### NEWS

**Parkview Adventist Hospital May End its Affiliation with the Denomination:** The last Adventist hospital in the United States not affiliated with an Adventist Health organization is due to be acquired soon by one of two competing non-Adventist umbrella organizations....

**Historically Black University Ranked Highest for Science by *Ebony* Magazine is Oakwood:** A new national survey by *Ebony* magazine has rated Oakwood University tops in the US in teaching and achievement in science. Many Oakwood students go on to take medicine....

**Measles Outbreak at Ozark Adventist Academy Evidently Due to Lack of Immunizations:** Returning students from mission trips may have brought the measles to Ozark Adventist Academy, leading to 21-day suspensions of 10 students whose vaccinations were not up to date when the outbreak hit....

**New *Adventist Today* Issue Mailed:** The brand new, September-October 32-page issue of *Adventist Today* will be posted later this afternoon for your enjoyment this weekend and the paper-and-ink edition should reach many homes today and tomorrow. (Available only to *Adventist Today* subscribers.)...

### OPINION

**Ellen White Against Being "At Variance":** What does it mean to be "at variance" with Adventist leadership? Ellen White used the term repeatedly, as union conferences were first being organized in Adventism. André Reis analyzes at length how Ellen White might characterize today's ordination initiatives....

**A Tale—or Two—for Our Time:** Blogger Cindy Tutsch reflects on problems created when good Christian people start behaving like the devil himself. Should we censure them, kick them...
out, shun them? Ellen White's example with firebrand A. T. Jones is instructive....

**Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak:** Debbonnaire Kovacs wonders if a lot of the insensitivity and hard behavior in our lives ultimately stems from our fears. Maybe if we got a handle on the fear, we could bask more richly in God's love and the Fruit of the Spirit could thrive again....

**SUBSCRIBERS' BONUS FEATURES**

**Kingly Power: Is it Finding a Place in the Adventist Church:** Get a head start reading the brand new issue of *Adventist Today* with this timely cover article that asks: Is the controversy over women's ordination only about women's authority, or is it ultimately about kingly power? (Available only to *Adventist Today* subscribers.)...

**Abuse in the Church, and Women’s Ordination: A Connection?** Writer Debbonnaire Kovacs believes her multi-generational Adventist family may have suffered from a strain of abusive behavior somehow encouraged by, or at least connected to, their faith. She wonders if the tendency to deny the pastoral gifts of women may tie in with a historical Adventist trend to resolve things through power rather than prayer and reason. (Available only to *Adventist Today* subscribers.)....
Parkview Adventist Hospital May End its Affiliation with the Denomination

Submitted: Aug 27, 2012
By AT News Team

Two major health care organizations in Maine have filed dueling proposals with the state Department of Health and Human Services to take over Parkview Adventist Medical Center in Brunswick. Similar proposals were made in 2008 and 2010, according to reports last week in the *Sun Journal* newspaper.

Central Main Healthcare operates hospitals in Lewiston, Bridgeton and Rumford. It has filed a letter of intent to take control of the Adventist hospital by amending the articles of incorporation and bylaws. “No financial transaction would accompany the change,” the newspaper reports in a copyrighted story. “Day to day operational control would remain in Brunswick” and the institution “would retain its physical properties and tax-exempt charitable status.”

Mid Coast Hospital has filed a different proposal which would liquidate Parkview Hospital and merge its 60 beds with the larger institution which is also located in Brunswick. The letter of intent from Mid Coast argues that there is no need to continue Parkview Hospital and that it can meet the entire need for health care services in the community. Mid Coast presented similar arguments on at least two prior occasions in recent years when other merger proposals were put forward by Central Maine Healthcare and Parkview.

Detailed document packages are still being prepared by both Central Maine and Mid Coast and until the full documentation is on the record, the state regulatory body will not make a decision. In the mean time, Parkview continues to be affiliated with the Northern New England Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

When the future of Parkview is finally decided it will be the terminus of a major trend that has washed over Adventist health institutions in North America over the past several decades or longer. Parkview is the last Adventist hospital in this part of the world to stand alone without being affiliated with one of the five Adventist health care systems in the country.

As health care has become a more expensive and risky business, with major for-profit players, it has become almost impossible for small, local hospitals to survive, especially those that lack major endowments. “We are at the end of an era,” a retired health care administrator told Adventist Today. “With the new health care legislation passed by Congress, whatever the political fallout from the upcoming election, health care in this country is really passing into a new era.”

For Adventists it will mean that no institutions beyond secondary schools will survive in New England where the movement began. Parkview Adventist Medical Center has 213 employees and $45 million in annual operations, according to Hoover’s, a Dun and Bradstreet company.

---

Share your thoughts about this article:

Truth Seeker
Reply
2 months ago

It is not exactly clear why this SDA hospital is a target. Has there been a suggestion by Parkview authorities that it is going under?

