### NEWS

**Research Summit: Why Large Numbers are Leaving the Adventist Church:**
Research released this week is illuminating why the Church appears highly apostasy-prone today. A major story from *Adventist Today*.

**New Zealand Adventist Allegedly Defrauds Pastor, Church Members:**
Private financial scams among members is nothing new in the Adventist Church, and an egregious new chapter involving nearly a million dollars is being written.

**Top Adventist Leader uses Web, Video to Talk Directly to Members about His Goals, Concerns:**
Church president Ted Wilson is expanding his electronic visibility and reaching out to Adventist membership directly, rather than through more traditional channels.

**Second World Region of the Adventist Church Votes for Ending Gender Discrimination in Ordination:**
A second major world division has now endorsed ordination of qualified women as ministers, within its territory.

**Two Pioneer Women Pastors Ordained at Kettering Church in Dayton, Ohio:**
Two highly esteemed women who pastored before the prospect of women's ordination was a gleam in the mainstream ministerial eye, have been ordained in recognition of their many decades of service.

### OPINION

**The Darkness of Light:**
Writer Greg Prout studies the melancholy of faith and sees light as containing elements of darkness that try our souls. Why does the Bible itself describe men and women of faith as traversing periods of extreme stress and doubt, when God seems to be lost in the complexities of a pointless universe?

**Sh’ma 3, Loving God with All Your Mind:**
We are like rivers, delivering truth and purpose. But we have freewill, and can do as we choose, moving in a direction other than that which the gravity of grace has set before us. A devotional by Debbonnaire Kovacs.

### FEATURES

(Featured only to signed-in AT subscribers; to apply for a free 30-day subscription, click here.)

**Andrews University—the Philippine Connection:**
The Andrews University Symphony has announced plans to raise money to relieve typhoon-ravaged islands of the Philippines.
**Documentary on Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists Released in DVD:** The award-winning feature film that looks into the lives of three gay and lesbian Adventists has been viewed in movie houses by thousands, and today is released for sale to the general public....

**Storehouses of Snow (The Arts):** At one of the darkest times of the year, when the sun disappears entirely week after week in the north and snow insulates the earth over permafrost, Debonnaire Kovacs shares two scenes that pour forth visual virtues in a world stark with cold majesty and suffused with promise of a springtime coming soon—but not soon enough, it seems....

**Inasmuch (The Arts):** A forlorn figure in Budapest captured by photographer S. M. Chen reminds us that the prize is not for the swift or the strong, but for those whose hearts are attuned to the plight of others....

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**THANKSGIVING ANNOUNCEMENT**

Next AT Update

Because the *Adventist Today* office will be closed Thursday and Friday for the Thanksgiving Holiday weekend (November 28–December 1) *AT Update* will be emailed Monday, December 2, rather than Friday, November 29. We thank you for your patience and wish all special blessings as we give thanks....

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This message was sent to ahc@andrews.edu from Adventist Today, Post Office Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135.  
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Scholars in the social sciences from around the world convened this week to try to understand why such large numbers of members drop out of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Summit on Nurture and Retention is the second annual gathering of researchers organized by the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research (ASTR) at the denomination's General Conference (GC). The meeting was held at the GC office in Silver Spring, Maryland.

More than 30 million people have been baptized since the 1960s, reported Dr. David Trim, key organizer of the gathering and director of ASTR. Nonetheless the denomination's total membership is less than 18 million. Losses from those who are dropped from membership or stop attending often equal half the number of baptisms, and in recent years audits of membership records in some parts of the world have resulted in large adjustments in the statistics.

A survey based on interviews with 1,053 former and inactive members around the world found that some of the reasons for the large number of dropouts that are commonly believed by pastors and lay leaders are not as significant as stressful life events and the failure of local church leaders to respond with adequate care when members are hurting. Monte Sahlin, representing the Center for Creative Ministry, told the group that 74 percent of the individuals interviewed reported at least one major event in the year before they decided to stop attending church. These included serious illness, break up of a marriage, getting married, moving out of the community, becoming unemployed or getting a new job, a death in the family, and other items well known in studies of stress that use the Holmes-Rahe Scale. Most had multiple events.

Only 40 percent of those interviewed reported that the pastor or someone representing the church came to visit them after they stopped attending. "The general impression is that many dropouts are uncontested, and when visits were made they usually were based on the assumption that the departing member was in disagreement with the teachings of the church, which proved to be relatively rare," said Sahlin. "This pattern of not sensing and responding to the real needs of hurting people appears to be strong in Adventist congregations around the world and is the main reason for the high number of membership losses. A more actively caring church would retain more of the people baptized."

