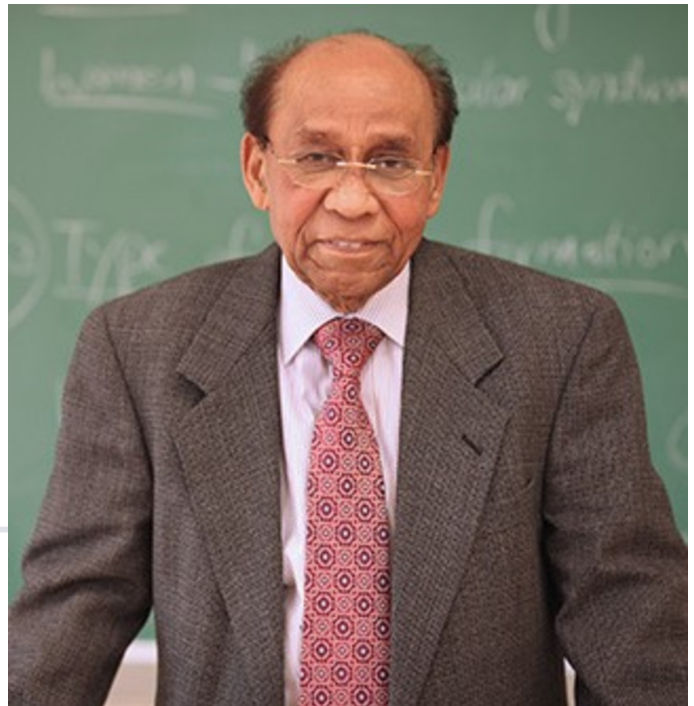


Gurubatham, Gladstone Pakkiaraj (1933–2015)

PETER OHURA KORAVE

Peter Ohura Korave is a Ph.D. student at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA. He has served as a pastor in various roles in Papua New Guinea and taught Bible and religion courses at Pacific Adventist University. He specializes in Historical Theology, with an emphasis in Adventist Studies. He currently serves as a graduate assistant at the Center for Adventist Research, contributing to archival and historical research on the development of Adventist theology.



Gladstone P. Gurubatham

Credit: Washington Adventist University.

Gladstone P. Gurubatham was a Seventh-day Adventist educator, administrator, counselor, and pioneer in adult higher education. During 51 years of teaching at Columbia Union College, now Washington Adventist University, he initiated programs that expanded access to higher education for working adults and helped establish lifelong learning as an important dimension of the university's mission.¹

Family Background and Early Life

Gladstone was born on June 26, 1933, in Tiruchinopoly (now Tiruchirappalli), South India, to Raj and Gnanakkan Gurubatham, who married in 1932.² His mother taught at the Wesleyan Mission Girls' School—a Methodist school founded in Bangalore in 1855, where her father (Gladstone's grandfather) served as principal. She later taught for a few years at Adventist schools and loved reading and art. Gladstone's father was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, administrator, teacher, and principal who served the church in India for over four decades.³ He was instrumental in setting up several Seventh-day Adventist schools and churches in South India.⁴

Gladstone grew up alongside four siblings—Vincent, Hepsiba, Joseph Edward, and Victoria Singh. Three of them devoted their careers to service in Seventh-day Adventist institutions: Hepsiba [“Hepsi”] Gurubatham Singh served as a vice president for finance at the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland;

⁵ [Joseph E. Gurubatham](#) devoted more than five decades to Christian higher education and expansion of

distance education;⁶ and Kezia Victoria Gurubatham Singh served in various capacities, including treasurer, in Risk Management at the General Conference.⁷

Education, Early Ministry, and Family Life

Gladstone received his early education in the Seventh-day Adventist schools in India. He attended James Memorial School in Prakasapuram for elementary and high school.⁸ In 1955, he graduated with a bachelor of arts degree from Spicer Memorial College (now [Spicer Adventist University](#)) in Aundh, Poona, India.⁹ On March 18, 1955, he married Pushpa Mala Shinde, who also graduated from Spicer College. Pushpa's father—Ganga Ram Shinde—worked for the Oriental Watchman Publishing House in Salisbury Park for 30 years.¹⁰ Gladstone and Pushpa had two daughters, Elizabeth and Lena.

Gladstone began his teaching career at the Adventist school in Lasalgaon, India, while Pushpa worked for the church and served as dean of women at the school.¹¹ In 1961, Gladstone travelled to the United States to pursue further studies. He completed a master's degree in American history from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in 1963.¹² He subsequently earned a second master's degree in library science in 1964 from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.¹³

Throughout his academic career, Gurubatham continued his studies, completing a third master's degree in geography in 1972 and a Ph.D. in geoscience education in 1974, both from the Catholic University of America. At the time of his death, he was also pursuing a second doctorate in clinical psychology.¹⁴

Teaching Career

In 1964, [Winton H. Beaven](#), president of Columbia Union College (CUC) in Takoma Park, Maryland, invited Gurubatham to join the faculty. It was the beginning of a 51-year career at CUC, later Washington Adventist University (WAU), that spanned from 1964 until 2015 and made him the institution's longest-serving faculty member.¹⁵

