## NEWS

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**Anonymous Group Claims Responsibility for Hacking White Estate, Challenges Trustees to Release Unpublished Manuscripts in Digital Form:** Does the White Estate have a trove of writings tucked away electronically that it refuses to share with the rest of us? A group that calls itself "SDAanonymous" claims it's electronically penetrated the secrecy and wants to spread the files like electronic leaves of autumn....

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Richland, WA Pastor Rides Across the Country for Diapers: Through the scorching heat of one of the most hellacious summers on American record, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor completed a bicycle ride across the nation this week, to raise a mountain of cash to swaddle needy children (Available only to Adventist Today subscribers.)....

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Handling of Sexual Misconduct by a Well-known Theologian Raises Questions and Concerns

Submitted: Sep 4, 2012
By AT News Team
Corrected September 5 at 6:30 p.m.

Questions have been raised about the conference president who employed Samuel K. Pipim, the Seventh-day Adventist youth worker and theologian who resigned last year due to sexual misconduct. “What did he know and when did he know it?”

Jay Gallimore, president of the Michigan Conference, released a statement just prior to the Labor Day weekend in which he admitted there have been multiple victims of Pipim’s “predatory” behavior. A leader of The Hope of Survivors, an Adventist support group for victims of clergy sexual abuse, responded to the statement by pointing out that there are at least “three additional credible and compelling allegations” in addition to the two mentioned in Gallimore’s statement, as well as “several other unverifiable reports.” Documented cases go back a dozen years during which Pipim worked with college students as an employee of the conference.

Even after he resigned his ministerial credentials, was fired and agreed to be dropped from church membership, Pipim took a group of young people on a trip to Spain and he hosted social events for young people at his home into early 2012. Michigan Conference administration did not warn young women away from these activities by the “serial predator,” a victim advocate has stated.

As the stories of Pipim’s victims have become known, questions have been raised as to whether his behavior constituted rape. Gallimore acknowledged this concern in his statement, but said “it seemed prudent to leave this definition alone.” It is an “embarrassment” when denominational leaders “cannot decide what is legitimate rape,” the advocate concludes. “Such institutional ignorance disgraces the Adventist Church and offends thinking people.”

Adventist Today has published an interview with a professional counselor authorized to speak for one of the young women that Pipim manipulated into a sexual encounter. A number of other interviews and confirming documentation has been collected, according to the victim support group.

There are tape recordings of Pipim attempting to convince a young woman to forgive him and not provide information to denominational officials, said Martin Weber, board chairman of the victim support group, in a response to Gallimore’s statement. “How many victims [have been] intimidated into suffocated silence? Are they so numerous that not even the predator himself can recall them all?”

The Hope of Survivors is a nonprofit organization made up largely of mental health and clergy professionals, many of them Adventists, although of the 93 clients served by the group in the last year of record, only about one in five identified themselves as Adventists. A total of 20 denominations are listed in the 2011 Annual Report as the context for victims supported by the
organization. It provides educational materials for congregations, information and assistance to family and church professionals who encounter cases, and public advocacy on the issue.

“Pipim is a case study in what happens when church officials ‘have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace’ (Jeremiah 6:14),” Weber stated. “Business as usual cannot continue when a global predator is deceiving God’s people.” Pipim became well known both because he was a primary predator of Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC), an independent, conservative Adventist youth organization that holds a yearly event around Christmas and New Years attended by thousands, and for the books he has written against women’s ordination to the gospel ministry and critiquing the work of a number of well-known Adventist Bible scholars.

“Leveraging his vast spiritual influence with the global Adventist community,” Weber said, “Pipim has been rebuilding his ‘ministry’ with a robust international speaking schedule. … His Facebook pages and websites provide inspiration and digital fellowship for thousands of under-warned ‘eaglets’ – Pipim’s pet term for his eager young disciples.”

Remnant Publications is an independent, “self-supporting” Adventist publisher based in Michigan. It is marketing Pipim’s latest book which is about forgiveness. Weber points out that the key personnel are members in Gallimore’s conference and asks if Gallimore has “done anything to dissuade them from propagating Pipim’s lies?”

According to his statement, Gallimore has urged Pipim to stop preaching and writing. “We believe it is in the best interest of the church as well as Dr. Pipim for him to stop all … speaking appointments, writing books … or developing a self-supporting ministry,” Gallimore said. He puts this in the context of an August 7 meeting with Pipim.

Some denominational workers are evidently unhappy that the victim support group has made an issue of this case. Although no one will go on the record, there are those who accuse those who have spoken out on behalf of Pipim’s victims of violating the privacy of these young women. Weber’s statement refers to them as “enablers” because they “rush in to shush all inquiry with pious talk about the victims’ right to privacy. But we are not asking for their names or for embarrassing details … We just need to know whether Seventh-day Adventists have a Penn State-style cover-up on our hands.”

Weber makes it clear that his statement was not made by the victims support group as an organization. He also says that it is not part of his role as a staff member for the Mid-America Union Conference. He spoke up at this point because he believes that Gallimore’s statement leaves some important things unsaid.

“A neutral party at a higher level in the denomination needs to get involved at this point,” a retired North American Division officer told Adventist Today. “There are policies that permit the Division to investigate and settle differences that involve denominational employees from two different union conference territories. The Working Policy also directs that cases of suspected abuse must be dealt with, not ignored or swept under the rug. The fact that someone has been
fired or disfellowshipped does not close the book on an abuse case.”
Anonymous Group Claims Responsibility for Hacking White Estate, Challenges Trustees to Release Unpublished Manuscripts in Digital Form

Submitted: Sep 3, 2012
By AT News Team

In a news release sent to Adventist Today, a group calling itself “SDAanonymous” has claimed responsibility for hacking a secret web site maintained by the Ellen G. White Estate as alleged in a lawsuit filed in August by the Estate. The group claims that a decision was made by the Estate at some point between 1995 and 2001 to publish all of the previously unpublished letters and manuscripts by White in a CD-ROM and that this set of digital files was ready for publication in 2002. It quotes from a book published with the authorization of the Estate in 1998.

The news release states that negotiations have already been exchanged by the White Estate lawyers and representatives of the group. Earlier in August, the White Estate attempted to initiate legal action in Australia. A counter offer was made to the White Estate offering to settle the litigation if the CD-ROM of the unpublished materials was released “by the end of 2012.”

The statement argues that under United States copyright law all of White’s unpublished material came into “public domain” outside of copyright protection on January 1, 2003. It says that Brendan Knudson, the only individual identified in the lawsuit, has not been served and lives outside of the jurisdiction of U.S. courts. The group expects the court to dismiss the lawsuit due to this lack of jurisdiction.

The group claims that an employee of the White Estate first revealed to them the online location of the full collection of unpublished letters and manuscripts and that it accessed these through a backdoor, not through breaking into the server. It also charges that a mistaken attempt by a private detective working for a White Estate lawyer to serve papers on Brendan Knudson caused “considerable distress” to “Brendan’s autistic brother.”

The document accuses the White Estate of seeking to control the interpretation of White’s writings instead of serving as trustees of the materials as specified in her will. It also charges the Estate with “disobedience to the writings they claim to uphold” because of the litigation it has filed. Statements by Ellen White warning against lawsuits among church members are quoted from pages 302 and 303 of Selected Messages, Volume 3.

According to the news release SDAanonymous is “a group of several dozen Seventh-day Adventists from all over the world [including] 13 nationalities and can be found on all the major continents.” It says that some are employees of Adventist institutions, while others are students. Knudson is specifically identified as the only person in the group who is not a member of the denomination. It says that he volunteered to be the person to which the online activity could be traced in order to protect the others from church discipline.
A public evangelism campaign in the South Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG) ended with the baptism of at least 4,500 new members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Attendance on the final night in Port Moresby, the largest city and the national capital, was over 100,000, according to reports supplied to Adventist Today by the *Adventist Review* news staff. This is a number equal to half the population of the city. Organizers say this is the largest public audience to hear the Adventist messages preached in English in the history of the denomination.

The campaign was led by John Carter, a veteran evangelist from Australia currently based in California. It was by far the largest audience he has addressed in his 50 years as an evangelist. The crowd was so large it could not fit in the giant Sir John Guise Stadium, a soccer venue. Thousands listened to the public address system standing outside or sitting in their cars. Another 5,000 sat on the grass listening in the dark at a second soccer field down the road. The local conference hastily erected a giant screen so this crowd could see the visuals.

The baptism ceremony itself was a huge operation. There are 60 Adventist churches in the city of Port Moresby. The night before, pastors mingled with those who answered an altar call. The pastors directed each new convert to a specific congregation. At the Sabbath morning baptism the candidates stood with their congregation.
Because of the large number of people to be baptized, ordained ministers from other conferences were called in to help. The event was held at a shallow ocean beach and 50 pastors stood in waist-deep water about 200 feet offshore as lines of candidates walked out to them. The pastors each baptized about 100 people.

The final session of the campaign was held six hours later. At that meeting another 3,000 people requested baptism and will be baptized later. If all of them follow through, the campaign will have added about 8,000 new church members. On August 18 the Adventist churches in Port Moresby were all crowded. “We had a wonderful, blessed Sabbath,” said Cameron Wari, coordinator of follow-up activities. “All the newly baptized members were welcomed by the churches as part of a big family. Most of the church leaders realized that there was not going to be enough room in their churches to accommodate the influx.”

