Consistent, expressive faith called for in Annual Council messages

One hundred and twenty-five years after the Seventh-day Adventist Church began its focus on righteousness by faith, global leaders of the 17-million member movement gathered to hear calls for consistent, expressive faith in the merits of Jesus.

The weekend commenced on October 11 with an evening program that celebrated the 1888 General Conference session and its focus on Christ’s righteousness.

“Jesus has become my sufficiency,” declared Ganoune Diop, an Adventist theologian and scholar who serves as the church’s liaison to the United Nations. Raised a Muslim in the West African nation of Senegal, Diop contrasted the faith of his childhood with his adult Christian belief in a Lord who died to redeem broken and sinful humanity.

Shawn Brace, a young adult pastor from Maine gave a brief but powerful testimony of being raised in an Adventist home where parents consistently focused on the righteousness of Christ. “When we fall in love with Jesus, obedience becomes a delight,” Brace said. “This is the message we are hungry for.” He said young adults are not looking for “dancing bears” and other “trappings” to attract them to the church; rather, they want the “authentic message” of trusting in the salvation offered by Jesus.

Artur Stele, a general vice-president of the church and head of its Biblical Research Institute, focused on the Old Testament narrative of Mephibosheth, the son of King David’s friend,
Jonathan, to draw parallels with the mercy and grace extended to broken human beings through Jesus.

And Lael Caesar, an associate editor of Adventist Review and Adventist World magazines, used the Luke 17 story of Jesus healing ten lepers to underline that it is God who does the work of salvation and healing in human lives: “Can you imagine a more powerful message on salvation than a story of cleansing from leprosy—by faith? What did these guys do to cleanse themselves? “As they went along, they were cleansed.” What can you do to cleanse yourself? Remember the lepers and let go of the burden and anxiety and stress. Take Jesus at His word: “As they went along, they were cleansed.”

The balance of the Friday evening meeting was devoted to reports of evangelism from the eastern United States and the NY13 effort covering New York City and neighboring areas in New Jersey and Connecticut. Church leaders reported a total of nearly 4,100 baptisms and 31 new congregations established as results of the year-long campaign. Bible worker Heidi Santiago inspired the 400 audience members with her reports of direct personal work among the people of Manhattan. She credits the work of the Holy Spirit for the dozens of Bible studies now underway in an urban area believed by many to be one of the most difficult in North America to penetrate with the Adventist message.

On Saturday morning, October 12, the church leaders and delegates turned to worship, prayer and reflection. Following a Sabbath school lesson presented by Washington Adventist University professor Gaspar Colon and Personal Ministries department associate May-Ellen Colon, worshippers prayed for Southern Africa-Indian Ocean division president Paul Ratsara and his family as they mourn the passing of Paul’s wife, Denise Ratsara, who succumbed to cancer this week. Inter-America Division president Israel Leito, whose son, Deutly, is hospitalized in Miami with a serious illness, is also absent from this year’s Annual Council of the Executive Committee.

Speaking to a capacity crowd of more than 450 in the General Conference auditorium, General Conference president Ted N. C. Wilson emphasized a call to “communicate God’s truth in love and illuminate the earth with God’s glory.”

He noted the pressures of the age that tempt Christians to abandon Bible teaching.

“There are those in the church and outside the church who wish to change the very beliefs we have held sacred and change the character of the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself – people who want to turn the grace of God into something vile thus denying Jesus Himself, even though they pretend to lift up His name,” Wilson warned. “As we communicate truth to those who do not know Christ, we must guard against the world entering the church, [and] neutralizing its mission.”

Wilson pointed to changing social attitudes toward homosexuality as an illustration of the abandonment of Biblical teaching: “The acquiescence to homosexuality that is pervading so many societies today is nothing more than the old immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah that is in complete opposition to God’s Holy Word and, according to the Bible, will result in not receiving eternal life for those who reject God’s loving and saving efforts to turn them away from sinful behavior.”

Wilson also urged Adventists to examine the integrity of their witness: “Are we communicating to the world a different message than we intend by how we personally use the Internet, by what we watch on television, by what we wear, by how we use our time, by what kind of music we listen to or by our worship style?”
Wilson appealed to members and leaders to adopt thoughtful, reflective elements in worship:
“Recognizing the world is full of various cultures, let’s worship in simplicity and in truth using the
Word of God and aligning ourselves with the culture of heaven.”