Another important pattern that Sahlin pointed out was the high percentage of members who were baptized as children and then as young adults moved to metropolitan areas to seek education or start careers. "As part of this journey they lost connection with the Church, although most still identify with the Adventist faith." He stated that this includes children born into Adventist families and almost an equal percentage who were baptized prior to adulthood but were not raised in Adventist families.

A second survey was conducted in which the union conferences around the world were asked to have a questionnaire completed by five individuals who had dropped out of the church and five more who had both dropped out and later returned to regular attendance. This resulted in more than 500 responses and an analysis prepared by Dr. Anthony Kent, an associate secretary of the GC Ministerial Association. Kent reported similar findings to those in the Center for Creative Ministry survey.

More information about Adventist young adults and their relationship with the Church was presented in a survey of recent graduates of three Adventist universities and colleges by Dr. Douglas Jacobs and Mia Lindsay from Southern Adventist University (SAU). Most of the
respondents were graduates of SAU with smaller numbers from Oakwood University and Pacific Union College. "There is a large group who are connected and still active in the Adventist Church," the two reported, despite significant numbers who have stopped attending. "They tend to be found in large and medium-size congregations." They strongly support most of the doctrines of the Church, although "the unique doctrines are less accepted" and "many question the denomination's stand on homosexuality."

Other research papers provided information on family life among Adventists, single parents in the church, the "perceived emotional/verbal and spiritual abuse of adult children of pastors," how Adventist education relates to the nurture and retention of members, an evaluation of classes on "science issues" and the extent to which they strengthen the faith of Adventists, various approaches to encouraging spiritual growth among members and general surveys of members conducted in most of the denomination's world divisions. Trim announced that ASTR would eventually publish as many of the papers as possible through its Web site. The report from the survey conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry which was presented by Monte Sahlin is available at: [http://www.creativeministry.org/transaction_detail.php?id=270](http://www.creativeministry.org/transaction_detail.php?id=270)

Several presentations showed that the denomination has learned how to better conduct more realistic outreach by learning from past examples, reported Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news service of the denomination. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many Adventist groups sponsored extravagant evangelism events, eager for the once-in-a-generation opportunity, but most of those new converts soon stopped attending church.

One presentation revealed that in South Africa, the rate of accession of new members had slowed, but membership had significantly increased due to retention. That fact prompted Pastor Harald Wollan, a GC associate secretary, to suggest to the group that future evangelism efforts should focus on nurturing members. “What if the church used some evangelism funds for our own members’ care? We might see a similar increase in numbers,” Wollan said. “We will have to do that,” responded Pastor Armando Miranda, the GC vice president who was chairing the session.

One delegate, Jimmy V. Adil, from the Philippines, asked why conferences feel pressure to increase membership, often from the parent unions, whom he said feel pressure from the divisions. He asked if the world headquarters was exerting pressure for growth. Dr. G. T. Ng, GC executive secretary, replied, “There’s no pressure for growth. Do we pressure a papaya tree to produce? … If so, we may stunt its growth.”

Trim said the problem is common in some regions. He had earlier revealed that 30 percent of church clerks in one of the denomination's world divisions had been pressured to inflate baptismal numbers. “It's a sin to lie about anything … but for some reason, too many people think it’s OK to lie about membership numbers.” Trim stated that several regions have made membership audits a priority, including South America, Southeast Asia and West Africa.

On the meeting sidelines, the youngest attendee, Cheryl Simpson, told an ANN reporter she was encouraged by the summit because she said it showed church leaders wanted to encourage young adults like her. Simpson, a senior psychology student at Andrews University, said she was glad that church leaders were willing to look at reality. “For me, this is essential because it’s showing me that theologians aren’t afraid to face the facts,” Simpson said.

A statement from the participating scholars, released November 21, concluded, "Responsibility for ensuring that every church member remains part of the body of Christ, and for reconnecting and reconciling with those who do not, is mutually shared by the Church at large, each congregation, and every church member. We therefore affirm that building loving and Christ-like relationships within the local church must be an urgent necessity for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We recommit ourselves to God’s vision of mission, which is founded on discipling, believing that this will enable us better to fulfill the prophetic mission of the Remnant Church.”

