

NCC Adventists Share the Good News in Petrolia

Not all mission fields are overseas. “Petrolia is as truly a mission field as China, Russia, Africa and South America,” said Terry Gustin, volunteer leader of Petrolia’s small Adventist group. “It is the mission I have been called to serve.”

Located more than an hour’s drive from Fortuna, along a bad (sometimes dirt) road, Petrolia has an estimated population of 300-500 people within a 15-mile radius. There’s no cell phone service. Adventists were once a large presence in this remote settlement on California’s Lost Coast. In fact, for a while there were more Adventists in Petrolia than any other denomination. But the village and its economy dwindled through the years, and the church closed for a time.

Gustin and his wife, Gina, are re-igniting the Adventist work in this mission field. Gustin has presented several ShareHim evangelistic seminars in Petrolia, and he and his wife are active friendship evangelists. As a result, six people have been baptized since 2014. “I love evangelism and feel privileged to watch people grow in their love of God and their knowledge of His Word,” said Gustin. “The Petrolia community is so caring and loving that it is a pleasure to work and worship here!” The Adventists meet in a church built in the 1860s — purchased from the Methodists more than 90 years ago.

Originally called New Jerusalem, Petrolia received its current name after an oil company started drilling nearby in 1865. An Adventist evangelist first presented meetings there in

1882. Word spread, and a number of people were converted during the next 30 years. In 1912, J. Adams Stevens came to Petrolia to conduct an evangelistic series. He reported to the *Pacific Union Recorder*: “An unruly element gave us trouble from the beginning; but no serious disturbance occurred, until the night the tent was saturated with kerosene and burned. The meetings were continued in the Methodist church for two weeks, without any further disturbance, and six persons took a definite stand for the truth.”

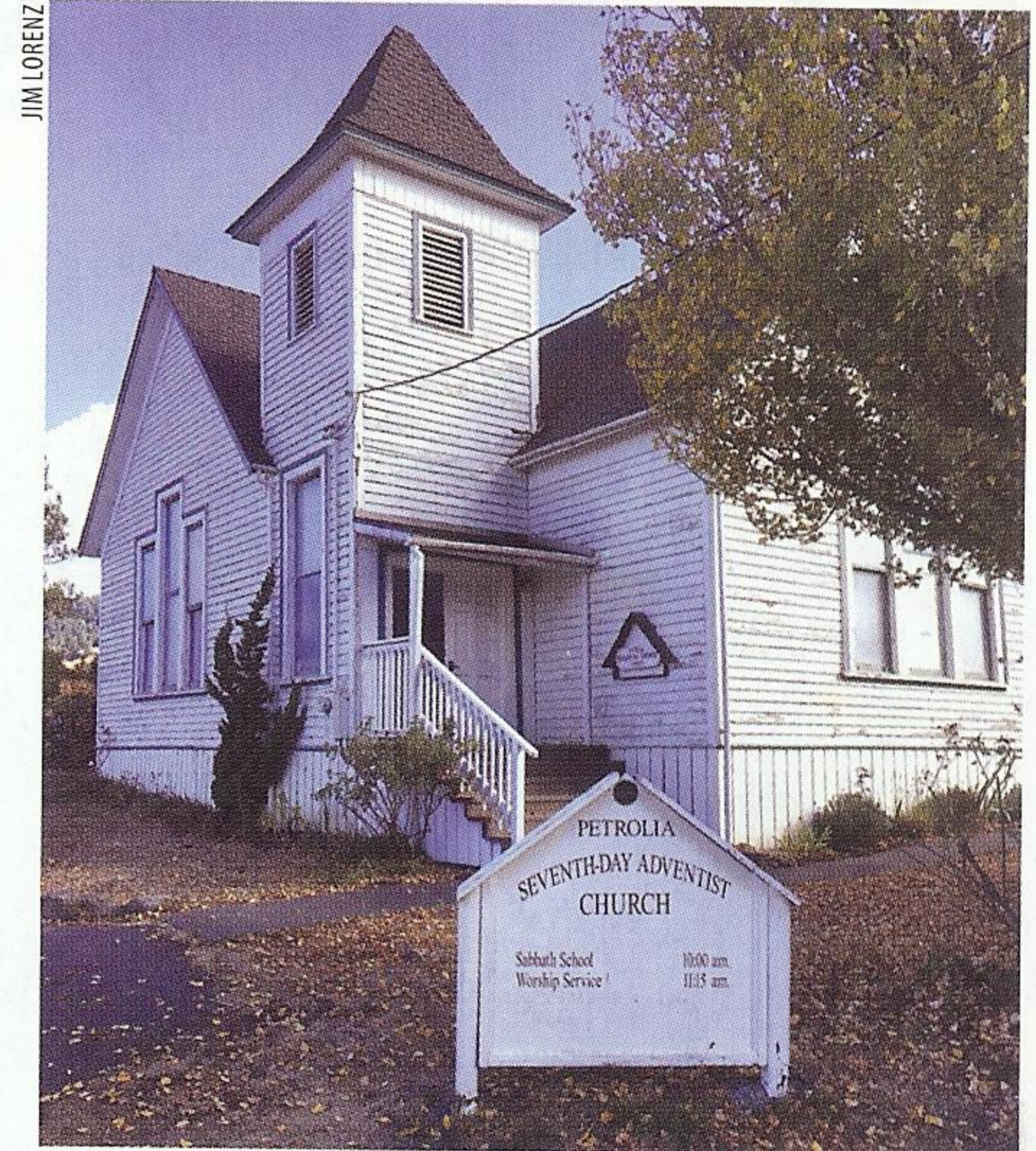
Stevens’s great-grandson, NCC Ministerial Director Jim Lorenz, preached in the same building during a Sabbath worship service this October. “I was surprised to learn that my great-grandfather preached at the church,” said Lorenz. “What a neat heritage to share!”

