Individual Copies of September Issue Available

We have received several inquiries over the weekend regarding the availability of individual copies of the current issue of the magazine, which focuses on the relationship of central and local power in the church, through the history of Adventism, in context of the recent controversies regarding the ordination of pastors without regard to gender. Those interested in individual copies should phone 503 826-8600 during office hours. Each copy is $8 apiece for a single issue; each additional copy with the same order is $7. For access to the online edition of the current magazine, subscribers may click on the above headline. (Available only to current subscribers; subscriptions may be purchased online or by phoning the above telephone number). ...

Corrected Information

A computer malfunction contributed to the following slight inaccuracies in AT's Friday blurbs.

Abuse in the Church, and Women’s Ordination: A Connection? (Corrected): Writer Debonnaire Kovacs believes a 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)... (AT incorrectly reported on Friday that the family in question was Debonnaire Kovacs' own family.)

Measles Outbreak at Ozark Adventist Academy Evidently Due to Lack of Immunizations: A returning student from an overseas trip 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.... (AT reported that the trip was mission-related; apparently it was not.)
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. So 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.
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.