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New Zealand Adventist Convicted of Defrauding Pastor, Church Members

By Adventist Today News Team, November 20, 2013

Updated November 23

Friday (November 22) Damas Tutehau Flor (age 69) pleaded guilty to seven counts of fraud in Dunedin (New Zealand) District Court. He was immediately convicted and will be sentenced in December. Court proceedings commenced Monday against the Seventh-day Adventist Church member who conned members of the Dunedin Adventist congregation out of nearly $850,000 (New Zealand currency worth about $705,000 in the United States at current exchange rates). Flohr “persuaded the pastor and his wife, two other couples and four individuals to advance him $853,000 when he was having financial difficulties,” according to The New Zealand Herald.

On Tuesday the Otago Daily Times reported that Flohr “denies dishonestly causing losses of $198,692.98 to Audrey and Edward Hagan, between April and September 2009; $305,709.92 to Evelyn Wordsworth, between September 2008 and September 2009; $246,519.31 to Melvyn and Lynette Trevena, between December 2008 and December 2009; $59,000 to Neeltjie Gaudelius between December 2008 and July 2009; $2500 to Janice McCraw in June 2009; $3800 to Surrey and Diane Watts, in March 2009; and $36,993.15 to Kathleen Bowman between December 2008 and February 2009.”

Flohr approached each of the donors separately, telling them “he had $30 million [US] due from an oil contract in Nigeria, money available in the United States of America and the United Kingdom and property interests in Tahiti that he could sell to cover the funds if necessary,” said The New Zealand Herald. A government analyst told the court the claims were “obviously scams” or had “all the hallmarks of a scam.”

The trial is taking place in the Dunedin District Court. Melvyn Trevena was the Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Dunedin from 2002 to 2009. Trevena says Flohr contacted him in 2007, requesting financial help. Because of their long-term friendship dating back to the 1960s at Longburn Adventist College, Trevena originally gave Flohr $4,000, but after additional requests by Flohr, Trevena gave him a total of $246,519.31.

Evelyn Wordsworth, who has known Flohr since college in the 1960s, became suspicious after giving Flohr more than $305,000. When Wordsworth began investigating Flohr's purported business ventures, she discovered the false information Flohr had used to solicit funds. Wordsworth and others confronted Flohr, but he claimed he did not have their money. Flohr explained that an ambassador who had attempted to bring approximately one million dollars to New Zealand—money ostensibly for them—had not been allowed to enter the country.

During the second day of the trial on Tuesday, the Otago Daily Times reported that retired pastor Trevena “denied encouraging members of his congregation to lend money” to Flohr. Trevena also denied partnering with Flohr in the deceptions, though Flohr and his wife did live with Melvyn and Lynette Trevena at one point. “To a suggestion that, by early 2009, his financial affairs and Flohr's were interlinked, Mr Trevena said he was certainly not part of the accused's business,” reported the newspaper, though Trevena did admit to having a joint account with Flohr that he had not revealed to police.

Trevena also had contacted a professor in the United States about using his U.S. bank account for receiving a portion of the funds. Rather than being evidence of a partnership, Trevena claimed he simply had been naive in his efforts to reclaim his loaned funds.

Adventist Today will update this story when more information becomes available. The trial could last up to three weeks.
Top Adventist Leader uses Web, Video to Talk Directly to Members about His Goals, Concerns

By AT News Team, November 15, 2013

It is unprecedented, according to the official Adventist News Network bulletin. Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has released a video "state of the Church" message on the Internet, taking his goals and concerns directly to Church members. Traditionally this message has been presented as a Sabbath sermon during the annual meeting of the GC executive committee.

Wilson thanked God for the rapid growth of the movement which began in the late 1840s with a few hundred people and now includes an estimated 25 million adherents in more than 70,000 local congregations operating in all but a handful of nations. He restated his top goal of "revival" and shared again a quotation from Ellen G. White, the woman who was the most prominent of leader in the formation of the denomination; "A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs."

Wilson listed four key concerns: (1) a loss of a sense of identity as a unique prophetic movement; (2) changes in traditional norms related to "diet and dress, recreation and amusement, and Sabbath-keeping;" (3) "the danger of disunity;" and (4) apathy and lack of involvement by many members. He stated that God has given the denomination a "divinely inspired organization" and "mutual agreements called church policies" and appealed to members "lay aside personal opinion" and support denominational policies and structures.

"Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you, as I appeal to my own heart, to make a full, complete, total consecration to Christ," Wilson ended his message. He then prayed for the denomination and others seeking the "truths of the Bible."