The membership of the Adventist Church in PNG was about 260,000 according to official reports. There are more than 3,500 local congregations in the country. The denomination grew at rapid rates (six to twelve percent per year) in the 1980s and then slowed to an average annual growth rate of five percent in the 1990s. Over the last decade the growth rate in PNG has been about the same as it was in North America, around two percent per year.

The government census reports nearly three times as many people who identified themselves as Adventists. In fact 10 percent of the population says they are Adventists. That is 25 times the percentage of Americans who identify themselves in national surveys as Adventists. This makes the Adventist faith the fourth largest religion in PNG, very close in size to the United Church (a mainline Protestant merger), about half the size of the Lutheran Church and a third the number of Catholics.

Pacific Adventist University began as a college in 1983 and was given a university charter by the
government in 1997. It has 1,100 students on four campuses with a faculty of about 100. Two years ago it launched an FM radio station that can be heard throughout the national capital region. The denomination also operates three secondary schools and six medical clinics in the country. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in PNG has a staff of 56 and an annual budget of a little over $1 million, according to its most recent annual report. It is involved with HIV-AIDS prevention, construction of village water systems, adult literacy education and other projects. The Adventist Church also sponsors the Flying Doctor Service that brings mobile clinics to isolated rural areas.

PNG is among the poorest nations on the globe with a third of its population living on a dollar a day or less. The Adventist Church’s investment in education and health care has been significant to the progress this country is making, and ADRA is in the forefront of community development. The result is that a significant portion of the emerging middle class in PNG has an Adventist family connection even if they are not active members.

Last fall *Adventist Today* reported on a constitutional crisis in PNG in which Adventists held key positions on both sides. Two men claimed the office of prime minister at the same time. The deputy of one candidate and the chief of staff of the other candidate were both members of the Adventist Church, as are a number of members of parliament.

*The report on the evangelism campaign and the accompanying pictures were supplied to Adventist Today by the Adventist Review.*
Adventist Bible Teacher to be Broadcast on Major Christian Television Network

Submitted: Sep 6, 2012
By AT News Team

Bill Liversidge, a well-known Seventh-day Adventist preacher, will be aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) starting today (Sept. 6). His Victory in Jesus broadcast will be released at 9:30 p.m. Pacific Time. It will also be seen on the TBN Church Channel, Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

TBN is probably the largest Christian broadcasting network. It owns 35 television stations in the United States and includes another 61 affiliates. According to TVNewsCheck, TBN currently is the third largest broadcast television station group in the country, besting CBS, Fox, and NBC, but behind Ion and Univision. TBN’s web site says that it “reaches every major continent via 78 satellites and more than 18,000 television and cable affiliates worldwide.” Most local cable companies in the U.S. include TBN.

Liversidge is best known for teaching large numbers of Adventist church members the inductive approach to Bible study which is rooted in the text of Scripture. He grew up and entered the ministry in Australia, serving as a missionary in the South Pacific before he came to North America where he has served as an evangelist and Ministerial Association director in two union conferences. For more than a decade he has led a “self-supporting” independent ministry, Creative Media Ministries based in Palm Springs, California.

Liversidge has a regular release on the Loma Linda Broadcasting Network, Safe Television in Arkansas and News TV in Arizona. More recently his program has been available on the Better Life Network in Oregon, Washington and northern California.

The schedule of his seminars around the country and overseas is available at www.creativemediaministries.org and more information about the new broadcast is available at www.tbn.org.
Public Update on Adventist Longevity Research Scheduled for Sabbath, September 15

Submitted: Sep 6, 2012
By AT News Team

Loma Linda University has become a major center of research on longevity with support from the National Institutes of Health and using large, long-running studies of Seventh-day Adventists in California and across the country. The public is invited to hear the results of this research at the inaugural Loma Linda Health Symposium.

The event is set for 5 to 7 p.m. Saturday, September 15, at the University Church, 11215 Campus Street, Loma Linda. Presenters will include Dr. Gary Fraser, principal investigator of the ongoing Adventist Health Study. He will be joined by Dr. Michael Orlich, Prof. Karen Jaceldo and Prof. Pramil Singh. The symposium is sponsored by the university’s School of Public Health, the Drayson Center Wellness Clinic and the University Church.

The Adventist Health Study is a multi-generational scientific study that looks into the health and longevity of members of the Adventist faith. Loma Linda includes many Adventist residents and was identified by New York Times best-selling author Dan Buettner as the only “Blue Zone” in North America. “Blue Zones” are four places in the world where many people live healthy and productive lives into their 90s and 100s.

“The secrets of health and longevity of Loma Linda have been a topic of extensive research,” said Dr. Hildemar Dos Santos, assistant professor in the Preventive Care Program at the School of Public Health and the primary organizer of the symposium. “In simple language, the experts will translate the health secrets of the Loma Linda Blue Zone.”

Symposium presenters will discuss topics such as cancer prevention, heart disease prevention, obesity and diabetes prevention, and many other health issues related to lifestyle. Information will also be shared about health screenings, educational resources and there will be question-and-answer sessions with the panelists. More information is available at (909) 651-5077.
Although no dramatic developments occurred, the ordination issue provided an interesting undercurrent during the European Pastors Council in late August in the Trans-European Division (TED) of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A GC vice president who made presentations at both the Columbia Union Conference and Pacific Union Conference constituency sessions spoke about “A Crisis of Leadership” in the denomination. A well-known female senior pastor from the Southeastern California Conference was among the key speakers. The division president reviewed the issues and clearly stated his support for ordaining women to the gospel ministry.

Elder Lowell Cooper, a GC general vice president appeared with GC President Ted N. C. Wilson at the Pacific Union Conference session on August 19, appealing for the delegates to hold off on authorizing ordination for women pastors, and then traveled to Slovenia where the European Pastors Council was held and spoke on August 23 to a general session. “There is a crisis in confidence in leaders,” said Cooper in his opening words to the European pastors. “Leaders are held in suspicion. And yet, a trustworthy God will never be made know by untrustworthy people.” He made no reported comments on the ordination issues, but in view of the timing is entirely possible that they were on his mind.

“Cooper went on to say that the most important human resource for the church is trust,” according to a news release from the TED. He discussed seven key principles of leadership: humility, integrity, trust, respect, accountability, collaboration and excellence. “Humility is a much misunderstood concept today,” he said. “By many it is thought of as weakness or insecurity and leaders in the world are thought to need a huge ego.” In the church however things have to be different. Humility is an essential quality for the church leader.

Trust is an essential foundation for any organization and, according to Cooper, two things are required for its establishment: moral character and competence. These are significant at two levels – the personal level and the corporate level. Breaking this down to specifics, he stressed the importance of maintaining confidentiality, while at the same time being transparent with the information that it is legitimate to share.

Cooper also said that collaboration is becoming more and more important in church leadership. “Anyone who believes that they are the center of everything is heading for disaster,” Cooper stated. In the church we cannot afford to encourage a celebrity mentality. Pastor Chris Oberg addressed the assembled European pastors the next day, August 24. “Getting Out of God’s Way” was the title of her presentation. She is senior pastor of the La Sierra University Church. The conference in which she is employed is one of several in the North American Division that have issued ordained minister credentials to the women who had previously been commissioned.

Before the European Pastors Council concluded, Pastor Bertil Wiklander, TED president, made a
lengthy statement on “Women’s Ordination to the Pastoral Ministry.” He reviewed the many
times since 1982 that the TED has discussed this topic and made specific request of the GC for
policy variances, culminating in a vote in November 2010, “To request the GC for permission to
ordain women to the gospel ministry.”

Wiklander made his views clear. “I have never made a secret of my own personal conviction. I
accept women’s ordination as being biblical and appropriate. But I am also very concerned that
we manage this important matter in harmony and cooperation with the world church.”

He also urged the pastors to read a new book by John Lorencin, retired president of the
Yugoslavian Union. Lorencin “used to be very much opposed to women’s ordination. He admits
that he took a traditional view and under the influence of his cultural context where there were
three main religions, Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic and Islam. He had not formed his
opinion on the basis of the Bible, so when he retired he decided to study ordination in the Bible.
… In simple language, he goes through the whole Bible.

Lorencin “finds that in the New Testament, Christ has taken over the sacrificial priestly office
from the Old Testament, so it is no more. Instead, Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial system and
become our high priest in heaven where he now offers his benefits for us to God. As our high
priest, he is also the head of the body of Christ, the church, which consists of the priesthood of
all believers, which makes no distinction between male and female.”

Lorencin “points out that there is no word for ‘ordination’ in the Bible. It is used in the King
James Version from 1611, but it is there based on old Roman Catholic translations from the 14th
and 15th centuries. In fact, pastor Lorencin warns against letting pastoral ordination be
influenced by the Roman Catholic, unbiblical practice, which is rooted in the pagan Roman
system of being promoted (Latin ordinatio) to a higher ‘order’ (Latin ordo) in the state offices.
Any sense of the rite of ordination conveying a special status or character that is not already
there through the gift of the Holy Spirit is unbiblical. Ordination is therefore a work of the Spirit
and only recognized and confirmed by the church.”

