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October 01, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | ANN staff

Seventh-day Adventist world church leaders are set to discuss the theology of ordination and the ownership constituency of a university among other agenda items later this month at the 2014 Annual Council, a meeting of the Seventh-day Adventist world church’s Executive Committee.

The theology of ordination will likely be the key discussion of the seven-day meeting. That discussion is set for Tuesday, October 14. The denomination has engaged in a two-year study of the matter, which has implications for ordination and how it relates to gender. While the Adventist world church currently only ordains men as ministers, it does have women who served as licensed ministers.

This month’s meeting could be the last time the matter of ordination is officially deliberated before potentially being set as an agenda item for next year’s General Conference Session, which is held every five years and is the denomination’s top governing body.

“I would encourage each church member, and certainly each representative at the Annual Council and those who will be delegates to the General Conference Session, to prayerfully review [studies on ordination] and then ask the Holy Spirit to help them know God's will,” Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson said in an interview with the Adventist Review last month.

Annual Council is set to begin at the denomination’s world headquarters the evening of Thursday, October 9 and run through Wednesday, October 15.

Also on the agenda is an October 15 constituency meeting of Oakwood University, a historically black university in Huntsville, Alabama, United States. Oakwood has operated as an institution of the denomination’s General Conference world headquarters since its establishment as an industrial school in 1896. Constituents will vote whether to accept a request from the Oakwood Board of Trustees to transfer the university’s constituency to the Church’s North American Division.

The Oakwood Board voted the request for transfer on August 6.

“Oakwood University would also join the emerging NAD portfolio of major institutions, such as Pacific Press Publishing Association, whose missions specifically focus on the advancement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s work in North America,” Oakwood President Leslie Pollard said in a statement.

Annual Council will also hold a Council on Evangelism and Witness, which highlights outreach projects in each of the world’s 13 divisions and attached fields.

Executive Secretary G. T. Ng will deliver his annual report on membership and analysis of growth trends throughout the denomination. During a Leadership Education and Development training workshop, Ng will also deliver a presentation on the stewardship of church offices. With many
church executives coming to the end of a five-year term next July at GC Session, Ng says he’ll encourage an appropriate perspective on what it means to hold a Church office and be subject to election.

“Elections are often a taboo subject, but we need to think about our term of office as one we are to vacate,” Ng said in an interview. “For those who are then elected to the same office, it is considered a new term.”

Annual Council delegates will also examine suggested edits to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs and the Church’s Mission Statement.

Delegates will also hear reports from various Church departments and institutions, as well as presentations on health. The Adventist Church has long emphasized healthful living, and Annual Council organizers said the presentations will help leaders continue to live and demonstrate principles of healthful living in their own career as Church executives.

**SCOTUS grants workplace religious discrimination case supported by Adventists**

**Church filed amicus brief supporting Muslim woman wearing hijab**

*October 02, 2014 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver*

The Supreme Court of the United States today accepted its first workplace religious freedom case in nearly 30 years, one that Seventh-day Adventists and other faith groups had urged the nation's top court to grant.

The case, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission vs. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc., involves a Muslim woman who was denied a job because her hijab—a head covering—violated corporate policy. Adventist feared that a ruling by a lower court could eroded workplace religious freedom rights, including those of Adventists who choose not to work on Saturday, the biblical Sabbath.

The Adventist Church in August filed an amicus brief, or “friend-of-the-court” brief, joined by seven other faith groups urging the Supreme court to hear the case.

At issue, according to Church legal counselors, is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which obligates employers to take steps to “reasonably accommodate” a prospective employee’s “religious observance or practice.”
"We’re hopeful the Supreme Court will take a friendly view toward Title VII and realize its importance, specifically the broad protection that the law intended,” said Todd McFarland, associate general counsel for the Adventist world church.

A date for oral argument has yet to be scheduled.

The case stems from a 2008 incident in which Samantha Elauf wore a hijab when applying for a sales position at an Abercrombie & Fitch store in Tulsa, Oklahoma. After a manager confirmed with a supervisor that Elauf's headwear violated store policy, she was deemed ineligible for hire without discussion of religious accommodation.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which filed a lawsuit on Elauf's behalf, said the move defied Title VII. While a federal judge sided with the EEOC in 2011, the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver upended that decision last year, claiming Elauf never told Abercrombie she needed a religious accommodation, even though she was wearing a hijab in the interview.

And that, Adventist legal counselors said, places undue responsibility on the applicant to determine whether her religious beliefs or practices conflict with company policy.

The Church’s amicus brief pointed out that “Frequently, an applicant will be unaware of a work-religion conflict simply because of her inferior knowledge of the employer’s work requirements.”

Also, a hiring process can be technologically structured so that an employee can’t raise the issue of potential conflict, such as online applications asking applicants which days of the week they are available to work, McFarland said.

“We hope the Supreme Court clarifies the standards for what an employee has to do to get an accommodation,” McFarland said.

Religious clothing and the observance of Sabbath and other holy days are the most common areas of conflict in the workplace, McFarland said. Hijabs, turbans, yarmulkes and other head coverings frequently conflict with a company’s “look” policy, while Sabbath observance can clash with scheduling.

Today’s granting is the first time since 1986 that the Supreme Court has accepted a workplace religious freedom case. In that case, Ansonia Board of Education v. Philbrook, the court clarified an employer’s obligation to make reasonable accommodation for employees requesting time off to observe religious holidays.

