markham Woods Church of Seventh-day Adventists is to bring the healing power of Jesus Christ to broken relationships—with God, with family, with others, with the church and with nature."

The United States has been a beacon of hope to millions of all-but hopeless people who yearned for personal and political freedom and economic security. Markham Woods Church seeks to be a similar beacon of hope to all-but hopeless people who yearn for human and divine forgiveness and spiritual certainty.

### *A place of grace*

Markham Woods Church seeks to be a place of grace. It's a family that welcomes home its prodigal children. It's a safe house for the spiritually battered. A city of refuge for the condemned. A sheltered harbor. A rehabilitation facility for the despairing. A place where past errors are laid to rest, where hope is born and where new life begins.

{ *...to accept people where they are on their spiritual journey, providing an environment where less-than-perfect people can be confident of love, acceptance and forgiveness...* }

Our Statement of Philosophy puts it this way: "Our church family is not a fraternity for the perfect but a support group for those needing growth. Our goal is to accept people where they are on their spiritual journey, providing an environment where less-than-perfect people can be confident of love, acceptance and forgiveness in a spiritual family."

We would hope that the prophet Isaiah's description of the coming Messiah (Isaiah 42:2, 3\*) could apply to the Markham Woods congregation: "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

## *Christ's example*

Have you ever watched the wick of a candle continue to glow faintly after you've blown out the flame? Have you ever snuffed out that ever-so-faint glow with your fingers? For some people, the blows of life have been so severe that only a faint glimmer of hope remains. The Bible promises that Jesus won't jeopardize even that fragile a hope—"a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." At Markham Woods we want that same level of sensitivity.

Have you ever seen a plant with the stalk so nearly severed that only a slight thread of fiber carries the life-giving nutrients from the roots to the leaves? Have you ever thoughtlessly ripped stalk and root apart? The Bible promises that Jesus will be more gentle than that in dealing with hurting, wounded, near-to-spiritual-death humans—"a bruised reed he will not break." At Markham Woods we want to follow His example.

Have you ever hurt people with your words? Has your tone been unforgiving? Have you raised your voice in frustration? The Messiah, the Bible promises, "will not . . . raise his voice" to get His

{ *God wants life to be vibrant and rewarding here and now; then we just go on living that way for eternity. He wants our joy to be complete.* }

message across. His love-in-action will provide sufficient volume. At Markham Woods we hope ours will too.

John 3:17 states: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." We believe that God has given the Markham Woods congregation a message and ministry of hope, of grace, of salvation—not a message and ministry of condemnation.

As a congregation we want to be God's instruments for the healing and restoring of broken lives—both our own and those of others. We want to be able to say, as is so eloquently stated in Isaiah 61:1-3: "The . . . Lord has anointed [us] to preach good news to the poor. He has sent [us] to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, . . . to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve . . . to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

Too often people have seen the Christian life as anything but enjoyable. They've seen it as a drudgery that must be endured if we want to avoid hell and win heaven. But Jesus had a different view. He said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). God wants life to be vibrant and rewarding here and now; then we just go on living that way for eternity. He wants our joy to be complete (1 John 1:4). That's the kind of spiritual experience we want to engender at Markham Woods.

## *Wounded healers*

Much as we're committed to these concepts, we fall far short of achieving our goal. We're all sinners. Whether newcomers or long-time members, whether leaders or followers, we're sinners who are trying to get our act together. Yet we believe that God uses frail, faulty, faltering humans to minister to others.

Our Statement of Philosophy says: "In spite of our own brokenness, God invites each of us, motivated by Christ's example of love and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to participate in His work of healing. By cooperating with God in this way, we not only help others, but find even greater healing for ourselves."

Our church isn't just for the spiritually down-and-out, however. It's also for those who've already experienced God's working in their lives. It's a wellness center where those concerned about spiritual health come to work out. It's a classroom for spiritual instruction. It's a laboratory where spiritual ideas are tested. It's a practicum, where spiritual theory is applied. It's a place where people seek to become all that God has in mind for them to be.

But all who participate, whatever their spiritual background, the duration of their spiritual journey or the progress they've made, recognize that they're sinners. The principle behind the saying "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic" is equally true for sinners: "Once a sinner, always a sinner."

By God's grace we grow. By God's grace we escape bad patterns of behavior and form better ones. But, no matter how much we change, we never lose the label "sinner" or the need to keep on growing.

Thus, our congregation isn't a self-congratulation society. It's more like Alcoholics Anonymous than a country club. It wouldn't be hard to imagine attenders standing up and saying, "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm a sinner. But, thank God, I'm a sinner who has been forgiven. I'm a sinner on whom God has put the label 'saint,' even though I don't deserve such an honor. I'm a sinner who's growing in God's grace."