Lorencin’s book was published earlier this year in English as well as other languages. It is
views are changing among the few who in Europe have opposed the ordination of women and
Wiklander hopes that the process of Bible study and the influence of the Holy Spirit will change
the opposition around the world so that the denomination can unite in a new position.

The full statement is available on the Web at: http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/statement-on-
womens-ordination-to-the-pastoral-ministry

Adventist Today thanks TEDNews for daily reports during the European Pastors Council.
God commanded circumcision of his ancient church. Cutting short the male foreskin was symbolic of submitting to God’s control our powers of creation, or procreation. Before circumcision Sarah proposed and Abraham accepted a creation scheme using an Egyptian slave girl to be the vessel of the promised Seed. But human schemes exploiting a slave’s body were not satisfactory for salvation’s plan so God’s original creation in Abraham and his male descendants was to be cut with a knife, and the little scar was to mark the penance of believers.

For over a thousand years Adam’s carefully designed foreskin became Abraham’s artificially shortened foreskin for all male believers and their wives. It was the distinguishing mark of obedience to God’s holy law. God’s enemies were the un-shortened. David has nothing but scorn for his enemy, that “uncircumcised Philistine” giant.

**JESUS WAS CIRCUMCISED.**

Jesus himself was circumcised. (See figure 1) The young ram without spot and blemish, actually had one small blemish. And medieval altars painting the key events of the gospel story for illiterate Christians often include a panel showing *Die Beschneidung* (The Cutting or Circumcision) of the 8 day old Messiah as a vital part of that story. As children partake of flesh
and blood, so it became the Author of our Salvation to be like unto them in all things, including the marks or scars of sin, only without sin.

Figure 1--The Beschneidung.
Photo taken of Medieval Church Art, Louvre, Paris.

So the 1st century followers of Jesus of Nazareth in church headquarters in Jerusalem were sure that “if it was good enough for Jesus it was good enough for the rest of us.” It was “clearly the teaching of the Bible” that the foreskin of all male believers had to be short. Yes, we were to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every nation, but part of that gospel had to be the Bible and its undeniable teachings on circumcision, didn’t it?

Is it surprising that certain believers from the headquarters of the church were sent out by leading brethren (how more leading could you get than Jesus brother, James?) to teach that Christians of every nation had to get “back to the Bible”, back to the clear teaching in this immoral world, that there was only one length of foreskin suitable for believers—short.

CIRCUMCISION OPPONENT

And then there was Paul. Himself with the proper length foreskin, mind you, teaching that length of foreskin was not a pillar of the faith. That long foreskins and short foreskins could both be good Christians, that it was peripheral and not central. And that those trying to enforce it as central were actually doing harm to the church. Ellen White writes that Paul’s circumcising opponents considered he was preaching “daring blasphemy”!

Why was opposition to circumcision as a condition of belief in Christ such an important issue for St. Paul and for the growth of the Christian church? Because it was not essential. A short foreskin may have been good, Biblical, and God ordained, traditional and the previous universal belief of the godly, but it was not central, vital, pivotal. The length of the foreskin, long or short, should not be allowed to be a hindrance to membership in the Christian church. And enforcing belief in a short foreskin could have killed the growth of Christianity.

James Stalker in his 1912 Life of Paul, writes that if the burden of the circumcisers to enforce their dogma on the entire Christian church had not been stopped by the crushing force of Paul’s polemics against them, “Christianity would have been a river lost in the sands of prejudiced near its very source; it would have been at the present day a forgotten Jewish sect instead of the religion of the world.”

You know why I am writing. I think that the attempt to enforce a short chronology for creation is the modern equivalent of enforcing circumcision on new gentile converts. I don’t think that believing in a short chronology of life on earth is spiritually wrong, but I think that enforcing that chronology on others is spiritually wrong.
HEALTH BENEFITS OF CIRCUMCISION

Actually as a physician I am strongly in favor of male circumcision. I and my sons are circumcised. And there is no single better way of preventing the acquisition of HIV/AIDS by males in this dangerous world than having all boys circumcised. Universal male circumcision is in fact promoted by the World Health Organization as the present best way, next to abstinence, of fighting male HIV/AIDS transmission.

Every SDA church in Africa and likely the rest of the world should be promoting male infant circumcision as an Adventist health message as much as abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. But the length of the foreskin should be a scientific and hygienic issue, not a church membership issue.

IMPOSING A SHORT CHRONOLOGY IS LIKE TRYING TO FORCE CIRCUMCISION

Likewise the length of the geologic history of this Created earth, short time or long time, can be an important issue, but it should be a scientific question, not a church membership question.

If from the Adventist church headquarters influential leaders send out messages in the Review demanding a short chronology as the only acceptable understanding of Genesis 1 for Adventists, then we need Sauls and Pauls to point out that short chronology and long chronology is not a key issue, any more than long foreskins or short foreskins was. It can be a scientific question, but should not be a religious question, and surely not a church membership question.

Otherwise Adventism demanding a circumcised, short creation: “would become a river lost in the sands of prejudice very near to its source. It would soon become a forgotten Christian sect, instead of the religion of the world.”

NOTES:
1 Genesis 17:11, the command to circumcise.
2 1 Samuel 17:26, of Goliath.
3 Galatians 2:12
4 Hebrews 2:14, 17:4:15
5 E.G. White, Acts of the Apostles, page 390, “(Paul’s) emphatic statement, ‘There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision’ was regarded by his enemies as daring blasphemy…”
6 James L. Stalker, Life of Paul, 1912, paragraph 158.
7 WHO & UNAIDS (2007, 28th March), ‘WHO and UNAIDS announce recommendations from expert meeting on male circumcision for HIV prevention
Fundamentalism Can Lead to Heresy

Submitted: Sep 1, 2012
By Monte Sahlin

Many Christians tend to believe that if one sticks to the more conservative, fundamental position on any question, that path leads to the correct understanding, interpretation or behavior in God’s eyes. Fundamentalist faith is appealing precisely because it seems to be safe, where more progressive or liberal religion is dangerous because it may lead to things beyond the pale.

Then along comes the strange case of 16 fundamentalist Amish in Ohio currently on trial for violent attacks on Amish neighbors and relatives they consider too liberal. The group formed because “they wanted to lead more conservative lives.” They claim they were motivated by good intentions, that the people they attacked had strayed from the true Amish way and needed to be brought “back into the fold.”

Several attacks were carried out in the fall of 2011 in a rural region around Steubenville, Ohio. In each case men and women, some of them elderly, were held down and their beards or hair cut. This is an act that is deeply offensive to the Amish, who believe that the Bible instructs women to let their hair grow long and men to grow beards and stop shaving once they are married.

The attacks were instigated by Sam Mullet Sr., a self-appointed Amish religious leader. The goal was to send a message to other Amish that they should be ashamed of themselves for not being more deeply serious about their faith. He has described the targets of the attacks as “Amish hypocrites.”

A typical incident, as described in court documents, involved twelve men and women who arrived at the home of farmer and his wife at 10:30 p.m. on September 6. The group dragged the man to a chair and cut his beard down to the skin as he cried and screamed for them to stop. Five of the women grabbed the woman and cut off two feet of her hair as she prayed for God to forgive them. The middle-aged couple had bruises and cuts from the attack.

On October 4 a group of 25 went to the home of a 76-year-old Amish bishop and conducted a similar attack. His “sin” was that he refused to endorse a request by Mullet to shun people who fled his group. In some of these attacks, adult children were sent to attack their own parents.

Defense attorneys for the 16 admit that what happened is “domestic violence.” They argue that it is just “a feud over church discipline,” not religious persecution as the prosecutors charge. In other words, they do not contest the violent behavior that the group is accused of. Remember, this is a group that is trying to more faithful to a religion that has pacifism as one of its core doctrines.

The important lesson for Seventh-day Adventists and other conservative Christians is this: Fundamentalism has led these Amish to transgress a core doctrine in an effort to be more conservative about their faith. Fundamentalism is a distortion of true faith that leads to heresy. In fact, in this case it has led to the violation of many other basic Bible teachings. Being too
conservative can lead one to actually be unfaithful to the very thing that one is attempting to be more faithful about.

Members of Mullet’s group have taken the stand and revealed really shocking things about his misguided attempt to purify the Amish. He had adult members spank one another with thick wooden paddles. He confined “sinners” in chicken coops for days at a time. He forced the young wives of some of his members to sleep with him to provide “marriage counseling.” He labeled has heretics anyone who questioned his decisions or pronouncements.

It is easy to think that this could never happen among Adventists. But, then, I have only to mention what happened in Waco. Extremism in the defense of “truth” can lead to vice. It is easy to see how one can become too liberal and lose touch with core doctrines. It may come as a shock to some to discover that it is equally possible to become too conservative and end up in the same place.
Four Quarters

Submitted: Sep 6, 2012
By Debonnaire Kovacs

*James 2:12-17:*
So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

I have a few disparate thoughts:
Thought one: "Mercy triumphs over judgment." If only we could remember that.

Thought two: I think this passage in its entirety is especially meaningful at this election season, but that's all I'm going to say about that!

Thought three, and maybe not so disparate after all:
The story I'll tell is about the day when some small boys first understood the principles James espouses here. I was a Sabbath School teacher for a special class, created specifically because we had a sudden influx of little boys of three and four, in between the nursery class and kindergarten, and I thought they were ready to begin to understand more about the offerings they faithfully put into the basket because their mamas gave them the quarters to do so.