William Noel
Reply
2 months ago

Having only 213 employees and $45 million in annual operations would make Parkview a small hospital and put them in a poor position for economic survival.

Forrest Howe
Reply
2 months ago

A great loss to the Northern New England Conference. A significant part of their tithe base comes from there. Too bad one of the larger Adventist health corps couldn't come in with a missionary purpose.

Jean Corbeau
Reply
2 months ago
Historically Black University Ranked Highest for Science by Ebony Magazine is Oakwood

Submitted: Aug 28, 2012
By AT News Team

The September issue of Ebony, the largest-circulation news magazine published for the African American community in the United States will publish five lists of the top Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the country. Oakwood University, the Seventh-day Adventist-affiliated institution in Huntsville, Alabama, ranks number one on the list of top science programs.

The other top black educational institutions in the country, according to Ebony, are Alabama State University in the liberal arts and Alcorn State University in the social sciences. Two professional schools at historically black institutions are also included in the listings, the business school at Morehouse College and the law school at Southern University and A&M College. Melody Thuston released this information on behalf of the publisher, Johnson Publishing Company.

Tim Allston, public relations director at Oakwood, has told Adventist Today that this is not a total surprise since the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education published a news article earlier this summer which placed Oakwood with the fifth largest number of graduates of historically black colleges who have applied to medical school this year.

Oakwood had more than 40 seniors from the class of 2012 who have applied to medical schools. The largest number among the historically black institutions is 87 at Howard University in Washington DC. Xavier University in New Orleans had 68, Spelman College had 57 and Hampton University ranked in the same range as Oakwood.

---

Share your thoughts about this article:
Ella M
Reply
2 months ago

This is wonderful news for the school and the church. What comes to mind with this kind of recognition--do they teach evolution as a fact? If not, it's interesting that a secular magazine would choose Oakwood's science program over competing secular colleges. Wouldn't this tell us that a college can excel without teaching evolution as a fact?

It would also seem to follow that their science program would be the best among the denomination's colleges.

Anonymous

Posting as James White Periodical Lib - 1 Andrews University Subscribe to comments

Preview comment

Posting as James White Periodical Lib - 1 Andrews University Subscribe to comments

Preview comment

Close

Full James White Periodical Lib - 1: Welcome Menu | Calendar | My Profile
Measles Outbreak at Ozark Adventist Academy Evidently Due to Lack of Immunizations

Submitted: Aug 29, 2012
By AT News Team

The Associated Press (AP) and the CBS affiliate television station in Fort Smith, Arkansas, have reported that Ozark Adventist Academy sent home ten of its 159 students on Tuesday (August 28) because they have not been immunized for measles. Two of these children are from the same family and have been diagnosed with measles along with a sibling who is not a student at the school, according to the reports.

Outbreaks of measles often occur when American children return from overseas travel, according to public health authorities. One of these children had recently come back from a trip that included time in Romania, Switzerland and Italy. A nurse practitioner at the school first noticed a child with symptoms, reported KFSM-KSNW television Channel 5 in Fort Smith.

Eight more students were sent home because they did not have up-to-date vaccinations, Mike Dale, the academy principal, told the television news. The two students with symptoms will be kept home for 21 days because of health department requirements, Dale said. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is running tests to verify if they have measles, according to the television news.

The law in Arkansas allows parents to keep their children from being immunized for childhood communicable diseases if they have a “philosophical” objection to vaccinations. The number using this exemption has increased from a few hundred in 2003 to more than 3,600 in 2011. This is less than one percent of the statewide number of school-age children, but it is growing at a rapid rate.
Ellen White Against Being "At Variance"

Submitted: Aug 29, 2012
By Andre Reis

The vote is in; women's ordination is history for at least three Union Conferences: the North German, Columbia and the Pacific Union.

As I contemplate the momentous events of the past few weeks and observe some of the exchanges between the echelons of the church and on the blogosphere, I turn to good old Ellen White for some ideas. I often find her very helpful in matters of church governance, especially now that terms such as "opposition", and "at variance" are used more frequently.

A search in EGW reveals that the expression "at variance" in her writings is mostly used as a state of mind, an attitude, a trait of character, a habit. Variance for her is often synonymous with "stubbornness and self-will". (Counsels on Leadership 11). When talking about the "unity of the church" she uses variance again in the sense of interpersonal conflict, strife, enmity:

"The unity of the church is the convincing evidence that God has sent Jesus into the world as its Redeemer. This is an argument which worldlings can neither withstand nor controvert. Therefore Satan is constantly working to prevent this union and harmony, that unbelievers, by witnessing backbiting, dissension, and strife among professed Christians, may become disgusted with religion, and be confirmed in their impenitence. God is dishonored by those who profess the truth while they are at variance and enmity with one another. Satan is the great accuser of the brethren, and all who engage in this work are enlisted in his service." (5T 619).