As members and leaders of the world church paired off two-by-two for prayer, Wilson challenged
his hearers to rededicate themselves to Christian service and proclamation: “As we come to the
end of time, realizing the devil is making every effort to confuse our message and mission, let us
rest firmly on God’s Word and promises to make us truly His messengers.”

The Friday evening and Sabbath morning worship services are initial events of the General
Conference’s 2013 Annual Council. Items of church business will be discussed, including mission
strategy, urban evangelism, health ministry, and financial priorities for the coming year.

Membership nears 18 million, secretary highlights regions of
growth, decline

The Seventh-day Adventist Church
continues to enjoy dramatic growth in
Southern Asia, Latin America and Southern
Africa, which has pushed worldwide
membership to nearly 18 million.

The growth includes more than 1.1 million
baptisms last year, with the largest number
of converts worshiping in the East-Central
Africa Division.

"On any given day, 3,052 people join the
church. Every hour 127 people are
baptized. Every minute, two individuals are
baptized, and we praise God for that," G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the Adventist world church,
told church leaders during his report at the 2013 Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, United
States.

Ng’s report heavily emphasized statistics based on trends that emerged several years ago:
Nations in the northern hemisphere are experiencing slow growth, yet the Adventist population is
booming in much of the southern hemisphere.

Some 6.6 million members live in Africa, 5.8 million are in Latin America, and 3.4 million are in
Asia.

In addition to reporting on church membership at the division level, Ng also identified the top 10
unions that are growing, plateauing and declining within those divisions.

The fastest growing unions from 2003 to 2012 were in India, Bangladesh, Zambia, Uganda, south
Central America, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Pakistan.

The top plateauing unions – defined as having membership growth rate of less than 12 percent in
a 10-year period – included Southern Germany, Poland, Japan, Hungary, Switzerland, New
Zealand, Austria, Portugal and Australia. Three unions in North America also made the plateauing list: Pacific, Lake and North Pacific unions.

While North America is considered slow growing, it still provides the single-largest amount of tithe, at $933 million. The next-closest tithe-producing division is South America, with more than $500 million.

The 15 fastest declining unions are in Euro-Asia, Trans-European and Inter-European divisions – not surprising given the population loss in the Eastern European nations setback by a major economic crisis and high unemployment in and around the former Soviet Union.

“There’s been a huge exodus of Seventh-day Adventist membership… to other countries,” Ng said.

One of the brightest spots in rising membership in 2012 occurred in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, which reported the fastest growth rate, at 7 percent.

Southern Asia-Pacific President Alberto C. Gulfan Jr. told ANN that most of the growth is occurring in the Philippines, which is undergoing a neighborhood-based evangelism campaign that is being credited for some of the 80,000 baptisms since 2011.

The care-group ministry program, called Integrated Evangelism Lifestyle, consists of an Adventist family praying for a family in their neighborhood, and inviting the family to a weekly study of health principles, family life matters and, later, Bible study.

"It’s catching fire," Gulfan said. “We are seeing that in South Philippines, where the growth is fastest and largest. It’s because they have strongly implemented the program of the Integrated Evangelism Lifestyle.”

On the other end of the growth spectrum was the South Pacific Division, which reported a membership decline of about 5 percent.

Division President Barry Oliver said the loss was expected because a comprehensive audit removed many members from church records. “The growth rate suffered simply because we caught up on all the statistics to make them more accurate.”

While in the global church structure, Australia is considered a slow-growth region, Adventism, it turns out, is the fastest growing denomination in the country, according to the government’s census.

Oliver said he expects membership to grow as a result “Beyond,” an Australian-produced DVD series designed for secular individuals.

Ng’s report also included updates from entities under the Secretariat, including Adventist Mission; Archives, Statistics and Research; Adventist Volunteers; and the Office of Global Membership Software, which is in the process of implementing a universal, Internet-based system to report church membership in a consistent manner around the world.