I brought in an appeal letter I had received that week from a mission--I don't remember which one. It told the story of a little Chinese girl, four years old, whose name, as I recall, was Mei Li. She had been found rummaging in the dumpsters behind a grocery store, filthy and wearing rags. I read that much of the story to the boys. Their faces showed their amazement that someone of their own age had no one to take care of her.

"What do you think the grocery man should have done next, when he found her?" I asked. "Should he tell her, 'Jesus loves you, Mei Li!' and go back inside his store?"

"Well, Jesus does love her," said one of my boys indignantly, "but he wants her to have a sweater!"

"And food!" piped up another. "Was she really eating the food from the garbage can?!"

"Yes, that's all she had. Do you think we might be able to help, even though we live so far away?"

"How?" asked the boys.
"Well, let's count our quarters." We had four. "You know, of course, that one quarter won't buy food or a sweater, right?"

They took my word for it, at any rate.

"But if we send our quarters, and other people send their quarters, there will be enough to take care of Mei Li." Carefully, the boys divided up the quarters--this one for a sweater, this one for a sandwich, this one for a new dress, and this one to pay someone to give her somewhere to sleep.

Then I told them, "You'll be glad to hear the rest of the story." And I read about the store owner who had taken the little girl inside, fed her, washed her, dressed her, and taken her to the mission. The boys were pleased and relieved.

But I've never forgotten the look of comprehension on their faces as they understood for the first time that those quarters Mama gave them were to help real people, children like themselves.

Now, if only the rest of us could remember how much our mite will do, combined with the mites of lots of brothers and sisters, not just in "the mission field," but right next door and in our own pews.
One of my company’s associate directors was recently conducting a training session with the team at my office. He had planned to conduct the session in person, but a bicycle accident changed his plans, so he resorted to the phone. Phoning saved money but it had its disadvantages. Communication was more awkward. Every few minutes he would ask, “Any questions on that?” or “Anyone having any problems doing that?” His questions were usually followed by long periods of silence. At one point he told us about an enthusiastic preacher who was preaching to a rather quiet congregation. Frustrated at their apparent unresponsiveness, the preacher burst out, “I need to hear some amens.”

I can sympathize with the comment. I gave a talk at a school gathering recently and struggled with the lack of feedback. Humorous lines barely seemed to draw a smile, although smiles may have been hard to see because I had trouble seeing the listeners very well. I think I’d have given a better talk if I had heard a few amens, or something similar. My concern, though, is not that we want feedback: it’s a problem that can accompany the wish for amens. Needing people to say or holler, “I agree with you” can limit your topics and even what you say in the topics you choose.

A column I wrote a few months ago, “Reading into Isaiah,” is taken from a sermon I preached in a small church. Not a good idea. Oh I think the sermon was a good idea, but preaching it in that church that day apparently wasn’t. They haven’t asked me back, whereas before they wanted to line me up to speak often. More caution on my part would have probably helped, so I’m not blaming people for reacting in an understandable way, but where do I draw the line? Should I make sure all my messages pass the “safe” or “popular” test? Do I filter my sermons so that they are unlikely to offend anybody? A Your Church article reported that over half of pastors could name one or more topics on which they would preach little or none because hearers might be less likely to attend church in the future.

I could have preached from a different passage in Isaiah. In Isaiah 30:10, the “congregation” is quoted as telling the prophets, “Tell us pleasant things (NIV).” People will overlook a lot of problems with a sermon or a message if it is “pleasant” or humorous or reaffirming. We like to hear speakers who tell us that what we thought is true is true. We want to hear reminders that people who have a viewpoint differing from ours are either stupid (or ignorant or uninformed) or wicked. We prefer familiar music, books, friends, and sermons (and articles).

The Ellen White comment about many things to learn and many to unlearn and giving up cherished views is apparently not considered to be a guideline for sermon topics. Of course people should be willing to change their views, but don’t expect me to change a religious belief. Especially not by your talking about it in a sermon. (Or an Adventist Today column.) We listen to sermons in church to be encouraged, to be confirmed in our beliefs, or to be entertained. Being confronted with the idea that we might be mistaken is not one of our reasons for church attendance. We can listen to sermons that say we aren’t perfect as long as they don’t touch on how our theology might be mistaken.
Some people in Nazareth felt that way one time. Luke 4:15 (NIV) says that Jesus “was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” And when he started his sermon in Nazareth, the congregation “spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips” (verse 22). But the amens quickly turned into “We’ve had enough of you!” Where did Jesus go wrong?

If Jesus had planned on ministering to that congregation for another year, I suspect he would have started out with a different message. He may have figured that he wasn’t going to be around Nazareth very much, so he might as well cut to the chase. Maybe the ones who give “tough” messages should either be visitors or people who have ministered to (or written for) a group for years and won the right to say things that would be considered offensive if spoken by anyone else. Or should tough messages just be dropped into sermons a bit at a time?

“Birds of a feather flock together.” We stick around people who are similar to us, which makes it easier for us to think that everyone thinks as we think. After all, we don’t know people who think differently. And it’s irritating to have someone tell us (or remind us) that our way of thinking might not be put together as well as we think.

The problem of needing amens works two ways. Preachers (and writers) who want amens will sometimes fail to speak out on topics that need voicing. And people who only want to take in what they can happily say amen to will avoid what might challenge them or stretch (or change) their thinking. Some people limit their listening to right-wing radio stations (or television programs), while others limit it to left-wing. Of course the folks in each group think it sad that the other group won’t listen to the other side.

What are some topics that might not be preached from pulpits for fear of a Nazareth replay? How about overweight (which is a less safe preaching subject than smoking and drinking)? How about time wasted on the internet (a matter which is ignored in favor of warning about the danger of movies and television)? How about helping people in need of money or time (rather than a focus on calling for money in the offering plate, freeing us to otherwise ignore hurting people around us)?

Sermons on any topic need to present hope. A listener who is stunned at the change represented by a message might not notice the hope. And we find ways to explain away or forget messages we don’t like. But if I’m suggesting that you should see things the way I do instead of the way you do, I will probably make my case better if I can show how my belief can help you in
On the listening end, if you want to grow and improve, you’ll probably be more willing to listen to someone who sometimes makes you uncomfortable. If you’re only listening to “safe” material, you’re probably missing out on growth opportunities. (Same thing for reading material.) On the teaching end, if you only preach harmless material, you and your hearers will miss out. Preaching challenging material may force you to find new angles, and the process alone means stretching your brain, not to mention the new thinking that comes from such pressure. As Dag Hammarskjold (former Secretary-General of the UN) put it, “It is when we all play safe that we create a world of utmost insecurity.” We need to hear amens, but let’s show some courage.
The Purpose of Babel

Submitted: Sep 3, 2012
By Katelyn Pauls

Way back in Genesis, God scrambled the people’s language because they were getting too powerful. He sent them to different corners of the earth with all different kinds of languages. They couldn’t be united anymore. I know that God wanted to humble them. But I think there was another purpose behind the scattering of the people; to show people the meaning of communication.

Since I’ve been here in Thailand I have realized how superfluous words are. I’m no closer to understanding Thai than I was when I arrived. And as much as I want them to, the people here still can’t understand English very well. What I’ve come to recognize is that I don’t really need words to communicate. I point and hold up fingers to indicate what I want and how much. It’s pretty effective!

Also, in my classroom, my students and I are continually playing charades. When I’m trying to explain the meaning of the word crawl, I get down on my hands and knees and crawl across the floor while repeating the word “crawl.” When they want their pencil sharpened, they bring it to me and twirl their finger around the tip. When they are naughty, I put my hands on my hips and frown, and when they are good I give them a thumbs up.

What few words we do use are in very broken English. When a student forgets his book, he comes to me and says “No book, teacher.” If they aren’t focused on their work and want to play a game, I tell them, “No finish, no game.” Immediately, their heads bend over their work and their pencils move a little bit faster. I know I’m here to teach them English, but they are young. If I start speaking like I would to native English speakers, they wouldn’t understand me. I explain to them in terms they already know.

I think this is a lesson from God to me. See, God made the universe. It’s safe to say that He knows more than me. A lot more than me, if I’m going to be honest. And He has had much more experience communicating than I have. But God knows that I can’t understand His language. He knows I sometimes can’t even understand my own. He left me with a book full of words about His love for me. But He doesn’t expect me to read that and grasp the full meaning. So He shows me His love with actions. A beautiful sunset, a peaceful feeling, an answered prayer. All of these are examples of the actions God shows; His body language. He knows that actions speak louder than words.

In relationships, it seems that words sometimes offer us ways to sound interested while keeping the other person at arm’s length. Actions show that we mean what we say. So wouldn’t loving actions produce a more intimate relationship than loving words alone? I know that actions speak louder than words. I’ve seen with my own eyes here that actions speak more effectively than words. So why do I pray long prayers with large words and an arrogant attitude? Don’t actions mean more? Why don’t I show God my love? I know that I want a deep relationship with Him.
These are all questions I have to answer for myself. I’m not exactly sure what loving actions I can show to God. I know I can start by loving others and treating them as I would treat Jesus if He were here. As the Bible says in Matthew 25:40, “Then the King will answer, ’I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.’”