When faced with the prospects of bitter conflict among the brethren, she bared her soul saying: "I know that Satan’s work will be to set brethren at variance. Were it not that I know [that] the Captain of our salvation stands at the helm to guide the gospel ship into the harbor, I should say, Let me rest in the grave." (1888 Materials, 29)

And:

"God is the embodiment of benevolence, mercy, and love. Those who are truly connected with Him cannot be at variance with one another. His Spirit ruling in the heart will create harmony, love, and unity. The opposite of this is seen among the children of Satan. It is his work to stir up envy, strife, and jealousy". (5T 28.1)

Here, unity is the opposite of "envy, strife and jealousy", disunity and disharmony.

She also creates a litmus test for the good type of "variance" by asking: "Does this light and knowledge that I have found, and which places me at variance with my brethren, draw me more closely to Christ? Does it make my Saviour more precious to me and make my character more closely resemble His?" (3T 444).
Although she used "at variance" in a variety of contexts, below I list four instances of the use of "at variance" in connection with church relations which may shed light on the current discussions. This list is certainly not exhaustive but may set the overall tone of her views on the matter.

1. Being "at variance" because of emphasis on "conservatism" and "tradition"

1888 provides vital clues to her treatment of conflict in the church. She came to the defense of Adventist authors and preachers who were seen as being "at variance" with the General Conference leaders in 1888. Writing two years after the 1888 conference, she said:

"There are men among us who profess to understand the truth for these last days, but who will not calmly investigate advanced truth. They are determined to make no advance beyond the stakes which they have set, and will not listen to those who, they say, do not stand by the old landmarks. They are so self-sufficient that they cannot be reasoned with. They consider it a virtue to be at variance with their brethren, and close the door, that light shall not find an entrance to the people of God. ... Light will come to God’s people, and those who have sought to close the door will either repent or be removed out of the way. The time has come when a new impetus must be given to the work. ... We must accept every ray of light that comes to us." (ST May 26, 1890, par. 12)

Ironically, even Ellen White had her run-ins with the General Conference in her day. Her anachronistically dated letters bring ominous revelations of back room dealings at the top echelons of the church. At one point she said: "The people have lost confidence in those who have the management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the Conference is the voice of God. Every time I have heard this, I thought it was almost blasphemy. The voice of the Conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not, because some in connection with it are not men of faith and prayer, they are not men of elevated principle.”(April 1, 1901, Ms. 37-190). Strong words indeed.

2. Being "at variance" because of imposition of ideas

"Many because their brethren do not follow their leading, manifest toward them a spirit of hatred. Is their leading right? Is it wrong? God has never bidden us follow the leading of any man, and he has said, “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.” Can we not see from this what it means to be at variance?” (KC 109.3)

3. Being "at variance" for opposing advancing truth

"The brethren [at Minneapolis] had all the evidence they would ever have that words of truth were spoken in regard to the righteousness of Christ. I knew that if they had distinguished the voice of the true Shepherd, if they had opened their hearts to receive the light, such speeches would never be made to create sympathy and leave the impression upon the congregation that we
were at variance and at enmity one with the other. {8MR 312.3}

I find the statement that leaders "had all the evidence they would ever have" especially germane to our discussion.

4. Being "at variance" for anarchy in doctrine

She warned against being "at variance" for believing wildly different doctrines. Thus she wrote:

"God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He will discipline and fit up His people. They will not be at variance, one believing one thing and another having faith and views entirely opposite, each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith." (TM 29).

Before the statement above is used against women's ordination advocates for "moving independently of the body", let me remind readers that the recognition of women as duly appointed ministers is not only part of Fundamental Belief 14, but it has also been affirmed since at least the 1990 General Conference. If believing in the equality of men and women to be ministers is used to label Adventists as rebellious, Ellen White would top the list.

* * *

It is striking that we do not see her use "variance" to promote absolute uniformity of practice and policies. To the contrary, she argued for "unity in diversity" and that whereas "there may appear to be dissimilarity, the work is one great whole, and bears the stamp of infinite wisdom." (GCB February 27, 1895, par. 5). She used the variety of the branches of a vine which all work together to produce one fruit.

In what appears to be an oxymoron, Ellen White considers diversity as the key to unity: "Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith." (EW, CET 201).

In sum, I believe EGW was very much against being "at variance" in the form of bitter, negative, overbearing spirit. In turn, she was very much for a diversity of operations, methods in church work. She was not a uniformitarian; thus she could write in 1899:

"We believe fully in church organization, but in nothing that is to prescribe the precise way in which we must work; for all minds are not reached by the same methods. Nothing is to be allowed to keep the working servant of God from his fellow man. The individual believer is to labor for the individual sinner. Each person has his own lamp to keep burning... {RH May 9, 1899, Art. B, par. 14}

We can certainly replace "methods" with "same music, same food, same color of clothes" and, alas, "same gender of pastors"!