## *Servant leaders*

At Markham Woods we believe in servanthood. Whatever our position or title in the congregation, our role is that of servant to others. We have different talents and skills, we've been given different spiritual gifts, but all abilities must be used for the building up of the body. And it takes the contribution of everyone to achieve the goal.

In our work-day world we may be administrators or janitors, ditch diggers or physicians, lawyers or mechanics, merchants or farmers. In our work-day world we may have much or little social status. But, to a great degree, the titles and trappings, pains and privileges of our work-day world disappear in the context of the Markham Woods spiritual community.

Our focus is on two great equalizers: First, we're all hopelessly

lost sinners without Christ. Second, because of what Christ has done for us, we've all been declared saints, with entitlement to eternal life. Granted these two facts, all other lines of demarcation pale into insignificance.

## *Everyone welcome*

Everyone is welcome at Markham Woods Church. If you're a long-time, baptized, active Seventh-day Adventist, you're welcome. If you're not a Seventh-day Adventist but feel blessed by fellowshiping with us, you're welcome. If you lead out in a major ministry of the church, you're welcome. If you just warm the pew, attend only occasionally and never officially join, you're welcome. Our goal is to minister at whatever level and to whatever degree you feel a need.

However, we offer a standing invitation for everyone to become deeply involved in the life and ministry of the congregation. We believe, as Proverbs 11:25 states, that "he who refreshes others will

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himself be refreshed." We believe that spiritual healing and growth are enhanced by spiritual exercise. We believe a greater blessing is found in giving than in just receiving. We believe that God gave us spiritual gifts to be used for the benefit of others.

Because we're dependent on volunteers for all our ministries, when the percentage of passive participants becomes too high, we can no longer provide all the ministries we wish to offer. So helpers are definitely needed all the time. But we want the motivation for service to spring from within rather than from brow-beating and guilt-tripping.

We don't want you to dread coming to church because you feel you're not playing a large-enough role. We want you to participate in a manner appropriate to where your life is presently.

We appreciate the kind of pressures that many people face. We know the demands of family and work. We understand how crises arise that threaten to overwhelm. So if you can do nothing more than summon enough spiritual energy to drag yourself to church occasionally, be assured, you're welcome.

## *Christ culture*

Markham Woods Church's goal is to create an over-arching spiritual culture and community that incorporates people of differ-

ent races, different ethnic backgrounds, different socioeconomic status, different educational levels, different ages, different personalities and different perspectives.

This is in keeping with the Apostle Paul's assertion in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The Bible doesn't deny our group differences or our individual differences. It simply says that the Christ culture transcends all

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other delineations. We aren't first and foremost Anglo or African-American, Hispanic or Asian, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, young or old, male or female, liberal or conservative. These are all secondary to the Christ culture.

The Christ culture is the ultimate definer. The Christ culture is the power that allows us to rise above all barriers. The Christ culture is the bond that allows us to have unity in the absence of uniformity. The Christ culture is all-inclusive and all-encompassing.

The Christ culture focuses on love, forgiveness and acceptance. And, as our church's Statement of Philosophy says, the Christ culture inspires us to want to become all that God has in mind for us to be.

### *Making people comfortable*

Our concern for the feelings and sensitivities of others means that we avoid some practices that may be commonplace elsewhere. For example, we're sympathetic toward the intense desire for anonymity on the part of some new attenders. They've been burned by religion. They've been burned by tenacious salespeople. They don't want to sign on any line that might allow them to be hunted down and pressured to "buy."

Thus, we don't invite visitors to sign a guest book. They may, if they choose, hand in a guest card from the pew racks. But even that is totally of their own volition.

Recognizing that extroverts love to meet strangers but that introverts are often intimidated by such encounters, we normally don't take time during our service to invite everyone in the congregation to shake hands with someone else. The true extroverts will naturally do it on their own, unbidden, whenever and wherever they meet friends or strangers. But we don't want the true introvert to feel forced to wait in the halls until the "safe time" when the handshaking is over.

Our goal is to make the uninitiated feel welcome. We place directional signs in the halls. We seek to use terminology that everyone will understand. We include phone numbers, addresses and directions in the bulletin when advertising activities.

During our sermons we try to avoid in-house jargon. We give

page numbers as well as chapter and verse so the beginner can easily follow along in the Bibles provided in the hymnal racks.

The message we try to convey is that Markham Woods Church isn't just for Seventh-day Adventists, or just for the spiritually mature, or just for people "in the know." It's for everyone who's seeking spiritual nurture and fellowship.