I don’t know all of the answers. I just want to suggest that maybe the purpose of Babel wasn’t just to make keep the people from being united under one language. Maybe it was to teach us how to communicate more intimately with God and our brothers here on earth. Maybe it was to teach us the meaning of communication.
Leadership Falling On Its Face

Submitted: Sep 1, 2012
By Harry Banks

In an earlier age, BT … (BT = Before the Tank: For those of you who may be just coming into the middle of the movie, my Adult Sabbath School Class has acquired the nickname of “The Shark Tank.”) As I was saying, in an earlier age BT, the class was following the Book of Numbers through the wilderness. We got to Numbers 14:5, “Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly.” I thought, that's odd. I've never seen anyone fall on their face in front of a group of people before.

A few chapters later in Numbers 16:4; “And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face.” Bam! Another "face plant!" I started wondering what was going on. What would you think if you walked up to somebody, gave them a piece of your mind and ... It's the story of the Korah, Dathan and Abiram; rebellion and confrontation. Anyway ... What would you think if you confronted someone and they did a "face plant" in front of you?

I tried to picture it. Sandy soil. Falling down on your face. Where are the arms? Out stretched like across and a Catholic priest being ordained in the middle aisle of the church? Or were the arms straight above the head like someone in a headlong dive? Or were the arms under the body with the hands covering the face to protect it from the sand?

I finally decided on the hands covering the face. So, back to the story; Can you picture trying to talk to a person laying face down on the ground with his face covered?

My next thought was, What is he doing down there? Face to the ground. Shutting out the world around? Is he just laying quietly? Is he praying? Is he listening for God's still, small voice? So being the scathingly brilliant (or not so much) researcher, I thought I'd make a quick check of the E. G. White scripture references on Numbers 14:5 and 16:4 to see if there might be another clue. Zipo! Nada! Nothing! Silence! Hmmmm ...

Then I decided to go to my next resource, the class. I asked the class when they pictured Moses doing a "face plant" what did they think he was doing while he was laying face down on the ground? After some thought and a bit of discussion they came to the conclusion that he must have been praying.

In the story the net result of these “face plants” was God's divine intervention on behalf of His people.

Sometime later I heard of a church member challenging a pastor. That week there was a sermon on the Numbers 16 rebellion story, but there was no "face plant" in the sermon or the pastor’s attitude. The member said mostly what they saw was direct, eye to eye hate looks from the pastor. Hmmmmm …

And now we come to current events such as ordination of women votes, ADRA debacles with
some serious high level log rolling. Here in Alaska we used to have a timber industry where logs were floated down rivers to mills for processing. A timberjack would walk across the mass of floating logs arranging them to be taken into the mill. I picture high level log rolling as being trapped under these unstable rolling logs where someone is continually rolling the logs in such a way it is impossible to pull one's self out of the water. There are other meanings but that's my own picture of log rolling.

As I have been reading about the TV broadcast maneuvers, personal vitriol from some defenders of the faith, the caustic comments, the attempts at rational discourse, I have been most troubled and thinking this seems like a time for "face planting." In this week’s E. G. White comments in the Sabbath School Study Guide there was this: “No human power can put unselfish love in the heart of man; only Christ can do this. He alone can give heavenly wisdom and this he does in response to our expressed desire to be led by his pure Spirit.” (R&H July8, 1909; E. G. White Notes for the Sabbath School Lessons: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, July-August-September 2012, pp 64-65)

I got to thinking. Could that include “No human power ...” can heal our bad opinions of each other?

My wife who does not attend church with me but rather finds her spiritual strength in nature and her animals. (20 some acres with 30 plus miles of trails through undeveloped land, and 20 some sled dogs, a couple horses and a cat) Sometimes when I describe some of the local or not so local bruhaha's and politics in the church, she will say, “So what's that got to do with God?”

Good question. It always brings me up short.

So back to the "face plant." As I picture Moses in the "face plant" position I'm thinking that has a lot to do with man and God in deep conversation in the face of confrontation and chaos.

Being a “failed” clergy, I've had opportunity to exercise a private “face plant” or two. When I resigned due to a moral failure (we sure have some weird ways of describing stuff sometimes), I asked God, “What have you got for a used preacher?” Meaning, Do you still have work for me to do even though I let you down?

Within the week, I was making a sales call and the guy was showing me the gun he was going to use to shoot himself, because he had slept with 30 women in the last 60 days and had no friends. All that and “no friends”... Wow! He wanted to go back to his wife.

Then he asked me, “Will you please pray with me?”

Inside I'm saying, “God, you gota be kidding”...

To him I'm saying, “You have the wrong guy. I'm no longer in that business. I'm messed up. I can't do this ...”

He asks again, “Please pray with me.” Again I say, “You've got the wrong guy. I'm not in that
business any more.”

A third time he asks, “Please pray with me. I need a friend!”

Finally, inside I say to God, “OK! OK! I got it! Quit whining! It doesn't matter how embarrassed I am, how flawed I am, if there is a job out there to do, just shut up, quit complaining and get the job done!”

I knelt and prayed with my new friend. Our paths parted. Two years later I met him again. He was back with his wife!

That was one of many “face plants” I have been through. Sometimes they have been willingly initiated by my choice. Other times they felt more like a sharp leg sweep from God, and a smash of my head on the sidewalk. But they are definitely opportunities for close God encounters.

So this week I got to thinking about my “face plants” and Moses’ “face plant” leadership. I started the search over again. Yep. Numbers 14:5, 16:4. Nothing. But this time my scripture search turned up Numbers 20:6. Another “face plant,” but this reference had a whole ton of citations. I started to check them out.

The citations still provided no clue as to what was going on inside Moses' head while in the face down position but this was definitely another “face plant” God encounter, yet this one was different! It was followed directly with failure. He did the “face plant.” He got the straight goods on just what to do; He was supposed to “talk” to the rock not strike it like the first time.

So he got all the people together and said, “Hearnow, ye rebels …”

Sounding a little testy there, Moses.

And then he went for the double strike on the rock with his rod. Ooops.

And just that quick he lost it and thought it was his own show!

Some of the references I found went like this...

“When Moses came down from the mount with the two tables of stone and saw Israel worshiping the golden calf, his anger was greatly kindled, and he threw down the tables of stone and broke them. I saw that Moses did not sin in this. He was wroth for God, jealous for His glory. But when he yielded to the natural feelings of his heart and took to himself the honor which was due to God, he sinned, and for that sin God would not suffer him to enter the land of Canaan. “Satan had been trying to find something wherewith to accuse Moses before the angels. He exulted at his success in leading him to displease God, and he told the angels that he could overcome the Saviour of the world when He should come to redeem man. For his transgression, Moses came under the power of Satan—the dominion of death. Had he remained steadfast, the Lord would have brought him to the Promised Land, and would then have translated him to heaven without his seeing death.” (White, Early Writings, pp 163-164)
But one of the references that surprised me the most was about William Miller: “My attention was then called to William Miller. He looked perplexed and was bowed with anxiety and distress for his people. The company who had been united and loving in 1844 were losing their love, opposing one another, and falling into a cold, backslidden state. As he beheld this, grief wasted his strength. I saw leading men watching him, and fearing lest he should receive the third angel’s message and the commandments of God. And as he would lean toward the light from heaven, these men would lay some plan to draw his mind away. A human influence was exerted to keep him in darkness and to retain his influence among those who opposed the truth. At length William Miller raised his voice against the light from heaven. He failed in not receiving the message which would have fully explained his disappointment and cast a light and glory on the past, which would have revived his exhausted energies, brightened his hope, and led him to glorify God. He leaned to human wisdom instead of divine, but being broken with arduous labor in his Master’s cause and by age, he was not as accountable as those who kept him from the truth. They are responsible; the sin rests upon them.

“If William Miller could have seen the light of the third message, many things which looked dark and mysterious to him would have been explained. But his brethren professed so deep love and interest for him, that he thought he could not tear away from them. His heart would incline toward the truth, and then he looked at his brethren; they opposed it. Could he tear away from those who had stood side by side with him in proclaiming the coming of Jesus? He thought they surely would not lead him astray.

“God suffered him to fall under the power of Satan, the dominion of death, and hid him in the grave from those who were constantly drawing him from the truth. Moses erred as he was about to enter the Promised Land. So also, I saw that William Miller erred as he was soon to enter the heavenly Canaan, in suffering his influence to go against the truth. Others led him to this; others must account for it. But angels watch the precious dust of this servant of God, and he will come forth at the sound of the last trump.” (White, *Early Writings*, p 257-258)

It presents an interesting view of human interactions and views of truth. It makes one wonder if there might be some relevance to some of our current discussions.

For some it might seem tempting to immediately apply some of these lessons to “the other.” However, I've found that “I am expert only on my own story.” In my subsequent career of Information Technology I have encountered a lot of vendor/technician “finger pointing.” I have yet to find “finger pointing” a productive exercise in problem solving. As for a spiritual application I believe it is the Bad Guy who is described as “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev 12:10). I think it behooves us to be very careful about “finger pointing” on these issues.