I believe that, were Ellen White alive today, her pen would be firing off letters of support,
copying and pasting her 1895 appeal for the ordination of women and maybe one or two "testimonies" with the ominous P.S.: Light will come to God’s people, and those who have sought to close the door will either repent or be removed out of the way.
A Tale—or Two—for Our Time

Submitted: Aug 27, 2012
By Cindy Tutsch

It appears A. T. Jones didn’t always practice what he preached about Christ. Pastor Jones was sometimes acerbic, exercised arbitrary leadership styles, and in general, raised hackles on lots of folks. Some were so disgusted with Jones they could hardly bear to speak to him, and wished he would resign from leadership.

“Not so fast,” Ellen White counseled. “Brother Jones has made some mistakes in his tone and choice of words, but he’s dearly loved by God and still has a contribution to make.”

Many years ago, when I was a youth pastor in the Oregon Conference, I preached a sermon titled, if I recall correctly, “Daniel and Professional Sports.” In the sermon, I compared Daniel’s choice to not participate in the negative aspects of Babylonian culture with our contemporary penchant for immersing ourselves without reflection into non-God-honoring aspects of our society.

The next week, group after group of the Northwest’s finest—Portland Trail Blazers-season-ticket-holding-Adventists—streamed into the conference president’s office, demanding my head on a melamine platter.

The president listened patiently to all, and deflected their anger with soothing words like, “Don’t mind her. She’s never had a homiletics class.” (Stung, I went on to earn an M.A. in pastoral ministry and a doctorate in leadership!)

That administrator never muzzled me, nor transferred me to Podunk, Oregon. Privately, he said with both a sigh and a smile, “Sanguine prophets never make life easy!”

Though I still am convicted that every word of that sermon was true, I also now realize that there would have been better ways to express those truths. (There’s something to be said for those homiletics classes!)

So, do I agree with everything our NAD VP said at the PUC special constituency meeting? Yes, absolutely. Do I think there might have been better ways to say it? Maybe.

Do I agree with our GC president’s position on women elders and women pastors? Absolutely not. Do I think he has a right to express his convictions? Absolutely.

I want to extend the same grace to those with whom I vehemently disagree as EGW extended publicly to Elder Jones, and as my conference president extended privately to me.

Maybe the skeptic Voltaire is the “stones crying out” to us today when he wrote, “I may disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”
Our early church engaged in vigorous debate about plenty of issues—the time to begin the Sabbath, the Trinity, the ID of the king of the north, the law in Galations. Wouldn’t it be spiritually mature of us to let everyone speak their convictions on this current subject about which we have not yet formulated a doctrine, without threatening or demonizing those who have convictions that differ from our own?

If our hearts and the process are honest, the Holy Spirit will lead us and we’ll eventually get this right. In the meantime, we’ve a world to win for Christ, and that’s never gonna happen while we’re preoccupied with throwing stones at our own team. ³

-------------------------------------
¹ This story is told, with references, in my book Ellen White on Leadership (Pacific Press, 2008), pp 131-133
² paraphrase
³ “Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other, let us really show it by our actions [and words].” ¹John 3:18 NLT
Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak

Submitted: Aug 30, 2012
By Debbonnaire Kovacs

James 1:17-27

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act-they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

I had just moved into a new town, and had attended the small, local Adventist church for the first time. The pastor was in the midst of a series on the Ten Commandments, and he was on number five. As I recall, it was a somewhat confusing blend of hearty, unamusing (to me) tales of paddlings and switches, the recommendation that kids should be a little afraid of their parents, and then a wrap-up of how God is our Father and we should trust him and not fear him. I remember wondering how I was intended to put all that together. Seemed pretty contradictory to me.

The next morning, out of curiosity, I went to a local multidenominational church. It was six years ago, to be precise, and I still recall that the above text was the foundation of the sermon, and how it sank into my heart like rain on dry soil.

The pastor called us “beloved,” just like James, and reminded us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. He reminded us that it’s a given in life that we’ll meet people with whom we profoundly disagree, and that listening, in that context, is crucial. Disagreeing, and loving anyway. Being slow to anger.

I go to both those churches now. I love them both, and they both love me.

A couple of years after that first time, the Baptists held a Peace Conference in my town, and it
was hosted by my multidenominational church. At the time, Bush and the Iraq war were big issues, and everyone was speaking out against the war (which meant against Bush). One night there was an open microphone session where many could have their say on any topic they chose. One who got up was a boy about 16, and I’ll never forget what he said.

He leaned shyly into the microphone and said, “I wish I could talk to President Bush.”

I figured I knew what was coming. He’d had it dinned into his ears his whole life, most likely, that Christians are for peace, not war. But he surprised me.

“I’d sit down with him, and I’d look him in the eyes and ask him, ‘Why are you so afraid?’”