During his lengthy career, Gurubatham taught courses in a wide range of fields, including psychology, history, sociology, anthropology, geography, counseling, and statistics. His interdisciplinary teaching reflected both his wide academic preparation and his commitment to educating the whole person.¹⁶

Innovations in Adult and Lifelong Education

Gurubatham became widely recognized for his visionary leadership in adult education. In 1979, he established the External Degree Program to serve adult learners who were unable to study on campus.¹⁷ According to information provided by Washington Adventist University, the program was the first in the nation to offer accredited bachelor's degrees to distance learners in general studies, psychology, healthcare administration,

business administration, and respiratory care.¹⁸ More than one hundred students enrolled during the program's early years. Through this initiative, students who could not travel to the United States or attend a traditional classroom setting could earn a U.S. qualification while studying in places such as Barbados, Canada, South America, and Russia.¹⁹

The off-campus program also advanced the church's mission. For example, while completing his external degree, a young Pentecostal minister was baptized as a Seventh-day Adventist immediately after graduation and began studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.²⁰

In 1981, Gurubatham started the Adult Self-Training Enrichment Program (ASTEP), through which adults spent a week on the CUC campus attending classes, living in the dormitories, and participating in a variety of extracurricular activities.²¹ The following year, he established the Elderhostel Program for adults aged 60 and older. Most participants were retired professionals from diverse religious and social backgrounds.²² Participants stayed in the dormitory for one week during the fall, ate vegetarian meals in the cafeteria, and attended three classes each day. Non-credit courses such as Astronomy, Elements of Radio-TV Production, and Traveling First Class in Literature were offered. These courses required neither assignments nor examinations and emphasized considerable class participation. The program exposed participants to Adventist beliefs and lifestyle. Courses were offered, for example, in vegetarian cooking. In 1984, the ASTEP program enrolled 370 individuals and had a waiting list.²³

In another major innovation, Gurubatham, in 1984, founded the Adult Evening Program, providing working adults an opportunity to complete bachelor's degrees at an accelerated pace without disrupting their employment. Although the idea initially met with resistance, Gurubatham convinced CUC President [William Loveless](#) that it provided a viable path to address the college's drop in enrollment and financial difficulties. Loveless agreed to offer the program but made it clear that it would receive no financial support. Convinced it would work, Gurubatham secured a mortgage on his home and financed the first adult evening program himself.²⁴

Classes ran for six weeks and met once a week in the evening, a schedule that made it possible for students to graduate in 18 months after completing 128 credit hours. At the time, no other educational institution in the state offered an undergraduate degree program to adult learners in the evening hours, and it was only one of five such programs in the nation.²⁵ By 1989, almost 300 students had graduated, and more than 350 students were enrolled in the program.²⁶

The adult evening program eventually evolved into the School of Graduate and Professional Studies, one of WAU's most significant academic divisions. In 2012, WAU recognized Gurubatham as "founder and architect" of the program, honoring him with the "Excellence in Teaching Psychology and Social Sciences, and Excellence in Educational Leadership" award.²⁷

Church, Counseling, and Community Service

Beyond the classroom, Gurubatham served local churches in the WAU vicinity in numerous capacities. He was an elder in the Korean, Spanish, Chinese, Millennium, and Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Churches. He was also active in community organizations, serving as president of the Washington, D.C. Mental Health Counselors Association and the Takoma-Langley Rotary Club.²⁸ In addition, he was a licensed professional counselor and nationally certified as a crisis intervener and addictions specialist.²⁹

After the unexpected death of his wife, Pushpa, in 1993, Gladstone married Elvira DiLibero, with whom he shared his later years.³⁰

Legacy

Gladstone Gurubatham was still serving as a professor at WAU when he passed away on November 28, 2015, at age 82. Affectionately known to colleagues and students as “Dr. G.”, he demonstrated a genuine love for people that, along with his professional achievements, made him a highly respected, admired, and beloved figure.³¹ His legacy rests not only on the courses he taught or administrative responsibilities he carried, but also on the opportunities he created for adults whose circumstances had prevented them from completing a conventional higher education. The External Degree Program, ASTEP, Elderhostel initiative, and Adult Evening Program that he pioneered all reflected his conviction that education should remain accessible throughout life.

Dr. Gurubatham’s family established the Lifelong Learning Endowment to support students at Washington Adventist University. In this way, his commitment to education, service, and Christian mission continues beyond his lifetime.³²

SOURCES

Advertisement. *Columbia Union Visitor*, March 19, 1981.

“CUC Offers Elderhostel Program for Senior Citizens.” *Columbia Union Visitor*, September 1, 1982.

“Donor Honor Roll—Class of 1963.” *Focus*, Fall 2010.

“Gladstone Gurubatham, Ph.D.” Washington Adventist University. Accessed August 21, 2026.

<https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/gladston-gura.pdf>

Heissner, Steve. “Columbia Union College Offers Adult Education Degrees by Correspondence.” *Columbia Union Visitor*, November 15, 1982.

Howard, B. A. “Ganga Ram Shinde obituary.” *Southern Asia Tidings*, September 15, 1954. Accessed September 6, 2026.