Whether we see ourselves as Moses, William Miller, William's friends ... or any other player in this act ... I for one, think it is time for me to do a “face plant” and listen carefully for the instructions and then step carefully away from the rod of impatience and striking, and watch God act in His own mysterious and powerful ways in spite of my/our failures. He is the only one who can save His people at a time like this. Neither Ted, Nor the GC, Nor the Unions, Nor Women can lead us into the promised land if we intentionally or accidentally stray in to “the accuser's”
I do appreciate, so very much, the carefully reasoned approaches such as Gary Patterson, Leona Running and others. But for myself, I must be careful of what I call “the distraction of being right.” As I have opened myself to more of a collaborative relationship with my God—remember that “yoke is easy” image—I still fight the yoke, but when I let the Big Guy carry the bulk of the load it sure works a lot easier.

Anyway along that strange journey I finally became honest enough to admit I really thought I knew what was best for me and the rest of the world. I began to openly admit that I had applied for the position of Master of the Universe. I've noticed that a lot of others seem to have their application in for consideration as well but they seem to have made a “subconscious filing.” As I look back I see that I too, long ago, made a “subconscious filing”

So, as I have gone along and involved myself in the leadership and politics of the church even from my “fringe” position, I have from time to time not only applied in triplicate for my Master of the Universe (MOU) certification but at times added another 12 applications, one for each of the apostles as well because I was certain I had the answers. As I expressed these “intent to file” sentiments in my Sabbath School class some of the members grew tired of my continual references to applying for the Master of the Universe rating. So one day I walked in and was presented with a manila envelope with a cover letter and certificate from Masters, Inc. Inside was a letter of apology for the long delay, and indeed a “Master of the Universe” certificate. (So if any of you out there are thinking you are hot stuff, I'll lay you money you don't got one of these!) But, the cover letter made it clear I had to take notice of the “fine print.” Alas ... upon checking the “fine print” I discovered that just as in the great controversy there is a jurisdictional problem with the MOU certification. The “fine print” said, “not valid on earth or in heaven.” Which made most of my friends immediately speculate where it was valid. Hmmm ...

So why would I mention this frivolous attempt at humor? Because, since I got the certificate I have had a lot of fun with it, showing it to my colleagues on the college faculty, but I have also found myself tempted to almost believe that I really do know best sometimes. It has made me much more sensitive to how thoroughly deceitful my heart is when it comes to my opinion of others. It also has made me start stepping back and wondering what does the real master of universe think of all these shenanigans going on down here. Has He seen leadership gone bad? Yep. Has He seen “the Chosen” get restless. Yep. Does that put Him out of business? Nope. Does it make His job more challenging? I'm pretty sure it does.

But it is also just another way of underlining my desperate need for “yoking up” and doing “face plant” leadership.

I can feel the heat of the sand ... my hands covering my face ... my hot breath blowing back in that small space ... the darkness of eyes closed ... the darkness of soul. Will Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, Ruler of All, KING of KINGS, LORD OF LORDS have a chance to show His stuff in spite of me or through me? I hope it's through me ... but I may have to keep my face planted longer to make sure.
Dear Conservatives: An Open Letter

Submitted: Sep 3, 2012
By Trudy J. Morgan-Cole

(Please note that by “conservatives” here I’m addressing those who are more conservative than I am in the religious sense, not the political sense. I could write a whole other letter to the political conservatives I know, but this is not that letter).

A couple of controversies during the last few months – some personal and some public -- have led me to reflect on the divide between those who get labelled as “conservatives” and those who get labelled as “liberals”. Some people disdain labels altogether and I respect that, but within the context of the Adventist church I have no problem being labelled a “liberal Adventist” as I think that best describes my views.

Here’s something I do have a problem with, hence this open letter every fellow Christian whose views on some issues may be more conservative than mine:

It’s OK that your views differ from mine. It makes me crazy sometimes, but deep down I do believe we need a diversity of viewpoints as we collectively grope our way towards Truth. We need disagreement and lively debate.

What I’m not fine with is the assumption — very common in Adventist circles, and I think within Christianity generally — that liberals are liberal because we care less about following God and believing the Bible. We do not choose our viewpoints and practices because they’re an easier path, because we want to please ourselves or the world around us. There’s often an assumption that we lack your tough-minded commitment to obeying God no matter the cost. That being liberal equates to being “lukewarm,” and that the truly committed are always the truly conservative.

Here’s what I want you to understand. I am a “liberal,” by your terms, because I am every bit as passionate about following Jesus as you are — I have just drawn some different conclusions about what it means to follow Him.

If you are having trouble accepting this, I’ll start with what seems to me like a trivial example.

Let’s say it’s a Sabbath afternoon in summer – as, indeed, it was when I first had the idea to write this column. Church is over, Sabbath lunch is over, and by happy coincidence we are both sitting beside a beautiful clear sparkling lake with our families. You tell your children not to jump in the water because “we don’t go swimming on Sabbath.” Or, if you’re in a position of authority, you might just close down the waterfront at church camp for Sabbath afternoon. I, meanwhile, will do what I do every Sabbath in summer at our cabin: jump into the water along with the kids and spend the Sabbath hours splashing, paddling and floating. (Needless to say, I wouldn’t do this at church camp when you’ve closed down the waterfront; I’m not talking about defying authority or being confrontational. I’m talking about what I do in the privacy of my own cabin, or on a public beach).
Now, it’s perfectly OK with me that we have these diverse practices. You are free to do what you believe is right; I have no problem with that.

It does bother me when you imply that I spend my Sabbath afternoon in the water because I am less concerned about Sabbath keeping, as if the Sabbath is less special or holy or precious to me than it is to you.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. I go swimming on Sabbath (when weather and location permit) because I love the Sabbath and the Lord of the Sabbath, and I genuinely believe that there is no better way to praise Him than to be out enjoying His Creation.

It’s a small issue and one that I don’t want to get hung up on – I know most Adventists could wrangle for days about what is and isn’t appropriate to do during Sabbath hours. The point I’m making is not about the activity itself, but about the gap between my actual motives, and your assumption about what my motives are.

The same principles apply when we get to what might be the weightier matters of the law. I take stands you disagree with on controversial issues — I believe we should ordain people to the ministry equally without regard to gender; I believe same-sex marriage ought to be legal and that gay people have the same civil rights that straight people do. You might think — in fact, I’ve heard some of you say — that I hold these views because I don’t respect the Bible, or don’t take what it says seriously, or that I’d rather follow my own wisdom or the wisdom of “the world” than follow the Bible.

In fact, I hold these views because I believe in the Bible. I certainly interpret it different than you do, but I take the Bible very seriously. I’ve adopted those beliefs not because they’re popular or easy but because, after careful and prayerful Bible study, I believe they more truly reflect the spirit of the Bible and of the way Jesus treated people in the Gospels. You can disagree with how I read Scripture and we can debate it, but please don’t do me the disservice of thinking I don’t care about what the Bible says or about shaping my life according to its principles.

I could think of more examples. So could you. But the central point is the same in each one: whatever our differences, I am not lacking in love for God, passion for my faith, or the desire to follow His path.

I’m not arguing about which of us is “a better Christian” or “a better Adventist.” That’s up to God to decide, if He’s interested in those kind of measuring sticks (which I doubt).

I often fail as a Christian. I don’t always live out the love that I believe is central to our faith. I lose my temper; I snap at my kids. I don’t read my Bible or pray as much as I think I should. I may not live my faith as fully and as effectively as you do.

But I don’t care about it less, just because my faith is different from yours.

I disagree with you on so many points. I think the way you read the Bible is short-sighted and often inconsistent. I think you observe the letter of the law at the cost of its spirit. I could debate with you for hours about some of these controversial issues on which we disagree.
But I always recognize that your conservatism, your beliefs and your practices, come from a place of great faith. Whatever our differences, I know that you really care about our mutual faith, that you are dedicated to God and His Word, and that you do not make faith-related decisions lightly.

All I ask is that you do the same for me.
My View on Unity and Uniformity

Submitted: Sep 6, 2012
By Nic Samojluk

For several decades now the Adventist Church has been involved in a never ending debate over the issue of gender discrimination regarding women’s ordination. The main bone of contention has been over whether uniformity is a requisite for church unity. Can we have true unity without doctrinal uniformity? Can the church function with unity on essentials and diversity on peripheral issues.

The Case for Unity and Uniformity

The leadership of the church has been striving for unity and uniformity over the controversial issue of women’s ordination. The best scholars of the church have invested enormous amounts of time and effort in an attempt to discover what the biblical teaching is regarding this highly contested topic without reaching a consensus.

Given this lack of agreement among the experts in biblical studies, the Adventist leaders kept urging fellow Adventists to be patient and avoid making a move that might threaten to split the Adventist community over this seemingly crucial issue.

When the Pacific Union Conference [PUC] decided to schedule a constituency meeting for August 19, 2012 to decide this controversy, Ted Wilson, the president of the General Conference, made desperate efforts to convince the delegates to vote for unity and uniformity.

The Case for Unity and Diversity

The view of the majority opinion in the PUC was summarized with unusual clarity by Randy Robert, the Senior Pastor of the Loma Linda University Church; who argued for unity on essentials with diversity on peripheral issues. He reminded his hearers of the fact that when dealing with similar controversies in the Christian Church, Paul did not insist on uniformity over non essential doctrinal issues like food which had been offered to idols and even the Jewish circumcision ritual.