The director of the office, Sherri Ingram-Hudgins, said that tens of thousands of churches submit membership statistics and transfers in many different ways: Some church workers still produce documents for their conference in handwriting, fax, email and traditional mail.
Eventually, she said, all churches will be equipped and workers trained to use a consistent web-based platform called Adventist Church Management System, which will streamline the reporting and recording process.

“When they report their baptisms and transfers,” Ingram-Hudgins said, “the information to will flow seamlessly to the parent organization, the conferences or the missions.”

Adventist treasurer makes case for inclusion of young adults

The generosity of church members led by God’s spirit, not appropriations, will finish the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And young lay people, more often than senior administrators, will ignite that work.

Robert E. Lemon acknowledged that his prediction might seem out of character—even “meddlesome”—in the context of a financial report to Annual Council delegates, but the Adventist world church treasurer is convinced that it’s time for a sea change in how the church is funded and directed.

First, he wants to see more grassroots financial support for projects.

“Our church has a history of thinking that if a project is worthwhile, it must have millions and millions of dollars of funding behind it, but the work isn’t going to be finished by the money in the [church]’s bank account,” Lemon said.

One case in point is the Great Controversy Project, he said. The book distribution project received less funding from the General Conference budget than Adventist world church headquarters spent on travel expenses for delegates to attend Annual Council. But members worldwide who supported the project shared more than 140 million copies of the book, which was authored by church co-founder Ellen G. White.

Going forward, Lemon said he and other church financial leaders would like to see more projects that empower lay people to take similar initiative.

“When God’s children get excited about something, they take money out of their pockets,” Lemon said.

Meanwhile, church financial leaders will continue to concentrate funding in areas with little or no Adventist presence. In Pakistan, $300,000 will fund a shelter for at-risk girls. In Myanmar, $400,000 will pay to reopen the Yangon Adventist International School. Another $500,000 will go toward building a center of influence and a vegetarian restaurant in Brunei, where an Adventist presence is not yet established.
Delegates also approved a proposal to send $570,000 to the MORE Project, which publishes books and pamphlets contextualized for other religious audiences. Another $4 million will step up production at the media center in the church’s Middle East North Africa Union. Currently, the media center produces programming in Arabic, but local leaders are eager to expand to other languages.

Lemon also made a strong case for including more young people and women in ministry during today’s Treasury report.

It was no coincidence, then, when he asked delegates to approve a proposal to use the mission offering collected at the 2015 General Conference Session to fund outreach and evangelism projects overseen by Adventist young people ages 25 and under. Projects would receive approval from a new committee comprised of 75 percent young people, Lemon said.

“It’s time that we tell our young people that we not only trust them to do the work, but we also trust them to make decisions as to how to spend the money of the church,” Lemon said.

“It’s interesting how our perception of youth has changed,” Lemon said, noting that a study of early church history reveals that most of the church’s founders were teenagers or 20-somethings. “Young people” when the church was established 150 years ago were not the late 30- and 40-somethings who are labeled “young” administrators today, Lemon said.

He urged delegates to take advantage of upcoming opportunities to “leave young people a seat at the table of decision-making.” In early 2014, each of the church’s 13 divisions will select delegates to the 2015 General Conference Session.

“We have the young people. We have the women, who constitute a majority of our church. We have the funds, although most of it is still in our own pockets. And we have the blessings of the Lord. This work is going to be finished. The question is, are we going to be a part of it? Or are we just going to have to move out of the way?” Lemon asked delegates.

“My dear friends, we are one church, one family, and we have a work to finish,” he said.

Lemon also reported on tithe and offerings for 2012. Tithe returned in the North American Division for 2012 was up about 1 percent from 2011 and totaled US$933 million. Tithe from divisions outside of North America increased 4.4 percent for a total of close to $1.4 billion. In the church’s South American Division alone, members returned nearly $530 million in tithe.

Mission offerings from outside North America similarly rose, reaching about $60 million, a 6 percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, mission offerings from North America dipped 2.6 percent, but still totaled nearly $23 million.

Creative outreach projects highlighted at Council on Evangelism & Witness

Top regional leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist world church heard examples of authentic Christianity this morning during the Council on Evangelism and Witness report to Annual Council.
“People everywhere are looking for someone who represents integrity in their Christian experience,” said Rick McEdward, director of the Adventist world church’s Global Mission Study Centers. Church leaders should take the New Testament model of Christian witness, in which actions march in lockstep with words, as a cue, he said.