Korave, Peter Ohura. "Gurubatham, Joseph Edward (1942–2016)." *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*. September 8, 2026. Accessed October 1, 2026. <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=9B1N>.

"Life Sketch." Unpublished biographical manuscript, December 2, 2015, unpaginated.

Moyers, Richard. "CUC Educates Busy, Working Adults . . . and Serves Community." *Columbia Union Visitor*, July 1, 1989.

"Putting on the Ritz." *The Gateway*, Winter 2015. Accessed October 1, 2026. <https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/gatewaywinter15.pdf>.

"School of Graduate and Professional Studies Celebrates 30th Anniversary." *The Gateway*, Winter 2015. Accessed August 28, 2026. <https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/gatewaywinter15.pdf>.

Suddarth, Barbara. "High Enrollment Expected for CUC Elderhostel Program." *Columbia Union Visitor*, May 1, 1984.

"The Dr. Gladstone Pakkiaraj Gurubatham Lifelong Learning Endowment." Washington Adventist University. Accessed August 21, 2026. <https://www.wau.edu/alumni/endowments/dr-gladstone-p-gurubatham-lifelong-learning-endowment/>.

"Washington Adventist University Gathered to Mourn the Death of Long-Time Professor Gladstone Gurubatham, PhD." Washington Adventist University. February 17, 2016. Accessed August 27, 2026. <https://www.wau.edu/washington-adventist-university-gathered-to-mourn-the-death-of-long-time-professor-gladstone-gurubatham-phd/>.

NOTES

1. I gratefully acknowledge the Washington Adventist University library staff for their generous assistance in providing published and unpublished materials for this biography. I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, Dr. Gurubatham's firstborn daughter, for sharing firsthand information unavailable in published sources. These materials and personal accounts have enriched the biography with valuable depth and insight.
2. Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, email message to author, August 25, 2026.
3. "Gladstone: A unique name for a unique person," Memorial Scholarship Fund.
4. Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, email message to author, September 6, 2026.
5. "Risk Management Services Appoints New Treasurer," *Adventist Review*, March 16, 1989, 6.

6. Peter Ohura Korave, "Gurubatham, Joseph Edward (1942–2016)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, September 8, 2026, accessed October 1, 2026, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=9B1N>.
7. "RMS Appoints New Treasurer," *Adventist Review*, March 16, 1989, 6.
8. Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, email message to author, September 6, 2026.
9. "Gladstone Gurubatham, Ph.D.," Washington Adventist University, accessed August 21, 2026, <https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/gladston-gura.pdf>.
10. B. A. Howard, "Ganga Ram Shinde obituary," *Southern Asia Tidings* September 15, 1954, 16.
11. Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, email message to author, August 25, 2026.
12. "Donor Honor Roll—class of 1963," *Focus*, Fall 2010, 53.
13. "Gladstone Gurubatham, Ph.D."
14. "Life Sketch," unpublished biographical manuscript, December 2, 2015, unpaginated.
15. "School of Graduate and Professional Studies Celebrates 30th Anniversary," *The Gateway*, Winter 2015, 18, accessed August 28, 2026, <https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/gatewaywinter15.pdf>.
16. "In Loving Memory: Dr. Gladstone P. Gurubatham," memorial service program, Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, Takoma Park, MD, January 30, 2016, unpaginated.
17. Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, email message to author, August 25, 2026.
18. "Gladstone Gurubatham, Ph.D.," Washington Adventist University biographical profile, accessed August 28, 2026, <https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/gladston-gura.pdf>.
19. Steve Heissner, "Columbia Union College Offers Adult Education Degrees by Correspondence," *Columbia Union Visitor*, Columbia Union Conference, November 15, 1982, 13.
20. Heissner, "Columbia Union College Offers Adult Education Degrees," 14.
21. Advertisement, *Columbia Union Visitor*, March 19, 1981, 13.
22. "Life Sketch."

23. Barbara Suddarth, "High Enrollment Expected for CUC Elderhostel Program," *Columbia Union Visitor*, May 1, 1984, 12.
 24. "School of Graduate and Professional Studies Celebrates 30th Anniversary," *The Gateway*, Winter 2015, 14. Accessed August 28, 2026, <https://www.wau.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/gatewaywinter15.pdf>.
 25. "Gladstone Gurubatham, Ph.D."
 26. Richard Moyers, "CUC Educates Busy, Working Adults . . . and Serves Community," *Columbia Union Visitor* July 1, 1989, 4.
 27. "Putting on the Ritz," *The Gateway*, Winter 2015, 18.
 28. "Life Sketch."
 29. "Gladstone Gurubatham, Ph.D."
 30. Elizabeth Gurubatham-Norris, email message to author, August 25, 2026.
 31. "Gladstone: A Unique Name for a Unique Person."
 32. "The Dr. Gladstone Pakkiaraj Gurubatham Lifelong Learning Endowment," Washington Adventist University, accessed August 21, 2026, <https://www.wau.edu/alumni/endowments/dr-gladstone-p-gurubatham-lifelong-learning-endowment/>.
-

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000