The entire, 40-minute video can be viewed and downloaded at this Web site:  vimeo.com/79438041

This story is based, in part, on a bulletin from Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news service of the denomination.
Four World Regions of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination Have Voted to End Gender Discrimination in Ordination

By AT News Team, November 19, 2013

Updated November 22

Over the past two weeks a total of four of the 13 world divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination have voted to recommend an end to gender discrimination in the ordination of clergy. Each of these recommendations came from an in-depth study of the Bible as well as Christian history and the Adventist heritage, including the writings of Ellen G. White. These studies were conducted by the denomination's Bible scholars, individuals who have spent a lifetime studying the Bible in its original languages.

On November 4 the North American Division (NAD) executive committee voted 182 to 31, “That we receive the Biblical study of ordination prepared by the NAD Theology of Ordination Study Committee and affirm the conclusion that all people, men and women, may receive ordination as an affirmation of the call of God; and that the NAD support the authorization of each division to consider, through prayer and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, its most appropriate approach to the ordination of women to gospel ministry.” This decision was based on a 240-page report, as previously reported by Adventist Today.

A 730-page study of the Bible material on ordination was received and discussed this week at the annual meeting of the executive committee of the Trans-European Division (TED). The report came with a recommendation that gender discrimination in ordination be ended. After a two-hour discussion, the committee voted unanimously in a secret ballot to approve the report.

The executive committee of the Inter-European Division voted a similar recommendation unanimously during its annual meeting, November 1-5 in Madrid, Spain. The executive committee of the South Pacific Division (SPD) voted the same position on November 13 and again the vote was unanimous. The SPD includes a number of developing nations along with Australia and New Zealand, so this unanimous decision may be an indicator that the global consensus on this issue that has ignited so much controversy is shifting. The TED study responded to a large number of questions regarding ordination which had been listed by the General Conference study committee on the theology of ordination. This does not only include the issue of women’s ordination, but the matters of biblical hermeneutics, the biblical teaching on ordination, ministry, offices, terminology, rituals, the significance of laying on of hands, the development of ordination after the completion of the writings in the New Testament, the understanding and practice of ordination in the major Christian churches, its introduction and later development in the Adventist denomination, and the views of Ellen White on the topic. Dr. Bertil Wiklander, division president and chair of the study committee in Europe, said after the vote, “It is clear that the leaders in the TED wish to see a thorough review of ordination as a whole and to have an inclusive ministry without gender distinctions. We have worked for 19 months with this report and have become astonished at what we have discovered in the Bible and various historical sources. The report gives good reasons for the Church to review its practices in order to let them harmonize more with the Bible. We understand, however, that our contribution is only one of many and we are looking forward to continue working with the world church to seek biblical solutions while preserving unity of purpose.” Besides a detailed exegetical study of the Bible and historical study of ordination in all its major aspects, the report contains twelve recommendations to move the denomination "towards a Biblical priesthood of all believers." (1) "Focus on the Mission of God and All Being Servants for the Salvation of the World. The entire matter of ordination should be seen and our terminology should be defined in the context of God’s purpose for the world as the Creator in Genesis 1-2 and the end-time vision of Revelation 21-22. This will revive the doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers and the inspired biblical theology of mission, church, and service. It will give a theological foundation for activating all members in mission. (2) "Remove the current distance between clergy and laity and the levels of ordination. We recommend that the Church embraces truly biblical principles and frees itself from the continuing dependence on ‘Roman’ practices, for example, by: (a) Finding ways to visibly include the role of lay people in the ordination ceremony (lay people are theologically included in the idea of the church delegating authority to ordained pastors, and lay people participate in the conference/union committee decisions to ordain a pastor); (b) Removing any idea of ‘apostolic succession’; (c) Removing the existing distance between clergy and laity, and the idea that the ordained clergy forms a separate class of members who are elevated to a higher status than others; (d) Removing the levels of ordination between all the different ‘servants’ who work in the church (globally and locally) and applying, rather, one concept of servanthood but with distinctions of duties and responsibilities which are documented in written credentials; (e) Removing the intricate differences between various levels of ministry, such as the licensed and ordained minister, the licensed minister and the
ordained local church elder, the pastor and the local church elder, etc.; (f) Admitting that there is no biblical command to ordain anyone by the imposition of hands and that there is no consistent biblical formula for how a leader is inducted to office in the Christian church. (3) "An inclusive ministry: Where it is culturally appropriate, the Church should allow for an inclusive and gender-neutral ministry, which means that credentials will be granted to men and women on equal terms for all offices which require ordination, presently the gospel minister, the elder, and the deacon/deaconess. This means that the Church removes all gender distinctions in its Working Policy related to the ministry and thus fulfils the biblical intent of the Working Policy BA 55 on ‘Human Relations’. If this cannot be implemented across the world at the same time, the Church should allow it where unions/divisions request permission to do so. This may mean that the world-wide recognition of an ordination in one country may have to be reworded in the Working Policy to the effect that an ordained minister’s credentials are subject to the acceptance of a receiving division/union/conference. (4) "Recommendation to the GC Session in 2015: We propose that a recommendation be brought to the General Conference Session in 2015 that approves a revised policy in which unions whose constituency meetings in session have voted approval and whose division committee has voted approval, be allowed to maintain an inclusive pastoral ministry which removes all gender distinctions within the work of the Church in that union territory. (5) "Theology and practice of ordination and the education of members: The Church should continue its development of the biblical theology of ordination. Based on our study, we urge the Church to proceed in considerably more detail than in the brief consensus statement now considered by the Theology of Ordination Study Committee. This should be accompanied by an organized and intentional attempt to educate members regarding the biblical rationale for ordination and what Seventh-day Adventists believe about it in view of the teaching of the Bible, our only authority for life and practice. "There should be an ongoing teaching of church members regarding the mission of God, the nature of the Church and ordination. This is especially important for new members who come from Roman Catholic or Orthodox backgrounds. The Roman Catholic Church has extensive catechetical teachings about ‘Orders’, which is one of seven sacraments and lays the foundation for the priesthood and the right to determine a person’s salvation or condemnation. ‘Orders’ are part of even brief and popular Catholic Catechisms, but in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we say almost nothing about ordination. This deficit has generated bias and unwarranted traditions that have determined members’ opinion on both ordination in general and women’s ordination. The text of the Working Policy is hardly known by members and is even insufficient as it now stands. (6) "Consider the best terminology: The Church should carefully consider the wisdom of using the term ‘ordination’, which is ambiguous and loaded with meanings from the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations that are not biblical and that are confusing our members who have come to us from other churches. Its origins in the pagan Roman empirical administration, its laws and idol worship, and in the false Christian theology introduced by Tertullian and Cyprian and others after them, make a Seventh-day Adventist hesitant and uncomfortable about this term. We recommend therefore that terms that are closer to the biblical terminology are introduced, such as ‘appoint’, ‘commission’, ‘dedicate’. If for traditional reasons, it is decided to keep ‘ordination’ as a technical term in denominational language, it should be acknowledged that each language in the world has ways of referring to the concept of ‘ordination’ that does not reflect the English ‘ordination’ or Latin *ordinatio*. For example, Greek Adventists use the common Greek term *cheirotoneo*, which is found in Acts 14:23. Other options abound in various languages and the Church should acknowledge the wish of a union to choose better terms in the local language than ‘ordination’ or ‘ordain’.

