



Maternal-child health care in the Adventist faith: a perspective

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Abstract

This commentary explores maternal and child health (MCH) care within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) faith, where health is viewed as a spiritual obligation. Rooted in the Adventist “health message,” maternal care emphasizes holistic wellness, preventive practices, and spiritual resilience. Faith-informed behaviors—such as vegetarianism, rest through Sabbath observance, and abstinence from harmful substances—contribute to favorable pregnancy outcomes and mental well-being. Adventist communities and institutions, like Loma Linda University Medical Center, integrate modern medical care with faith-based values, offering services such as nutritional counseling, childbirth education, and spiritual support. Emotional stability is further strengthened through prayer, church rituals, and pastoral care. While tensions may arise between religious beliefs and some public health interventions, Adventist models generally align with global health goals through their emphasis on prevention, community care, and whole-person healing. This perspective underscores the potential of faith-based frameworks to complement scientific approaches in maternal and child health care.

Keywords: Maternal, child, health care, Adventist, faith, perspective

Faith-Based Health Beliefs and Maternal Practices in the Adventist Tradition

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) faith presents a distinctive approach to maternal health, integrating spiritual beliefs, lifestyle practices, and community support. At its core is the theological view that the human body is the “temple of the Holy Spirit,” a belief that elevates health practices—especially during pregnancy and childbirth—to the level of spiritual duty. For Adventist women, this perspective shapes health-related behaviors before, during, and after pregnancy, resulting in a unique and holistic model of maternal care.¹

A defining characteristic of Adventist maternal health is the commitment to **preventive care and healthful living**. This often includes a vegetarian or plant-based diet, abstaining from substances like alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco, and maintaining regular exercise and rest. These principles, deeply tied to religious doctrine, are not only health guidelines but expressions of faith. Studies, such as the Adventist Health Study by Fraser,² highlight that Adventists enjoy better long-term health outcomes, which positively influence maternal and fetal health. Research on plant-based dietary patterns during pregnancy indicates potential benefits including reduced risk of gestational diabetes and excessive weight gain,^{3,4} outcomes that

align with the dietary practices emphasized in Adventist maternal care.

Spiritual preparation is another key component during pregnancy. Most of Adventist expectant mothers engage in prayer, scripture reading, and communal worship, creating an emotionally supportive and spiritually enriching environment. Such practices have been linked to lower rates of anxiety and depression during pregnancy, as noted by Koenig.⁵ Additionally, through health ministries at both the congregational and institutional levels, Adventist communities offer health education programs and seminars reinforcing faith-informed decisions and building community among mothers.⁶

The weekly observance of the **Sabbath**—a day of rest and worship—further supports maternal well-being. This pause from work-related and worldly stress allows pregnant women to rest physically and emotionally, enhancing their overall health. The Sabbath also strengthens family relationships and promotes peace, contributing to healthier pregnancies and maternal mental states.⁷

Holistic and Preventive Health in Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Adventist Faith

The Adventist faith places strong emphasis on healthful living as a spiritual responsibility, particularly during significant life events such as pregnancy and childbirth. In the Adventist worldview, health is not merely physical wellness but a reflection of one's relationship with God. This perspective fosters a holistic and preventive approach to maternal care, an approach that integrates nutrition, lifestyle, mental well-being, and spirituality to promote healthy pregnancies and safe childbirth.⁸

One of the most prominent aspects of Adventist maternal health is its focus on diet and nutrition. Many Adventists practice vegetarianism and adhere to dietary guidelines based on biblical principles and the writings of early church pioneer, Ellen G. White. These diets emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts—foods that support optimal

maternal nutrition. Research from the Adventist Health Study² shows that such plant-based diets are associated with lower risks of obesity, hypertension, and gestational diabetes—common complications during pregnancy.⁹

Mental and emotional well-being are also prioritized within the Adventist approach to maternal care. The integration of faith-based coping strategies, such as prayer and community worship, provides psychological resilience during the physical and emotional challenges of pregnancy.⁵

Community Support and Faith-Based Health Infrastructure in the Adventist Tradition

In the context of maternal and child health, the role of community and institutional support cannot be overstated. Within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) faith, this support is deeply rooted in both theology and practice. Adventist communities emphasize collective responsibility, faith-based education, and a strong health infrastructure—all of which shape maternal health behaviors and outcomes.¹⁰

Adventist communities are built around the principles of fellowship, service, and holistic health. Churches do not function solely as places of worship but also as centers for health education, emotional support, and preventive care. Many local congregations host health expos, seminars on maternal care, parenting workshops, and lifestyle coaching, often led by healthcare professionals who are also members of the faith. These activities aim to equip expectant mothers with knowledge about nutrition, pregnancy care, childbirth, and breastfeeding, while reinforcing spiritual values such as gratitude, prayer, and faith in God's provision.