The Petrolia group was officially organized as a church in 1917, but the members continued to meet in a home. In 1923-24, three Adventist women — Martha Hunter, Addie Clark and Minnie Rackliff — purchased the Methodist church for \$1,000 and gave it to the Adventists. The pump organ and pulpit that came with the church are still there today.

In the 1940s and early 50s, an Adventist-run sawmill operated in the area, and a number of employees attended the church. But by the mid 1970s, the church was inactive. However, for a time a few families still met in the building, ringing the bell on Sabbath mornings. Then, beginning in 1989, Jan and Loneva Doward committed themselves to the work in Petrolia and drove there every Sabbath from their home in Ferndale.

The Gustins also attended the church for five years before moving out of the area. After Terry’s retirement, they returned, and in 2013 he took over the leadership from Doward. Petrolia is a “daughter” group of the Fortuna church, and Gustin greatly appreciates the support of Fortuna church Pastor Dave Perry.

Petrolia members are currently making plans to start a health outreach in their community. “Please keep Terry, Gina and this faithful group in your prayers,” said Lorenz.



In the 1920s, three Adventist women purchased the Petrolia church building from the Methodists for \$1,000.



Terry Gustin is the volunteer leader of the Petrolia group.

Learn more about the Petrolia church at petroliasda.org. If you are ever in the area, make plans to worship with fellow believers in the historic building. “The church is small and rustic,” said Gustin, “thus a very quiet and restful place to worship and a place where you truly feel the presence of the Holy Spirit.”

Julie Lorenz

Historical information for this article was compiled by Terry Gustin from many sources: Merlin Anderson, Jan Doward, Dorothy Price, Jeannie Buchanan, Sennis Edeline and Sandra Weeks, with editing by Gina Gustin and Andrea James.



Cindy Lyman, Gina Gustin, Susan Radebaugh, Dawn Posh, Terry Gustin and Judy Lorenz enjoy a potluck meal.