## *Outreach all the time*

Although the Markham Woods congregation has hosted few evangelistic series in its history, it's totally committed to outreach. In fact, every activity the church runs is viewed as outreach.

The congregation is encouraged to invite family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances to every aspect of our church program—worship services, social events, children's programs, youth activities, Vacation Bible School. As individuals and as a congregation we seek to make each attender feel a part of our spiritual community.

We believe that the single most important aspect of any outreach is friendship. If church members don't befriend people, all outreach effort, whatever it is, to a great degree is wasted.

Often, congregations have reached out through a form of "bait and switch." For example, churches host Visitors Days. A high-quality program is planned. Members are primed to be friendly. Everyone smiles at everyone. No one says anything negative about other religions. It's company manners all the way around. But what

# MARKHAM WOODS CHURCH

*Mission* The mission of the Markham Woods Church of Seventh-day Adventists is to bring the healing power of Jesus Christ to broken relationships—with God, with family, with others, with the church and with nature.

*Philosophy* Because we live in a sin-racked world, all our relationships are broken to varying degrees. Even our best falls short of God's ideal. Yet in spite of our own brokenness, God invites each of us, motivated by Christ's example of love and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to participate in His work of healing. By cooperating with God in this way, we not only help others, but find even greater healing for ourselves.

As Jesus took the initiative in seeking the lost, our church accepts the responsibility to actively seek out those in need. Our church family is not a fraternity for the perfect but a support group for those needing growth. Our goal is to accept people where they are on their spiritual journey, providing an environment where less-than-perfect people can be confident of love, acceptance and forgiveness in a spiritual family.

But Jesus offered more than acceptance. He showed us how we should live. Thus our goal is to encourage, instruct and nurture those within our sphere of influence so that each of us can become all that God has in mind for us to be.



you see isn't what you'll get. Next week will be business as usual.

At Markham Woods, we have no Visitors Days—because every day is visitors day. Members are always encouraged to invite visitors. Visitors are always welcome. The program planners always assume that visitors will be present. And what the visitors see is exactly what they'll get.

Because Markham Woods Church is blessed with such a large number of children and youth, they're a high outreach priority. The church runs a wide range of spiritual, social and recreational activities for children and youth, designed to attract non-attending young people and to nurture those who already attend.

But outreach is by no means limited to what goes on at the church. The congregation engages in a variety of activities that are best described as “disinterested benevolence.” For example, we strongly support the Christian Sharing Center, an interdenominational community service center in Longwood. We feed the homeless on a regular basis. We step forward when disaster strikes, providing financial and human resources to help those affected.

We've joined with other congregations to build homes for Habitat for Humanity, providing material and volunteer labor. We've raised money to build worship facilities for congregations that are less affluent. We've provided both material and labor to build churches in other countries. And we do these things simply because a need exists and we're in a position to help.

## OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

### *General Goals*

1. Provide worship experiences that glorify God and uplift the human spirit.
2. Foster a sense of fellowship and belonging among members.
3. Create an environment where diversity becomes a means of mutual enrichment rather than a barrier between individuals.
4. Provide ministries for specific age, needs and interest groups within the congregation.
5. Provide nurture through spiritual instruction and encouragement.
6. Make training and outreach opportunities available to every member.
7. Provide a wholistic outreach to the community.
8. Ensure the financial viability of the Markham Woods Church.
9. Support Christian education.
10. Support the global mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## *A no-put-down zone*

Our goal is to help people with different life experiences, different personalities and different viewpoints as they move forward on their spiritual journey. We recognize that not everyone will arrive at the same spiritual understandings, and not everyone will travel

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between individuals.* }

at the same speed. Spiritual growth can follow a circuitous route. So tolerance is a crucial characteristic for those wishing to fellowship with the Markham Woods Church family.

Rabidly propounded viewpoints—be they rabidly liberal, rabidly conservative or rabidly middle-of-the-road—are counter-productive. We welcome forthrightness. We expect disagreement. But, as our Statement of General Goals says, we want to “create an environment where diversity becomes a means of mutual enrichment rather than a barrier between individuals.” We don’t want people hounded and harassed because others view them as heretics. We want everyone to understand that good people can and do disagree.

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and certainly its most influential thought leader, advocated teaching people to be “thinkers and not mere reflectors of other men’s thoughts.” In the spirit of her admonition, we seek to foster open discussion at Markham Woods. We want all to feel free to express themselves, certain that they’ll be treated with respect, even by those who disagree.