Such community-based initiatives have tangible health benefits. According to DeHaven, et al.,⁶ faith-based health programs have demonstrated effectiveness in improving health behaviors and outcomes, especially in underserved populations. In Adventist settings, where health is viewed as a spiritual duty, this approach fosters consistent and proactive engagement with maternal healthcare.



Beyond local church activities, the Adventist faith is supported by a robust global health infrastructure. Institutions like Loma Linda University Health, AdventHealth, and hundreds of SDA clinics and hospitals worldwide deliver healthcare that respects both medical science and the patient's faith journey. These facilities offer maternal health services—from prenatal checkups to childbirth and postpartum care—while accommodating patients' spiritual preferences. For instance, patients may request prayer before surgery or be assigned a chaplain to provide spiritual counsel throughout their hospital stay.

This model of integrated care is central to the Adventist philosophy of “whole person” healing—addressing the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of health. Fraser notes that patients in Adventist hospitals tend to report higher satisfaction when care respects their religious beliefs, particularly during vulnerable life events such as childbirth.² This trust in faith-aligned institutions further encourages regular prenatal visits, early detection of complications, and safer delivery practices.

Moreover, the Adventist community provides ongoing emotional and social support. Church members often visit new mothers, deliver meals, assist with childcare, and offer spiritual encouragement. These acts of service embody the Adventist values of compassion and stewardship and help reduce the isolation or stress many new mothers experience. Such support has been shown to improve postpartum mental health and encourage practices like exclusive breastfeeding and early child bonding.⁵

Maternal Mental Health and Spiritual Resilience in the Adventist Tradition

Maternal mental health is an often underappreciated aspect of prenatal and postnatal care, yet it plays a vital role in the well-being of both mother and child. Within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) faith, maternal mental health is addressed not only through medical means but also through a spiritual and community-based framework. This

holistic view acknowledges the psychological challenges of motherhood while offering faith-centered strategies for emotional resilience. This essay highlights five distinct ways in which the Adventist tradition supports maternal mental health: theological framing, structured rest, community rituals, pastoral care, and religious meaning-making.

Theological framing of motherhood in Adventism elevates the role of mothers as partners in God's creative work. Rather than seeing pregnancy and child-rearing merely as biological processes, the church encourages women to view motherhood as a sacred calling. This perspective provides existential significance to the challenges mothers face, helping to reduce feelings of purposelessness or inadequacy often associated with perinatal depression.¹¹ Through this divine framing, many mothers gain a stronger sense of self-worth and emotional endurance.

In addition, structured rest through Sabbath observance greatly contributes to improved maternal mental health. The Adventist practice of dedicating a full day each week to worship, rest, and family time allows mothers to temporarily withdraw from daily responsibilities and stressors. Unlike generic rest recommendations, Sabbath rest is spiritually grounded and socially reinforced. Regular participation in this tradition can aid in emotional recovery and has been linked to reduced stress and enhanced mood regulation.⁵

Moreover, community-based practices surrounding pregnancy and childbirth provide significant emotional affirmation. There are Adventist congregations that conduct prayer services, blessings, or small gatherings to support expectant mothers, mostly done through house to house visitations. These practices acknowledge the transition into motherhood and offer vital social validation. The sense of belonging that emerges from such spiritual rituals helps buffer emotional isolation and contributes to a more stable maternal mental state.

Equally important is the role of pastoral counseling and spiritual mentorship, which offer mothers accessible and non-judgmental

emotional guidance. Unlike formal psychological therapy, pastoral support is usually provided in a faith-aligned, compassionate setting. Church leaders and women's ministry advocates often deliver spiritual encouragement, practical advice, and empathetic listening. These interactions can be especially helpful for mothers navigating emotional changes in the perinatal period.⁶

The ability to assign religious meaning to life's difficulties strengthens maternal resilience during crisis moments. Whether facing miscarriage, health complications, or postpartum depression, Adventist mothers often turn to scripture and faith in divine providence for strength. This process of spiritual reappraisal allows them to find purpose and hope amid hardship, reducing psychological distress and enhancing overall mental health.¹¹

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Submitted 19 Jun 2025, Accepted 15 Oct 2025, Published 3 Nov 2025

Acknowledgment: This article acknowledges the help of generative AI in language editing and reorganization and polishing of ideas and language.

Funding: This article did not receive funding from any agency or institution.

Cite this article as: Blancia GV, Olarte J. Maternal-child health care in the Adventist faith: a perspective. *Christ J Glob Health*. 2025 Nov; 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.15566/cjgh.v12i3.516>

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