McEdward and Jerry Page, secretary of the Adventist world church’s Ministerial Association, introduced Irene Tarigan and Arlaine Djim, Indonesian professionals who quit stable, high-paying jobs to launch the Chinese Ministry Center in Jakarta, a center of influence impacting the city’s growing Chinese population. The center includes a health food store—proceeds from which pay the rent—a lecture hall, and space for worship and prayer.

Tarigan and Djim first raised awareness of the center by hosting a health seminar and teaching the principles of a healthy diet and regular exercise. Since then, the center has steadily gained a reputation for supporting late-stage cancer patients whose doctors have given up on them, they said. The ministry recently outgrew the original center and now includes several satellite centers, each working with 60 to 100 people. Three out of four centers have spawned Adventist congregations that each see an average of 50 visitors every week.

In Melbourne, Australia, church members are distributing nine-volt batteries to their neighbors to activate smoke detectors. A conversation about safety in case of fire often segues into a discussion of God’s desire to protect them not only physically, but also spiritually.

The church’s Trans-European Division is intensifying efforts to fund innovative outreach projects, said division President Bertil Wiklander. In London, the “Sabbath sofa” project gives Adventist young people a unique way to share the church’s belief in the seventh-day Sabbath. When passers-by take a break on a sofa strategically placed on a busy sidewalk, it’s an opportunity to talk about how Sabbath rest can bring balance to people’s lives and help them avoid burnout.

A report from leaders from the Japan Union Conference indicated that the region continues to face the challenges of growing secularism and an aging population. At one Adventist church in Tokyo, the youngest member is 62 years old. But a bright spot is a comprehensive urban evangelism project called Tokyo ‘13 that leaders say is reenergizing the church in Japan.

In Australia, the new “Beyond” series is preparing audiences for public evangelism by first meeting needs and offering friendship. The 14-part documentary series uses storytelling to engage audiences from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds and address universal topics such as the search for hope and meaning. The series comes with a toolkit to guide personal evangelism.

“In the hands of a loving Christian, “Beyond” is mightily powerful in introducing the gospel in a contemporary context,” said Joanne Davies, an Adventist businesswoman who introduced the project.

Mike Ryan, an Adventist world church general vice president who chairs the Council on Evangelism and Witness, urged delegates to put special focus on the Middle East and China—two
regions that he said pose “tremendous opportunities” but are still only home to a small percentage of Christians.

Political and religious sensitivities challenge outreach in both regions, but church leaders are working with local members to find new ways to contextualize the church’s message of hope and truly meet local needs.

Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson echoed Ryan, asking delegates to make outreach to China and the Middle East a matter of prayer. “Take home this great burden,” Wilson said. “Think about it, pray about it and then let’s do something.”

Delegates also heard an update on the Adventist world church’s Revival and Reformation initiative this morning. A production team from world church headquarters is headed for Northwest Africa this week to shoot reenactments of biblical stories, including the New Testament story of the Pentecost.

Andre Brink, associate director of the Adventist world church’s Communication department, said he hopes the stories will help modern Adventists better relate to timeless biblical principles.

“When there were problems, church members in the New Testament would come together and pray in a united way, and this would lead to growth in the church and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit,” Brink said. “We are hoping this example inspires today’s church members to go back to the methods of the Bible.”

Management expert Hamel exhorts Adventist leaders to encourage ‘radicals’

One of Silicon Valley’s brightest minds challenged 400 world leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to create a climate of innovation at every level of the denomination.

“"I think aspiration is the best insurance against irrelevance," management thinker Gary Hamel declared in a keynote address to the Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) training program, which preceded the October 11 opening of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists’ Annual Council. "No organization ever outperforms its own aspirations."

Hamel, cited by The Wall Street Journal as the world’s most influential business thinker, encouraged leaders to be aware of changing climates in their constituencies. Overall, he said, society is changing the way it views and interacts with institutions such as the church, sometimes rendering those institutions less effective: “Every successful organization is successful until it’s not,” adding, “as human beings, we are all susceptible to denial.”
The LEAD program is part of an effort to introduce Seventh-day Adventist Church decision-makers worldwide to current innovations and best practices in leadership.