—Elizabeth Lechleitner and Andrew McChesney contributed to this story.
Move integrates historical property ministry with Church structure

October 02, 2014 | Ansel Oliver/ANN | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

The ministry that manages Adventist historic sites is about to become more integrated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s structure.

The denomination’s Ellen G. White Estate board last week approved Adventist Heritage Ministry’s request to become a more fully recognized entity of the Church. Beginning in January, AHM, which owns four properties related to founders of the Adventist Church, will have a fulltime executive director who will also serve as an associate director of the White Estate, Church officials said.

White, who died in 1915, was a co-founder of the denomination.

AHM was founded in 1981 with the purchase of the Deacon John and Betsey White home in Battle Creek, Michigan, where the denomination was established in 1863. AHM has since purchased properties that once belonged to William Miller farm and Hiram Edson in New York, as well as the Joseph Bates boyhood home in Massachusetts. The organization is run by volunteers and funded by donations.

White Estate Director James Nix said AHM is both an evangelistic outreach and a ministry to remind members of their roots.

“This is important ministry for the Adventist Church to support because once visitors see the consecration, commitment and dedication of the early pioneers, it makes a difference in their own lives,” Nix said.

More than 12,000 people visit AHM’s four properties each year, said AHM President Thomas R. Neslund. He said last week’s move puts the ministry on a more stable footing.

“I’m proud of the Church for doing this. This puts it in a category where it belongs. It gives the organization what it needs to be part of the Church’s ministry,” he said.

As it grew over the years, AHM has struggled at times and once nearly had to disband.

AHM was launched in 1981 as Adventist Historic Properties Inc. by several lay Adventists interested in historical preservation.

In 1984 the organization purchased 25 acres of what was William Miller’s Farm in Low Hampton, New York. Miller was a Baptist preacher who incorrectly predicted the second coming of Christ in 1844. Some of his followers from the Sabbatarian movement would later form the Adventist Church.

The ministry was officially recognized as an Adventist organization in 1988.
In 1989, the organization purchased 17 acres that were originally part of the Hiram Edson farm in Port Gibson, New York. Edson was credited with introducing the Sanctuary doctrine to the Adventist Church.

In 1993 the organization changed its name to Adventist Heritage Ministry.

In 1995, AHM began developing the Historic Adventist Village in Battle Creek, Michigan. The village is a three-block area, which now includes several homes belonging to the White family, as well as surrounding properties.

In 2004, AHM nearly had to close due to a lack of donations to fund maintenance, utility bills and operations. Neslund said the Church’s North American Division the General Conference world headquarters assisted the organization financially to assure its survival.

In 2005, AHM purchased a portion of the Joseph Bates boyhood home in Farhaven, Massachusetts. Bates was a sea captain who became convinced of the seventh-day Sabbath and was a co-founder of the Adventist Church along with James and Ellen White.

Neslund said an increasing number of guests come from other countries, and several of the denomination's 13 world division are investing in historic preservation in their own regions.

"It's very important for members to know where this denomination came from," Neslund said. "If you don't know your roots you don't know who you are."

His favorite quote of White's is from an 1890 letter: "The past history of the cause of God needs to be brought before our people, young and old, that they maybe familiar with it. How frequently were the waymarks set up by The Lord in His dealing with ancient Israel, let they should forget the history of the past."

AHM board member Garrett Caldwell, assistant Communication director for public relations at the denomination's headquarters, said AHM is seeking to work cooperatively with other Adventist historic sites worldwide, such as White’s “Elmshaven” home in St. Helena, California, United States, and her “Sunnyside” home in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

“We’re wanting to convey the palate of significant heritage of the Adventist faith,” Caldwell said. “The likelihood is that when a person experiences one they want to experience more.”

**In U.S., Southern Adventist University receives Governor's Healthier Workplace Award**
University views health in a wholistic way

October 01, 2014 | Collegedale, Tennessee, United States | SAU staff

Southern Adventist University received the 2014 Governor's Healthier Workplace award, part of the state’s Healthier Tennessee initiative, for meeting all 32 of the program’s requirements and being an involved community advocate for wellness.

The normal lifestyle on campus met a lot of the simple criteria for having a healthy workplace, including vegetarian meals and an alcohol- and smoking-free environment. A sample of additional areas where Southern excelled were the university’s health-related lunch and learn programs, employee participation in group activities such as intramurals, and the availability of hiking and biking paths.

“At Southern we don’t just promote being active and fit, but look at health in a more holistic way,” said Robert Benge, chair of the Employee Wellness Committee and dean for the School of P.E., Health, and Wellness. “We’re focused and intentional about what we’re trying to do here on campus.”

David Edwards, director of project implementation for the Governor’s Healthier Tennessee Workplace program, was so impressed with Southern that he expressed an interest in featuring the university on his group’s website as a participant and partner with the state for promotion of healthier living in Tennessee.

And while the Seventh-day Adventist health message does place an emphasis on physical well-being, there are pragmatic reasons for all the time and energy Southern spends providing these benefits to employees.

“We definitely want people to live a long, healthy life,” Benge said. “But another reason this is important is that the healthier you are in the workplace, the more productive you’re going to be.”

The university’s care and concern extend beyond simply their own employees; there are some special health perks for spouses and children of faculty and staff also. Beginning in June 2012, Southern provided complimentary membership to the Hulsey Wellness Center—including the pool, weight room, gymnasium, and everything in between—for all employees and their families.

“This has been a blessing not only to me but to my husband and kids, too,” said Kendra Stanton Lee, assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Communications. "I am forever grateful for this benefit."