## *Spirit of the pioneers*

Early Adventists didn’t want an organization; they wanted a movement. Early Adventists talked a lot about “present truth,” because they saw the search for truth as an ongoing quest. Early Adventists held a variety of beliefs on a variety of issues. Early Adventists wanted people to think for themselves.

Our goal is to retain the spirit they exhibited. We want to equip our attenders for decision-making; we don’t want them to merely memorize a list of decisions already made. We want our church to be a spiritual discovery zone, to be to the pursuit of spiritual truth what the laboratory is to the pursuit of scientific truth. We want our members to ask questions and not settle for glib answers. We want everyone to respect those who arrive at different conclusions.

While we’re proud to be Seventh-day Adventists, and while we feel God has given a special task to this denomination—and to our congregation—at a special time in earth’s history, we believe that every organization that uplifts Christ is part of God’s plan for the

evangelizing of the world. In short, Seventh-day Adventists don't have a monopoly on spiritual insight, salvation or virtue. If people wish to ridicule and deride other denominations and other belief systems, they should be forewarned that their comments aren't welcome at Markham Woods.

Our goal, to borrow the words of Ellen White, is to "keep to the affirmative of truth" rather than to put down others, be they individuals, organizations or entire spiritual systems. If we focus on the positive—the Bible, Jesus, salvation, grace, hope and service—the negative, for the most part, will take care of itself.

Our sermons are strongly Bible-based. We believe the Bible is God's Word and should be our rule of faith and practice. We believe that the Bible, though written millennia ago, is as relevant today as when it was written. Our goal is to show how the Bible sheds light on the big questions of life.

### *Let the Spirit lead*

The members of Markham Woods Church believe in letting the Spirit guide the individual conscience on issues concerning which the Bible lays down broad guidelines but doesn't provide specific directives. We believe that the principle behind the Apostle Paul's admonition about eating meat offered to idols is applicable in many situations.

Paul says: "Those who think it is all right to eat such meat must not look down on those who won't. And if you are one of those who won't, don't find fault with those who do. For God has accepted them to be His children. They are God's servants, not yours. They are responsible to Him, not to you. Let Him tell them whether they are right or wrong. And God is able to make them do as they should" (Romans 14:3, 4, The Living Bible).

One such area that we leave to the individual conscience is the wearing of jewelry, a practice Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally frowned upon. While Markham Woods attenders may wear more jewelry than is typical in other Adventist congregations, we have definite reasons for the open stance we take.

Our congregation has specifically targeted the prodigals, the spiritually hurting, the angry, the cynical, the doubters, the

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heretics, the free-thinkers, the free spirits, the uncommitted, those who've been burned by Adventism or by Christianity in general, those who've all but given up on organized religion, and those who've never been exposed to religion in the first place.

It's not an easy target audience.

In the case of ex-Adventists, many left the church, in part, be-

cause they felt it majored in minors. But because a spiritual void still exists, they at some point seek a place where the void may be filled. They don't want to be chastised and condemned; they want spiritual encouragement. They want hope. They want love, acceptance and forgiveness in a spiritual family.

We're not going to meet such people at the church door and say, "When you shed that Jezebel image, we'll be glad to have you back." Those may have been the words that were hurled at them as they left the church a decade or two ago.

No, we welcome them as they are.

### *Open-arms welcome*

Many others who come into our fellowship have had only minimal exposure to spiritual things. They don't know religious jargon. They certainly don't know anything about Adventist standards and traditions. They just know they have a need, they're trying to fill it, and they're checking out the beautiful church at 505 Markham Woods Road to see if we have the answer.

We're not going to say to such people, "When you learn to dress in what we consider an appropriate fashion, we'll be more than happy to engage in spiritual discussion. But until then, you're just going to have to sit on the sidelines." Rather, we open our arms, welcome them and encourage them to become actively involved in some form of ministry.

### *Other considerations*

While Markham Woods members support the biblical principles of simplicity and stewardship, when it comes to the practical application of these principles, some might not draw the line in the same place that Seventh-day Adventist tradition has.

For example, they might not be willing to let others decide that a metal brooch worn on a dress is simplicity, but the same amount of metal worn in a necklace is vanity.

They might not buy the argument that face powder is consistent with personal piety, but lipstick and colored nail polish denote personal pride.

They might not fall into line if told, as a by-gone era was, that it's acceptable to buy a one-use-only wedding dress (designed purposely to draw attention to the wearer), but it's a sign of self-centeredness to buy a to-be-worn-for-life wedding ring to symbolize one's marriage commitment.

They might not agree that items worn on the body as image-enhancers are evil, but classy cars, well-decorated homes, titles and a wide range of other status symbols are spiritually neutral.