Hamel is a founder of Strategos, an international management consulting firm. His books include "What Matters Now," a guide to building organizations that thrive amid uncertainty and shifting priorities.

He urged Adventist leaders to facilitate experimentation and change within the organization’s ranks: "The pace for change is ultimately the question of how much experimentation is going on inside that organization," Hamel said. "The job of every leader is make sure that change always seems more exciting than standing back."

Hamel reminded his audience that while divinely-given truths are eternal, the structures of organizations to communicate those truths can and should adapt to the times: "We don't worship tradition, we worship a risen Lord," he said.

Drawing from his consulting experience at the epicenter of America’s high technology industry, the famed “Silicon Valley” area between San Jose and San Francisco, California, he noted that Google strives to have 5,000 experiments aimed at improving the firm’s computer search technology every year, with the expectation that a significant number will yield results for the firm.

"Basically every large corporation has an innovation lab in the Silicon Valley, he said. "Maybe the [Seventh-day Adventist] Church needs an innovation lab, too."

Hamel said that while the church is committed to redemption, renewal and reconciliation, there are times when established programs, policies or practices obscure the core message.

“The only way you would really know you are committed is if you were willing to sacrifice some of those habits, some of those structures, to those commitments," he said.

G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the Adventist world church, said Hamel's earlier presentations to the Secretariat department sparked the invitation to address the leadership at this year’s Council. Ng said the church can learn much from Hamel's message.

"The church at different levels could do more to overcome the inertia to change in terms of methodologies, to maximize the use of technology, to keep pace with a fast changing world," Ng said. "We probably could do better in empowering the rank and file for mission by removing or reducing red tape. In [Secretariat] we have already taken steps in that direction. The South Pacific Division's example of downsizing in order to allocate more money for mission is a good example."

The LEAD conference began Thursday evening with major presentations that featured research on the church's health message.

Fred Hardinge, an associate director of the world church’s Health Ministries department, addressed scientific evidence underlining the Adventist health message. After citing numerous studies backing up the various point, he noted that merely presenting health education is not sufficient.

“This message is not to be separated from the gospel message. Some of the health promoting effects of the health message have been confirmed by science, but today’s most skillful and
perceptive scientist cannot bring the dead to life,” Hardinge said. “Jesus is the only life giver, and He is the only health giver.”

Kathleen Kuntaraf, also an associate Health Ministries director, discussed how Seventh-day Adventist health principles can help fight against non-communicable diseases. “God truly cares for us and gave us this wholistic packaged prescription for our own good,” she said. “However, the struggle between making good and bad choices for our health is a continuous one.

And Peter Landless, who recently assumed leadership of the Health Ministries department, noted the end-time importance of sharing health education with the world at large: “The world is facing unprecedented challenges both in the developed countries and in the emerging economies by the issues of obesity, type II diabetes, hypertension, tobacco-related diseases and coronary artery disease. We are called not only to practice temperance in our lives, live the health advantage that has been so generously given to us but also to share it with a broken and dying world.”

Following Hamel’s Friday morning message, hypothetical and actual case studies of leadership situations were presented to the church leaders. A drama team of students from Washington Adventist University presented a skit pitting the arguments of “Dr. Evan Keel Church” against those from member “Youneeda Change,” asking the audience to decide how best to implement change.

Two other case studies, though hypothetical, also reflected challenges many administrators face. One centered on an Adventist hospital that was once a local leader, but had fallen on hard times, and the other concerned a dynamic pastor who, when elevated to a leadership position, was unable to gain cooperation and began to “steamroll” his positions through. In each of these instances, audience questions were designed to guide leaders into a greater understanding of how to deal with, and improve, such situations.

First phase of comprehensive health ministry will promote future work

The Seventh-day Adventist Church announced the first phase of a comprehensive approach to health outreach, one that for the next year and a half will involve promoting health evangelism to local church members and administrators.

In the coming years, top leaders hope local congregations will offer programs as a “gift of health” to their communities.

“What would happen if 70,000 Seventh-day Adventist churches opened their doors to … teach wellness,” said Mark Finley, assistant to the world church president for evangelism. “This will broaden the base for an evangelistic approach that goes beyond preaching – addressing spiritual, mental and physical modalities,” he said.
Finley introduced the initiative to some 350 delegates today at Annual Council, which is the yearly meeting of the denomination’s Executive Committee at the church’s world headquarters.