There was a silence in the room, and the boy let it be silent for a minute. Then he said, “Everybody keeps talking about him and saying things, and don’t get me wrong, I’m not for the things he does. But I just think he needs somebody to listen to him. That’s what I’d like to do, if I could.”

It seems to me that this lectionary text comes at a good time. As my pastor said (as if we needed reminding) we are always coming upon people with whom we profoundly disagree. There is never a shortage of controversial ideas, and I do believe we should all have our say, all be up-front and direct and transparent about what we believe and why. But are we also listening? Are we being quick to listen and slow to speak? Slow, especially, to anger? Are we “bridling our tongues”?

And seriously—if someone asked you to complete this sentence: “True religion is this:---“ how would you complete it?
Kingly power: Is It Finding a Place in the Adventist Church

Submitted: Aug 31, 2012
By Stanley E. Patterson

Current happenings in the North American Division are unexpectedly shining a new light on realities hammered out during the passionate process of redefining the organizational structure of the church at the General Conference Session of 1901. The present issue is parity between men and women who serve a pastoral role in the leadership of the church, but the context in which that challenge is being played out is the governance structure of the church.

The North American Division (NAD) was recently corrected by General Conference legal counsel, who reported that the division could not develop policy related to the role of women in church leadership if such policy differed from General Conference policy. Since the division is an extension of the General Conference and has no separate constituency, it has no latitude to authorize such differentiation.

But what about the next rung down on the organizational ladder: the union conferences? Since unions do have a legitimate constituency, would it be reasonable to assume that an action taken by vote of their constituency would have the right to alter policy and practice related to the place and authority of women who lead as pastors?

The answer is not as simple as one might be tempted to assume. Over the years, the latitude available for differentiated action on the part of the union conferences and local conferences has become increasingly restricted. A review of the model Constitution and Bylaws from 1980 to the present will reveal a gradual tightening of the restrictions placed upon union conferences and local conferences by mandating certain elements of the model constitution that must be implemented in order to comply with General Conference policy and procedure. Copies of the model document published in editions of the Constitution and Bylaws and the General Conference Working Policy after 1995 include required bold face type to identify the portions of the model that must be incorporated into the constitutions and bylaws of local conferences and union conferences. It should be noted that it appears that mandate has not been uniformly incorporated across the North American Division.

The prologue regarding implementation of the model Constitution and Bylaws of 1980 referenced as C 70 05: “This model is to be followed as nearly as possible by union conferences.”1 In 1985 it was recorded as follows: “Model Union Conference Constitution and Bylaws for use as guidelines to be followed as closely as possible pending final consideration by the 1987 Annual Council.”2 The trend becomes clear by 1995, when the same item reads:

“This model constitution shall be followed by all union conferences. The model bylaws may be modified, with the approval of the next higher organization. Those sections of the model bylaws that appear in bold print are essential to the unity of the Church worldwide, and shall be included in the bylaws as adopted by each union conference. Other sections of the model bylaws may be modified … provided they continue to be in full harmony with the provisions of this model. Amendments to the model Union Conference Constitution and Bylaws shall be made by action
of the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at any Annual Council of that Committee.”

The 2010 edition reflects some changes but reads essentially the same as what is put forth in the 1995 edition.

The model constitution that once was presented as guidance and recommendation has morphed into a document that carries significant mandate from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which serves as the determining agent in regard to whether a policy initiative by a union conference or a local conference is in agreement or not. This assumes that the boldfaced items in the model constitution are supported by a vote of the delegates at a General Conference session and not simply the work of a committee at the General Conference office, apart from a session vote authorizing the mandates.

The question that remains unanswered is how the governance process will play out if a union conference receives (or is given) a mandate by its constituency that requires women to be placed on an equal footing with men when it comes to denominational opportunities and formal affirmations in the pastoral leadership role. What parameters are intended in the policy that grants authority solely to the union conferences to authorize ordination of pastors?

Since there is no formal prohibition against ordaining women to gospel ministry, then what existing policy at the General Conference would be referenced as reflecting the voice of the people (General Conference in session) regarding the ordination of women? Certainly we have guidelines for ordination, but do those guidelines explicitly prohibit the ecclesiastical affirmation of women? Or do they simply describe the process of ordination? Maybe legal experts will be able to uncover restrictive ordination policies that I have failed to discover, but I find no policy that is being defied by those seeking to establish parity for male and female pastors.

But regardless of the posture of either organization, it must be admitted that the Seventh-day Adventist system was designed to support an upward flow of authority from the people to the leaders who serve the church at the various organizational levels. We must be reminded that such leaders exercise authority loaned in trust by the people—our leaders do not own authority.