The congregation believes that such matters should be decided by the individual conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, rather than by ecclesiastical mandate or tradition. Too often, we believe, Christians have sought forced conformity instead of letting the Spirit do His prompting.

As might be expected, some people who once wore no jewelry begin wearing it after attending Markham Woods. As might not be expected, however, some people who once wore much jewelry cease to wear it after coming to Markham Woods.

Our philosophy, in general, is that it's the job of the church to promote the principles outlined in scripture. But it isn't the job of the church to prescribe every practical application of those principles. That's the work of the individual conscience, guided by God's Spirit.

### *Harmony with nature*

The same busy rush of life that robs us of adequate time for God, family and community also estranges us from nature. Yet nature is God's handiwork, a demonstration of His power, a revelation of His love, a gift to be enjoyed.

Part of the mission of Markham Woods Church is to help restore the broken relationship between humans and nature. We seek to help people grow in their appreciation of nature, and we encourage them to bring their lifestyle into harmony with the laws of nature.

The very name of our church—Markham Woods—alludes to nature. The lovely wooded setting of the church grounds and the wild animals that live on or pass through the church's property make it a virtual nature sanctuary. We've sought to capitalize even further on this idyllic setting by creating an outdoor chapel, a nature trail and a secluded picnic area.

Through a variety of activities the church encourages people to more fully appreciate and be blessed by God's "second book." We have an active Pathfinder, Adventurer, and Eager Beaver program for children and youth. Each year the Pathfinders (grades 4-12) go on at least six campouts, and the Adventurers (grades 1-3) and Eager Beavers (age 4 through kindergarten) go on at least one. In addition, the church sponsors an annual nature-oriented weekend retreat at Wekiva Springs State Park, a backpack trip, a bicycle ride, a canoe trip and a church picnic at Sylvan Lake Park.

*{ ...we promote balanced living. But we seek not to judge others on the basis of how perfectly they perform. We let people grow at their own pace, according to their own convictions, as the Spirit leads. }*

At the personal level, we advocate a healthful diet, adequate exercise and sufficient rest. We promote balanced living. But we seek not to judge others on the basis of how perfectly they perform. We let people grow at their own pace, according to their own convictions, as the Spirit leads.

## *Preserving our identity*

Markham Woods is unique, and those who attend often sense the uniqueness. Some don't like what they find, but many do. In fact, many prefer it to anything they've experienced elsewhere. And many who move away say they can't find an adequate replacement.

Quite innocently, however, newcomers can fall into the trap of trying to change our approach. "Why do you tolerate such far-out opinions?" they ask. "Why don't you make the young people dress more appropriately?" "Why don't you follow the denomination's traditions more closely?" "Why don't you take control more?"

What they fail to realize is, the feeling they get at Markham Woods, which they love so much, exists precisely because we don't do what they're suggesting. And were we to do so, we would lose the atmosphere that makes us so attractive.

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Undeniably, the Markham Woods congregation colors outside the lines at times. However, the departures from tradition are rarely by chance and are never a sign of anarchy. They're part of a carefully thought-through and comprehensive philosophy that has been developed and refined by pastors and the congregation over more than two decades.

In the Orlando area, we have the luxury of a veritable smorgasbord of Adventist churches—large and small, traditional and progressive, urban and suburban. In all probability, a church already exists that has a corporate personality that quite nearly matches whatever a person is looking for. Thus, it isn't necessary to overhaul any congregation; it's simply a matter of finding a congregation that provides the right match.

In keeping with the candor that characterizes Markham Woods Church, we want every potential member to know why we think and function as we do. That's the reason for this brochure. We readily acknowledge that in some respects we're different from many Seventh-day Adventist congregations. But we're excited about the niche we've carved for ourselves. Our unique approach has positively impacted many who would never be reached otherwise. We feel privileged to be part of such a ministry, and we open our doors to all who would like to share the Markham Woods experience with us.

*\*All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise designated.*

## *Invitation*

- If you like the emphasis of our statements of Mission, Philosophy and General Goals . . .
- If you like the explanations provided in this brochure . . .
- If you like our Bible-centered, Christ-centered, hope-centered, service-centered worship . . .
- If you like the congregation's willingness to let people make their own spiritual decisions . . .
- If you like open and free discussion . . .
- If you like a congregation that targets much of its ministry toward the spiritually down-and-out . . .
- If you feel comfortable in a congregation that candidly admits its own spiritual inadequacies . . .
- If you feel at home when fellowshipping with us . . .

*Consider making  
Markham Woods  
your church family.  
It's a good family  
to belong to.*

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