



Juanita Kretschmar

Dialogue With an Adventist Missionary in the City of New York



A former missionary to Brazil, Juanita Kretschmar has directed E-van-gelism ministry in New York City. This involves writing a newsletter and preparing spiritual and health education materials, prayer counseling, hosting a weekly TV program, and administering the staff of 30-35 persons involved in the blood pressure screenings, food sharing, printing, Bible school, and counseling ministries connected with that work. Persons from all over North America and the world contact her on establishing similar outreaches, for which she praises God. In October 1992 Juanita was asked to serve as general manager of the SDA Good News Network, a new satellite TV network that she had prayed for and worked toward establishing. Headquartered at the Community Health Services Center (Van Center) on Long Island, the new broadcast ministry, which reaches most of North America and parts of the Caribbean, is, she acknowledges, a result of prayer.

■ *Your work currently includes a number of activities. What do you consider the high point of your multifaceted career?*

I don't see this as a career; it's a life. Regardless of which aspect of the work I'm dealing with, it always gives me a very special lump in my throat when people tell me their lives have been changed by what they've read, or a program they've seen, or counsel they may have received months, even years, back. And when I hear that the *Power to Cope* stress-control magazine I authored is being translated into many languages around the world, I am amazed at the way God has blessed.

■ *Many people think metropolitan New York is a difficult place to live and work in. Has this perception affected you in your work or witnessing?*

Once we were convicted, through prayer, that God wanted us to be here, the locality had no bearing except for the

enormity of the challenge. I consider this densely populated area a great plus: if you're going to fish, you need to go where the fish are.

■ *What do you believe is the reason for the continued effectiveness and growth of your work with the van program?*

First and foremost, I credit prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, God has surrounded me with people who are dedicated, adventuresome, and competent—or willing to be trained. Many on my staff are also strong prayer partners. And God impresses people to help us, working miracles on our behalf time and time again. God is in charge of personnel and finances; the entire operation is His!

I should also mention that as far as my personal participation is concerned, I am married to a man who is very supportive of commitment to ministry. He has consistently encouraged me to serve in whatever way I feel called to, and has affirmed me in my work.

■ *What led up to your acceptance of your many roles in conference and community work in New York?*

I was involved with community service during my husband's first years of pastoring in Oregon. When he was a missionary and administrator in Brazil, I reached out to young people and ran a clinic for the poor. I started writing the thrilling experiences workers there were having.

When we went to the Upper Columbia Conference, in the North Pacific Union, I stopped writing the newsletter because my ministry there was largely personal and marital counseling, and therefore confidential. I first wrote Bible lessons there because it was in that period that I met Christ as my personal Saviour.

I had never preached until, just before leaving Upper Columbia for the East Coast, someone asked me to substitute for my husband at a prayer meeting. I was very uneasy about it, but now, by God's grace, this opportunity is given to me regularly in this country and elsewhere.

When we arrived in the Greater New York Conference, where my husband had been called to serve as lay activities and



Community Services director, it was clear that God needed him here. But for six months I felt totally unneeded, except as a wife and mother. I could see no ministry for me but prayer. And so I prayed, for the conference, for people I met, for God's work, and great things began to happen.

■ *How do you balance your wide range of duties with your home and personal responsibilities?*

Obviously, there are things I neglect. I don't even try to do everything, because I know some things have to be ignored. For instance, I don't entertain guests as a conference president's wife might. We do open our home Friday evenings for worship. From 5 to 40 persons come, week after week, year after year. For many it's the first time in their lives they've attended a Christian meeting of any kind.

■ *How do you feel the avenues of service you're involved with have affected the metropolitan New York community?*

The vans are out on the streets with a statement to people that someone cares. Our ministries are nonthreatening, whether it's blood pressure screening and health education, bringing food to the hungry, or in just being available to talk or pray. (Callers on our 800 line tell us ours is the only number in the yellow pages that an individual can call and have prayer.)

We've had money all but thrown at us by the state and city to help with our work, but we don't accept public funds. Still, there is continuing recognition of the value of our services. The public knows we are in the city, and people express their appreciation regularly.

We have touched more than a million lives one-on-one with the knowledge not only that we care but, hopefully, that God cares.

■ *Describe a typical day.*

When I get up in the morning, I go to the place in my home where I spend time with God in prayer. Most of my Bible study time is spent on my knees, because I often pray about passages I'm studying. I want to know God and what He wants to say to me today. If, after finishing with my devotional time of 30 minutes to two hours, there is another hour or more before it's time for breakfast, I dictate letters to those who have written me, some 200 to 400 weekly.

After breakfast with my husband, I get ready for work. After that, nothing is really typical! At the end of an 8- to 12-hour day at work, I exercise usually by taking a brisk 20-minute walk with my husband. On weekends I frequently speak at local churches or at prayer retreats. Once every couple months I have a free day.

■ *What do you feel you have done that has broken new ground?*

If there is any, I believe it's that I've learned I can trust God for "daily manna." This kind of management style doesn't always make treasurers or bookkeepers comfortable, but God has always come through.

With a staff of 30, the van program is a fairly large operation. Our budget is large. More than 80 percent of it comes in through donations. If I really thought about it, I'd probably have ulcers. However, it doesn't weigh on my mind, because it's His idea.

My personal and management goals are to stay in tune with what God wants and not get in His way. In the process, He has to rub off lots of rough places on me, such as my irritability with incompetence (my own and others) or being sensitive to tone and look in dealing with people every day.

■ *What are you dreaming about or planning next?*

I would like to have the foreign-language programming of our network developed. I believe we're being pushed to go around the world with broadcasting. It's happening: stations and networks in other countries are calling for our programming.

I would like to have additional qualified persons on staff so our present personnel could work fewer hours. And I want to do everything possible to make sure the TV network is fully equipped.

■ *What experience prepared you for your work?*

Everything I've ever done or been interested in has been and is being used in one way or another. Still, nothing could have prepared me for the level of total dependence God has asked. I feel my



career is all about getting a degree in trust. I'm glad for it, but it's similar to a child's jumping off a table into Daddy's arms, trusting that nothing will happen.

■ *Are there frustrations in your work?*

Since this work is His, I would like an instantaneous Urim and Thummin so I could always know God's priority. I've at times spent hours, even weeks, asking for specific guidance from God. And when needed (but never early), it comes. My own inadequacy to be sensitive to the needs of everyone around me can also be a frustration.

■ *Do you have any advice for student readers?*

Take time in the morning for God. Before you turn to any other books, study God's Word for His messages for you that day. Before listening to anything else, listen to Him. For me, that time with Him is nonnegotiable. □

Interview by Betty Cooney

Betty Cooney is communication director for the Greater New York Conference and news director for the SDA Good News Network.

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