Policies were developed not by proactive legislation, but rather by recognition of what was generally or commonly practiced by the people. The Church Manual emerged in such a fashion, and though it sometimes seems like a patchwork quilt of ecclesial policy, it has the honor of representing the voice of the people rather than expert clerics. What we see emerging in terms of practice at the local conference and union conference levels will certainly be viewed by some as rebellion and a move toward disunity. Careful reflection regarding how our systems of ecclesiology emerged, however, will reveal an exercise of authority by the people that is legitimized through the representative process of the local and union conferences and ultimately at the General Conference Session. It starts at the bottom and is processed upward.

Accountability
Let’s take a look at who answers to whom in our beloved church. First, let me express a caution. We are culturally conditioned to think in terms of top-down hierarchy when it comes to
accountability. We naturally assume that we are accountable to those above us, but this assumption doesn’t apply to the church. Take a moment and recall the words of the Master spoken on Thursday evening before his death on Friday: “He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves” (Luke 22:26, NKJV). This excerpt is part of a larger discussion in the Gospels that challenges the top-down hierarchical model (Matt. 18:1-5; 20:25-28; Mark 10:43-44; John 13:12-17) that we intuitively draw on when considering accountability. Jesus turned it upside down, and so did the delegates to the 1901 General Conference session. Those who are loaned authority for their term of service by the people should be honored by those over whom they are given authority (Heb. 13:17), but it remains the God-given responsibility of the corporate body of believers to delegate the authority by which each level of the organization functions.

The intuitive assumption is that the “lower” organizations are accountable to the higher organization. This assumption is intuitive but wrong. Accountability in the Seventh-day Adventist system always takes us back to the people, for it is the church members who hold the divine gift of authority, and it is to them that all levels of the church ultimately answer. All positional authority is granted by the people on a basis that is limited by both time and scope—whether the position is General Conference president or local pastor.

The Consolidation Tendency
The tendency of human organizations is to move from a model of distributed authority toward a consolidation of authority—from authority exercised by many to authority exercised by a few (or, in extreme cases, one). Consider Israel’s persistence in pressing for a king (Judges 8; 1 Samuel 9), wherein God proclaims himself to be rejected in the process. Consider the dramatic consolidation of the radically distributed authority in the New Testament church as it raced toward a papal system that proclaimed the people to be the subjects of authority rather than the possessors of it. Multiple examples of this tendency can be cited throughout biblical history. God distributes authority; people tend to consolidate it.

What about our church? If you review the background leading up to the reorganization of the church in 1901, it will show that the reorganization was a solution designed in reaction to a process of consolidation of power that resulted in what Ellen White referred to repeatedly as “kingly authority.” The following quote was penned in 1903, and it provides a sense of time during which the leadership behavior problem was maturing:

“In the work of God no kingly authority is to be exercised by any human being, or by two or three. The representatives of the Conference, as it has been carried with authority for the last 20 years, shall be no longer justified in saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.’ The men in positions of trust have not been carrying the work wisely.”4

Except As We Shall Forget
It has been a little over a hundred years since our ecclesial ancestors struggled with the issues of organization and leadership and came up with the church structure and the leadership guidelines that define our representative system of church governance. Up until that time, the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seems to have unfolded in response to practical needs. At first our spiritual forbears resisted organization; then in the mid-19th century they
recognized a need for more order as our numbers and the complexity of the body increased. Finally, late in the 19th century, the church discovered that careful organization was absolutely essential.

The move to organize was not prompted solely by the issue of complexity brought on by growing churches and mission expansion; it was also a response to the leadership behavior of church officials at the highest levels. As far back as the time of the Greek philosopher Plato, humans have recognized the predictable and progressive change in leadership behavior that edged toward authoritarian and dictatorial patterns. In his discussion of rulership and tyranny, Plato wrote, “When he [tyrant] first appears above ground he is a protector.” The move from protector to tyrant is a common transition in human leadership behavior—one to which the church has no automatic immunity. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 both describe Lucifer’s journey of selfascendancy in similar terms but with tragic results.

Ellen White was engaged with the issue of leadership, authority, and power issues much of the time after her return from Australia in September 1900 until her death in 1915. Many Leadership reveal her positions on leadership and organizational behavior in reaction to what was happening during this period. Here is an example of the tone of her counsel:

“No man has been made a master, to rule the mind and conscience of a fellow-being. Let us be very careful how we deal with God’s blood-bought heritage. To no man has been appointed the work of being a ruler over his fellow men. Every man is to bear his own burden. He may speak words of encouragement, faith, and hope to his fellow-workers; he may help them to bear their special burdens … .”

There are many such comments in her writings, to be found in context in the manuscripts of her work. She was clearly engaged in turning the church away from both behavior and policies that consolidated authority in one or a few, rather than distributing governance and leadership authority broadly throughout the body of Christ.

Reorganization
Ellen White was also engaged vigorously in the preparation and conduct of the General Conference Session of 1901. She was present in spite of her poor health and made the following statement in a closed meeting just prior to the session, which was quoted by A.T. Jones:

“But when we see that message after message given by God has been received and accepted, yet no change has been made, we know that new power must be brought into the regular lines. The management of the regular lines must be entirely changed, newly organized.”