He added Paul’s practice of forbidding women from speaking in the church, which is universally ignored by Christians and Adventists today. We do allow women to teach, preach, baptize, and teach both other women and even men, which Paul considered to be unacceptable. The classic example of the wide acceptance of this practice is the case of Ellen White, who was allowed to preach and teach the entire Adventist community both with verbal and written instructions for over a century now.

Needless to say, the opinion of Randy Roberts prevailed to the dismay of Ted Wilson, who reacted by announcing that the General Conference will study in the month of October on how to properly respond to this undesirable event which, according to him, seriously threatens to break the unity of the Adventist community of faith. Of course, for him, unity without uniformity makes no logical sense.
Unity on Peripherals and Diversity on Essentials

My personal view on what is taking place in the Adventist Church is that we have been fighting for unity on peripherals while practicing diversity on essentials. We have been majoring in minors and minoring on majors. The church’s insistence on depriving women; who are allowed to study for the ministry, and who after graduation are permitted to teach, preach, baptize, and to officiate at wedding ceremonies; of the privilege of prayer, laying of hands, and a piece of paper which recognizes their spiritual calling for the ministry; represents to me a good example of our stress on unity on peripherals or majoring in minors.

Contrast this with the church position on abortion, which represents in my view a violation of one of God’s Commandments enshrined in the Decalogue, which the Lord wrote with his own finger on two tablets of stone. On this life and death issue, which has deprived millions of innocent human beings of what is the most sacred asset God bestowed on humanity, we as a church have so far allowed for diversity in spite of the fact that our Adventist pioneers considered the practice of abortion as plain murder.

When our Castle Memorial Hospital was faced with a demand for abortion back in 1970 by their non-Adventist physician staff, the church did not say: We must have unity and uniformity over this controversial issue. Neal Wilson, the then president of the North American Division, did not say: “Let’s wait for the entire worldwide community to be united on this issue before we allow our North American hospitals to offer elective abortions in our medical institutions.” Profit from abortion prevailed over unity and uniformity, and moral duty took a back seat.

Eventually the church approved the policy contained in the document known as “Guidelines on Abortion,” a non prescriptive set of suggestions which pretended to speak on behalf of the unborn, but which provided a long list of exceptions that opened the door wide for abortions on demand, and which eventually led 12 of our Adventist hospitals to offer abortion services to their patients with impunity. One of these institutions was described by a General Conference representative as an “abortion mill.”

So much for unity and uniformity on a major life and death issue! Said Guidelines on Abortion document was never submitted to the worldwide Adventist Community in a general session of the General Conference where delegates from the entire world are present. Thus, diversity on a crucial doctrinal issue affecting one of God’s Commandments prevailed without an insistence on unity and uniformity.

Concluding Remarks

My question to my fellow believers is: Do we have a moral and logical right to insist on unity and uniformity on women’s ordination if we have neglected to require such unity and uniformity on a life and death issue like abortion? Is a piece of paper entitled Ministerial Ordination more important than the life of millions of unborn human beings? Why do we insist on uniformity on a minor issue like ordination but allow diversity on what is clearly condemned in the Decalogue? Wasn’t this the problem of those who crucified the Son of God?

More:


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Leaders, Drivers, and Losers.

Submitted: Sep 6, 2012
By Ed Dickerson

We had a brand new conference president, addressing the workers for the first time. “One of the most important things about any organization,” he began, “is unity.” I knew right then we were in trouble. It was more than thirty years ago, and I was not yet quite thirty years old, but already I had experienced real leadership—and this wasn’t it.

As we discussed the situation later, my wife said, “I don’t get it. Wasn’t he right? Isn’t unity important in an organization?”
She had me there. Still, I knew something was wrong, and time would sadly confirm my initial judgment. The new conference president brought in new department heads, one of whom, my boss, declared, “P.R. is everything.” Things went quickly downhill from there.
When I decided to leave the conference two years later, the “P.R. is everything” man asked, “Am I going to get blamed for you leaving?” I shook my head in disbelief. It hadn’t occurred to me that anyone should be blamed. But I suppose when P.R. is everything. . . .

Years later, when the Governor of my state asked, “Where’s Ed? He gets the first pen. This bill would not have passed without his leadership,” I was gratified, but surprised. I hadn’t given leadership a thought. My only concern had been how to get enough support, both within the legislature and in the larger community, to bring relief to the state’s families.

My experiences, in business, politics, and the church, have given me the opportunity to study and experience leaders and leadership in a number of settings. Over the years, I have formulated a few observations. I realize that these observations have implications for the current situation in the world church, and in the coming election. But that’s not the primary motivation for mentioning them now. I’m focused on the great need for leadership in our homes, churches, businesses, and communities.

Those who seek or claim leadership fall into three broad categories: Leaders, drivers, losers.

Leaders lead. They don’t talk about leadership, or unity, or obstacles. They talk about goals, objectives, aspirations, and courses of action. They understand that unity comes from shared purpose, goals, and aspirations. They focus attention not on themselves or their efforts, but on the shared purpose, the goal to be reached, and the aspirations which we all share. They mentor, model, coach, and explain. Jesus was an exception in one way: to be like Him is our goal. But He recognized that leaders don’t rely on force. They lead and draw followers. So He said that if He was lifted up, He would draw followers. His sacrifice and example elevate and fuel our aspirations. Of course, not everyone will follow. That’s their choice. It may be because they are called to a different cause. Whatever their reasons, leaders do not demonize those who choose not to follow.
Leaders know that leaders do not drive. As Jacob said to Esau, “And he said unto him, my lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.” Gen 33:13. People and animals that are driven suffer unnecessary casualties.

Drivers talk about unity, about loyalty, mainly because they cannot inspire it. Where Leaders appeal to the “better angels of our nature,” drivers use fear and shame. If you’re not loyal, shame on you. If you don’t sign on to our program, you will be left behind. Drivers drive. Drivers declare the inevitable casualties that occur “disloyal,” or “unworthy.” Drivers think it’s all about accomplishing tasks, whatever the cost. Leaders know that in striving together, we accomplish tasks we could not have originally envisioned. Drivers sometimes accomplish tasks, but usually end up defeating the purpose those accomplishments were designed to aid.

And finally, Losers. Lots of wannabe drivers end up as Losers. Losers complain about obstacles, about opposition, about lack of loyalty and failure to acknowledge authority. But of course, if there were no obstacles, no opposition, leadership would not be necessary. Losers demonstrate they know nothing about leadership at all. Leaders cast obstacles and opposition as challenges, as opportunities to achieve despite difficulty. Losers view obstacles and opposition as excuses for failure.

Losers have a thousand explanations for their plight, when the truth is a vacuum of leadership. Ahab is a clear example of a loser. Dominated by his wife, pouting when he’s disappointed, he’s quick to assign blame to Elijah, “You’re the one troubling Israel!”

I could not fully articulate this thirty years ago, but I sensed its truth. The conference president who wanted to talk about unity was not a leader, he was a driver. He said “we need unity,” but he meant “you need to be loyal.” Many a driver/pastor has told a congregation, “We need revival,” when what he means is “you need revival.” Many a loser/pastor has complained, “The previous pastor left this church in a mess,” or “The elders didn’t support me.”

I don’t mean to leave the impression that leaders always succeed. In the broken world we live in, that will not happen. In my experience, intervention of a non-leader at a higher level in the organization constitutes a major reason leaders are not allowed to succeed.

For example, I have seen church members with deep pockets persuade a conference president (who happened to have a ‘driver’ leadership style) to attempt to intervene in local church elections when results challenged entrenched power at the local level. When one pastor refused to cooperate with this clearly inappropriate action, he was replaced with a driver who would obey.

And that points to part of the problem. Drivers and Losers at higher levels of authority tend to be suspicious of Leaders below them. It’s not so much that they recognize these subordinates as
possessing qualities or character that the superiors lack; it’s more that leadership always threatens the status quo. Drivers and Losers are always acutely aware of anything that might cause blame to fall on them, and disturbing the status quo certainly falls into that category. So the current system is self-perpetuating.

The funny thing is, both sides agree about one thing: the status quo in the church is not acceptable. It will take leadership to improve things. But I must say again, my focus is not at the top levels. My concern is for the lack of leadership primarily at the conference and local church levels. Leaders don’t suddenly learn how to lead when promoted to high office. They learn it at home, at the local church, or not at all.
No Known Cure for EA

Submitted: Aug 19, 2012
By Ron Gladden

It is addictive. There is no known cure. We call it evangelistic adrenalin, or EA for short.

Just last night, Sergio popped over to my house and announced that he is getting baptized. He’ll be number 56 so far at Epikos Church when he takes the plunge on September 8. I’m always excited, humbled, and thankful when anyone decides to follow Jesus, but I am especially stoked about Sergio because he is my son-in-law. How cool is that?!

At Epikos, we have a serious case of EA, and it seems to be spreading. Our first Yay, God! baptism was in February 2009. A dozen of us stood in a circle and cheered while Pastor Sam immersed Debbe in a hot tub. We celebrated with warm hugs and cold desert, and we prayed that the miracle of conversion would spread and infect hundreds and, someday, thousands of people.

The intensity of EA was amped up again last Saturday when Tom was baptized during the 4:00 pm gathering by his son, Michael, who is studying to be a pastor at Multnomah Bible College. This was the first time Michael had performed a baptism and he was unspeakably delighted to immerse his dad (who was number 49). (Yes, it was recorded. We video all of our baptisms so we can enjoy them again and again.)