For the next two years, a renewed approach on health outreach will be promoted through church media to help prepare members and leaders for the upcoming plans and implementation of projects. “This is a conscious attempt to broaden the understanding and base of local church members and leadership,” Finley said.

The second phase of the comprehensive health ministry approach will begin in mid 2015, offering resources and ideas for local congregations to deliver as health outreach initiatives.

Health Ministries director Dr. Peter Landless said next year’s summit in Geneva would offer training for comprehensive health ministry initiatives. Leaders also said each of the denomination’s 13 world divisions would have training programs for the upcoming outreach approach using health.

The renewed approach to health outreach comes after months of planning to combine many health and ministerial initiatives. Leaders emphasized that the focus is not solely an initiative of the Health Ministries department, but a blending of all ministries.

“Comprehensive health evangelism involves all kinds of gifts, all kinds of ministries, and God will use us together in this thrust in the coming days,” said Jerry Page, secretary of the denomination’s Ministerial Association.

Annual Council again holds class: Working Policy 201

How do you explain some of the most mundane yet significant aspects of denominational policy and make it interesting for hundreds of church administrators who have come from around the world for the 2013 General Conference Annual Council?

You transform the 650-seat auditorium into a pretend college lecture hall, give pop quizzes, hand out apples and books as prizes – and ask an organist to play Pomp and Circumstance at the end of the 90-minute class.

In a sequel to the popular inaugural course last year, church officials Monday afternoon taught GCWP201 – General Conference Working Policy 201: Foundational Concepts in Church Organization and Governance.

A central purpose of the session was to help church leaders understand that the meetings they help oversee need to be in harmony with governance documents.
After the course, Seventh-day Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson took to the microphone to express the importance of the class: “What was presented today is surprisingly violated in many parts of the world,” he said. “I want you to take very special note of what has been presented. Make sure that we’re following in the right pathway of understanding what the Working Policy is all about.”

Much of the course, hosted by “chancellor” G. T. Ng, the animated executive secretary of the Adventist world church, and his “professors,” – Karnik Doukmetzian, the general counsel, and Lowell Cooper, a vice president – focused on a single passage contained in the 900-page Working Policy book, also known as the “family code of conduct.”

They were tasked with reviewing and explaining basic and advanced concepts, some of them as simple as the denomination’s organizational structure: Local churches report to conferences and missions, which report to unions, which in turn report to the General Conference.

Among the more complex: Understanding that the denomination has both corporate and ecclesiastical structure. For example, the corporate entity holds property and has fiduciary responsibility to the members, while the ecclesiastical entity is the non-profit arm that is held together by the Working Policy and Church Manual.

The hardcover, black-bound Working Policy book is designed to protect the organization from autocratic and erratic leadership, reactive decision-making, and widely differing patterns of action. The Church Manual, on the other hand, is the operational guide for local churches.

Doukmetzian shared how the church is structured from a legal standpoint. He explained how most of the denomination’s activities are accomplished through the church’s unincorporated entities, which includes unions and conferences. Yet, sometimes the denomination faces challenges – such as when an individual owns a church property, and that person dies, and surviving family members make legal claims to the land. “We’ve gotten into some difficulties,” Doukmetzian acknowledged.

Cooper went over the eight key elements of Working Policy Section B: Membership basis of organization; conferred status; representative and constituency-based; authority rooted in God; distributed to whole; committee system; shared administration, not presidential; unity of entities; and separate but not independent organizations.

He also stated the common mistakes when church institutions veer from their constitutions, bylaws and operating policies, such as when an executive committee finds that it did not address amendments on time.

“The point in all of this, brothers and sisters,” Cooper said, “is to make sure that we who bear the privileges and responsibilities of leadership in the church need somehow to demonstrate competency in this most essential function of organizational life, enabling membership to have its voice.”

He added: “The most important human resource in the church is trust, and those of us in leadership can act in ways that build trust.”
At the end of the class, Secretary Ng distributed evaluation forms and report cards. Every student present received an A+. The homework was to become more familiar with the church’s governance documents.