She was frustrated by the fact that organizational and leadership behavior issues had been addressed by her to church leaders for more than a decade but with no change realized. Consequently, the issue of change in this arena became part of the work of the 1901 General Conference Session.
The trend leading up to the 1901 Session was a move away from the distributed model and toward a hierarchical model in both leadership behavior and organization. Authority was progressively collecting at the top, to the end that both members and church employees were being made subject to the authority of those residing “above” them. The 1901 Session made a radical shift away from the hierarchical model, wherein power and authority flows down to those who are subject thereto, and instead focused upon the freedom and inherent capacity of the individual member and employee.

Again E.G. White speaks in favor of the distributed model: “Each is to have an individual experience in being taught by the Great Teacher, and individual communion with God.”

**Representative Model**

The delegates to the session and those immediately following 1901 brought forth a model of organization that tipped the hierarchy of power on its head. Instead of authority being vested in ecclesiastical leaders, it was laid upon those at the base—the members of the church. Authority flowed up through a process of delegation (see Figure 1). It was loaned to leaders at the various levels on a limited basis. No leader owned authority, but rather functioned as a steward of authority until the end of his/her term— and only within the organizational and geographical scope of the defined assignment.

The 1901 reorganization began a process that placed a barrier between each level of the church. This severely limited the personal authority of leaders beyond their immediate placement. The General Conference was limited in its authority over union conferences. Unions were designed as semiautonomous entities with limited ability to dictate to local conferences, and up until 1980 they were held accountable at their sessions by a constituency that included every ordained pastor in the union conference as a voting delegate. Conferences in turn had boundaries that limited their authority in the local churches. Leaders at each level, including the local church, answered to a representative constituency.
Again Ellen White affirms this model: “It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences. The power vested in the Conference is not to be centered in one man, or two men, or six men; there is to be a council of men over the separate divisions.”

This model is in stark contrast to the papal and the episcopal models, wherein authority is vested in an individual clergyman (papal) or group of clergymen (episcopal), who exercise it downward to a submissive constituency. The Seventh-day Adventist hierarchy of power was displaced in 1901 by a hierarchy of order that served the organizational needs of the church without consolidating power in any one individual. In so doing, the 1901 Session turned back the process that 1800 years before had led the early church down the path toward papacy.

The Representative System Today
God gave us an exceptional system of organization. It is the result of committed, God-fearing people who struggled with issues of organization and leadership in honest, open debate and produced a model that is “smarter” than any one of us. It’s a system that takes us back beyond the kings of Israel to a time wherein each son and daughter of God related directly to him as ruler. Gideon referenced this relationship with God in his answer to the elders of Israel when they requested that he become king: “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23, NKJV). Each person carried the responsibility of service before God. So it is that the 1901 reorganization challenged the concept of kingly power and won.

1903 GC Session Challenge
Proponents of the centralized model of authority challenged the newly adopted representative model at the 1903 General Conference Session. The delegates defended the idea that it was the people’s church and held to the distributed model of governance and rejected what was referred by some as “kingly authority.” It should not be ignored, however, that the tendency to control rather than to trust the voice of the body remains a temptation that has an insidious and persistent pull upon those called to lead. Remember Plato’s tyrant; he started out as a protector! We must ask ourselves and, yes, even assess our organization to determine whether controlling behavior is impacting the church in a systemic manner. Are we still honoring the spirit of the 1901 reorganization? There is evidence that the church is functionally moving toward an episcopal model as the representative structure crumbles from lack of maintenance.

Much will be revealed in the coming months relative to how the organized church will respond to the initiative by some union conferences in North America to take constituent action to address parity between male and female pastors regarding formal acts of affirmation. Is such action a legitimate move by the people to address issues that impact their sense of corporate and individual integrity? Or is such action a challenge to the General Conference, which is commissioned to implement the collective voice of the people on a global scale, and thus assure unity and in some sense ecclesiastic uniformity? Looking from the bottom up, it seems to make sense to move forward to address a problem with action affirmed by the constituency. Looking down from the top, it is understandable that anxieties might rise as the certainty of uniform beliefs and corporate behavior becomes less certain.
In the process of solving this problem, the church must renew its commitment to its root structure, wherein authority flows up from the people. In the end we must honor that collective voice, which over the years has grown faint. The denomination must refresh the concept of representative governance and build trust between the organized church and the body of believers by implementing concrete efforts to hear and value the collective voice of the body. The Master intentionally called his disciples friends rather than servants, and in that spirit the organized church must establish a relationship with the people they serve. God’s church is after all, the people’s church.