A couple years ago, Tom and his family were unchurched. They weren’t remotely tempted to visit any church, but they made a dangerous mistake. They received a postcard in the mail, and instead of tossing it in the recycling bin, they allowed the Spirit to prompt them to take a risk and check out Epikos. A few months later, I was honored to baptize Tom’s wife, Bunny, in the Pacific Ocean, as well as their other son, Justin, in icy-cold Horsetail Falls in the Columbia River Gorge.

Jesus gave us a categorical imperative when He said, “Go and make disciples… and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.” Of course the best way to make that happen is to create healthy, unselfish, growing churches. Epikos is not the greatest church ever (although a bunch of people would beg to differ!); we don’t do everything as well as we should, but we can’t shake the EA addiction. We walk, talk, and pray constantly about the next person. We are proudly obsessed with being faithful to Jesus.

On August 19, an entourage of cars filled with Tina, her four kids, and a gang of supporters from the Epikos family will head west to Proposal Rock on the Oregon coast. Tina, Kaile, Cody, and Kameron will be baptized (all at the same time by four Epikos pastors) and Brody will be
dedicated. On the same day, Daniel, one of our tech team volunteers, will do the same. The following Saturday evening, Rena will take the plunge in the Epikos baptistry at the worship center.

It is easy to get hooked on evangelistic adrenalin. Once you’ve experienced even a taste of the signs and wonders described in the book of Acts, you pray for more. For one reason: Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost. He poured out His life so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

At Mission Catalyst, we are enthusiastic about the mission. We are willing to do whatever it takes to start churches that reach the lost. When you look at the faces of those who have met Jesus in our churches, you hear their stories, and you feel their joy, you decide that it’s worth it.

So here is a question: God is working. What part are you willing to play?
Richland, WA Pastor Rides Across the Country for Diapers

Submitted: Sep 6, 2012
By Debonnaire Kovacs

Richland, WA Seventh-day Adventist pastor Eric Shadle arrived Wednesday, September 5, in Silver Spring, Maryland after bicycling across the United States from Richland, WA, to raise awareness of the need for diaper banks for low income families. Adventist Today talked with Shadle early the morning of the 6th, before he headed off to all-day meetings with high-ranking government officials.

He says it all started last year with a question about a sabbatical he had coming. He considered researching and writing a book about leadership, but “it just didn’t feel right; it didn’t come together.” So, he says, one day while riding his bike to exercise a hurt knee, he was thinking about a new and different ministry his church had started a few months before, a diaper bank. He admits he originally had to be convinced to do it—he’d never heard of such a thing—but he was convinced, and the Richland church started Tri-Cities Diaper Bank [www.tricitiesdiaperbank.org], the first Adventist diaper bank in the North American Division.

Staff at the bank want people to know that “diapers are a basic human need.” They can’t be bought with food stamps, they don’t come with WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) programs, and they’re expensive. Along with the far-reaching and important community services Adventist churches already do, here is a crying need that can be met. (No pun intended. . .)

Now, Shadle thought, there must be lots of other people who don’t know about the need for diapers. And plenty of people bicycle across the country for one cause or another. What if he were to ride to raise awareness of the need for diapers? He didn’t know if it would make a very big splash, but some people would learn about it anyway, and besides, he thought it would be a wonderful journey and he’d likely learn a lot of great life lessons.

An adventure was born.

The first step was months of planning. The support team would consist of Shadle’s wife, Pam, in a car, and another church couple, Bill and Dorothy Anderson, in an RV. Shadle needed a lot of paraphernalia, such as a heart monitor and a Garmin GPS unit which would monitor miles, cadence, elevation, heart rate, temperature, and fatigue and freshness levels. And of course, get in shape, get his bike in shape, and take plenty of fluids and good foods. The start date was set for July 8, 2012, and appointments were made all along the way to speak at churches or attend various events. He planned to arrive in Silver Spring on September 5. The idea generated a great deal of excitement, and ended up with a goal of raising the money for 1,000,000 diapers. The National Diaper Bank Network offered to match donations up to 250,000, or $62,500. This was taking on a life of its own which Shadle could not have imagined.

Shadle says the very first day was a good picture of the whole trip, in microcosm. “I expected maybe 20 people, a little prayer group, and I’d be off.” Instead there were 350 people at his church where about 200 attend on a typical Sabbath.[www.myrichlandchurch.org] There was huge community involvement, the mayor was there, the group Bikers against Child Abuse escorted him the first several miles, and a “bunch of church people” drove, cheering him on for
the entire 108 miles planned for the first day.

Those are the highs. The lows began with an air temperature of 108 degrees, the knowledge that his daughter, with whom he rides and marathons, could only ride with him the first day, and the exhaustion of that first evening. Shadle says, “I wasn’t as fit as I am now, and that day took every ounce of fortitude and persistence I had. And I knew I had another 100 miles to go the next day.” He really began to wonder, in just one day, what he’d gotten himself into and whether he could do it or not. It was a serious emotional and physical low.

But he got up and kept going. The days took on a routine, and the nightly task of uploading and analyzing the Garmin data showed his body becoming ever more fit. Then came the next low point. A week and a half in, Pam had to go back to work. They’d planned for that, of course, but it was hard to see her go. Another church member, Bob Howard, came to take her place, and then his mother got very sick and he had to leave for home. Shadle says he felt alone, even though he was grateful for the rest of his support team. Dorothy Anderson, from the RV, took over the driving of the car, but didn’t really enjoy driving.

And that still wasn’t the end of his hard time—he got a cold! And still had to keep pedaling. A loss of just one day would put him behind the rest of the way, let alone the several days he would have liked to rest. Those preplanned appointments were both a carrot and a stick by this time. So he says one of the life lessons he learned is that often, when we think we just can’t do something, we really can if we have to. Needless to say, they were all glad when Bob Howard was able to come back and drive again.

When it comes to high points, Shadle says it’s all about the people he met. Take, for instance, his first full day of riding in Missouri. He had assumed the mountains of Colorado would be the worst, but he was to learn that the hilly eastern half of the country was worse. The hills were very hard and steep and he was so exhausted he couldn’t fully enjoy the huge welcome in Springfield, but he still considers it a “big high.” An interdenominational organization called Newborns in Need[www.newbornsinneed.org] told him that specifically because of him and his bike ride, they’d now added a diaper bank. They asked him to speak at their grand opening, and had two TV anchors there. “That was a touching moment for me to realize—this is why I’m doing the ride; it’s not about riding your bike, it’s about the people,” Shadle said.

Then came New Market, VA. A woman named Ann McBroom had a service in her church called “A Small Hand,” [http://helpingshenandoahcountyinfantsinneed.blogspot.com] which distributes 250,000 diapers every year, all from donations—about $60,000/year, usually in tens, twenties, or fifties. She found out Shadle was coming and called the Adventists. “You have this guy coming, riding across the country. I want to organize a bike ride!” The Adventists were surprised—they hadn’t known anything about it. But they got together and organized a ride from Shenandoah Valley Academy to McBroom’s church and then another 15 miles into Strasburg, VA. Along with many bicyclists, young and not-so-young, they had a sheriff on a bike and one in a car behind them for the entire 30 miles. Along the way, kids came out from daycares to cheer and thank him, and then there was a TV interview and more kids at the end. Shadle’s exhaustion didn’t even matter in the face of so much community support.

And so, right on schedule, after 276 hours in the bike saddle and 3475.4 miles, precisely on his scheduled Day 60, Eric Shadle rode triumphantly into Washington D. C. and then to Silver
Spring. That evening, Adventist Community Services Director Sung Kwan and Donna Jackson, wife of the absent NAD president, took him out to a celebratory dinner. Alison Weir, Director of Programs for the National Diaper Bank Network [www.diaperbanknetwork.org] had made appointments for him all day Thursday with representatives and congress members, as well as officials who work with women’s and children’s needs in America.

And he can’t find his suit pants! He brought just one suit, for Sabbaths at churches along the way, and he did wear it to dinner Wednesday night. Now the pants have disappeared from the car and he’s going to have to wear his jacket and a different pair of slacks to meet government officials. But Shadle says if that’s the worst thing he’s lost, he’ll be happy.

“It’s been an incredible experience. I’ve met so many people who are working day in and day out for people in need. They treat me like some kind of hero and say I’m such an inspiration, and I’m just riding my bike!”

Throughout the miles, the Garmin told Shadle that his fitness was going up and up. At the beginning, his “score” was 15. Wednesday night, in Silver Spring, it was 170. But he can’t feel it yet. There’s a different metric in play, also measured by the Garmin: freshness versus fatigue. As the weeks went on and he got stronger, Shadle’s fatigue began to diminish, but his freshness, though it was coming up from a low point of -70, is still a -9 because he never got to really rest except for Sabbaths. His coach tells him that he won’t feel it for a while. When he gets home and gets truly rested up, the coach promises, “You’ll do work-outs or bike rides and discover you can do things you never thought you could do.”

That sounds like another life lesson to me.

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As of September 6, the ride has raised $106,786 which is 427,144 diapers, and it's not to late to add your donation at the website below.

Learn more, see pictures, and follow Eric Shadle’s blog at www.ride4diapers.org and findingthewayblog.com