Stanley E. Patterson, Ph.D., is an associate professor and chair of the Christian Ministry Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

1 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, NAD Constitution, Bylaws and Working Policy (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1980), C 70 05.
3 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Constitution, Bylaws and Working Policy (Silver Spring, Maryland: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), pp. 165–166.
10 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, General Conference Bulletin, in General Conference Session (Oakland, California: GC Secretariat, 1903), pp. 149-166.
Abuse in the Church, and Women’s Ordination: A Connection?

Submitted: Aug 30, 2012
By Debbonnaire Kovacs

As told to Debbonnaire Kovacs
Note: This article, half story, half opinion piece, comes from an anonymous survivor of childhood abuse who believes she sees a connection between that sort of violence and the attitudes toward women that are being displayed right now in the denomination. It is rather rambling; I have given it just as it was told to me.

I think I should start right out saying that I am not saying that the people who are against the ordination of women are violent or abusive. I don’t believe any such thing, although statistically, some may be. We hear all the time that one in three or four women in the world is or has been abused, and I always wonder, How many, then, are abusers?

All I’m saying is that there is a hidden or not-so-hidden attitude, not just toward women, but toward people who disagree with something we hold dear, in the Adventist church. I am a lifelong Adventist; my parents and grandparents were lifelong Adventists. There is a family story that somebody’s Bible was signed by Sister White. I won’t ever be anything else, either. I think Adventism makes more sense than any other religion.

But that doesn’t mean I can’t see our weaknesses, and of course we have them. One of the big ones is that, maybe just because we’re so different, we seem to attract people who, well, who are a little crazy. People who like to have a list of certain things they can do and not do, and don’t want to think for themselves. I think they’re afraid to think, afraid they’ll anger God, or something. Somebody recently told me I was giving them too much credit. “They aren’t thinking theologically,” he said. “They aren’t acting the way they are to try to please God. It’s just that they want what they want and hate change.” Well, maybe some people are like that. Maybe lots are. But I think a lot are just trying to do what they think God wants, and don’t know their Bibles well enough to see how he changes... not what he wants, which is for us to all reflect his love, but he changes how he wants us to show that love in different times and places and different cultures.

Or maybe that’s not exactly right. I don’t know how to express it.

I do know that there was a thread of rigidity, of fear, of absolute certainty of being RIGHT that ran through the generations of my family and—I think, anyway—was part of what led to abuse. There has been terrible abuse—beatings, whippings, sexual abuse, I’m not going to go into details. It’s not just my generation. I don’t know how far back it goes, but it goes back as far as I know about. And these were all church members, often elders and deacons and even preachers. Often they said they did what they did because it was God’s will. They would use verses like, “Spare the rod, spoil the child,” and “Children, obey your parents in the Lord,” (which they took to mean “obey as if they were the Lord”), and “Wives, obey your husband,” or “be silent in church,” or whatever.
This certainty of being right led to a certainty of the ways to make sure their kids were always right too, because if a kid (or a wife) did something God didn’t like, they might go to hell, and even though we don’t believe in an ever-burning hell, still you have to admit, it’s a scary thought. Especially if you know a lot about God, but don’t really know God, and how impossibly loving and forgiving he is. Or even if you don’t know human beings who are trying to be that loving and forgiving. I mean, we learn from each other, right? Kids learn from their parents, and in my family, mostly kids have learned from their parents how to be violent.

It was “Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day” that got me thinking about this. I’ve been learning that violence doesn’t start with a harsh act, it starts with a harsh word, and even before that with a harsh thought. Trying to make someone believe in the Sabbath, or tithing—that’s an act of violence. Even God doesn’t go around trying to force us to toe the line. So we try to force somebody to believe a certain way, and when they won’t, we argue, and our voice goes up and up, and that can lead to hitting, which can lead to more hitting. . . It can’t be stopped except by the Holy Spirit. And here’s the real catch: The Holy Spirit won’t force anyone to change! So if he’s working with someone who only understands force, he really needs all his patience. Luckily, he has a lot.

So what does this have to do with ordination of women? In my family, there was definitely an attitude of women being lower beings. Even when that’s covered up by pretending to put us on a pedestal, or to list all the ways we are allowed to serve and saying we’re trying to be like men if we want more or other than that, it’s still saying we’re not quite equal. And then there’s all the panic—really, that’s what it looks like to me, panic—when change does threaten. When people are afraid or angry inside, and usually don’t even know it, any change is definitely a threat.

Abusers feel powerless. They were probably abused when they were little, too. And their abusers were abused before them. Satan started it a long, long time ago. So they try to fix that power void by taking violent power over others who may be smaller or weaker. I hate to say it, but I kind of see an attitude like that in what people keep calling “the top echelons” of the church. Weren’t we always a different kind of church? Weren’t we started by young people and women and a teenage girl who had visions? Weren’t we supposed to be servants of God and each other? Isn’t the highest you go in church hierarchy supposed to be the “last,” the servant of all?

Jesus loves you. This I KNOW. He even loves me. It’s okay if we disagree. That’s not violent. Arguing and threatening is.

And it scares me.