(7) "Remove ritualistic and consecrational flavor: Seeing how ‘ordination’ is treated in the New Testament, which is where we must find our guidance on Christian ministry, we recommend that the ritualistic and consecrational flavor of the act of ordination, its vague mixture of granting the Holy Spirit or gifts for ministry and ecclesiastical authority be radically toned done and removed from policy and practice.

(8) "Make the imposition of hands optional. While an installation ceremony is a positive and needed feature in church life, we recommend that the imposition of hands be an optional part of the ceremony. In the New Testament, the apostle, servants/ministers, overseers/elders are nowhere ordained by imposition of hands in clear terms. For these functions, however, there is a clear biblical ground for talking about being ‘appointed’.

(9) "Emphasis on God’s blessing and practical aspects. We recommend that the emphasis in the ceremony be placed on the public recognition of the ordinand, the church’s confirmation of the ordinand’s call from God and commitment to serve Christ and the Church, the Church’s approval of the ordinand as teacher, preacher and spiritual leader, and the invocation of God’s blessing.

(10) "Review who is to be ordained in the Church. A special study should be conducted regarding the biblical basis for applying ordination to some offices and not others in the Church. All office holders in the Church are servants of God, but the Bible is not clear on who is ‘ordained’ and who is not. All officials at local church level and in conferences, unions, and the General Conference can be introduced to their functions when they start. This is practical and encouraging, but the biblical basis for ordaining only the pastor, elder, deacon/deaconess is very scant.

(11) "Separate ordination from election to an organizational office of leadership. A clearer distinction should be made between the
ordination (i.e. the ordained minister’s credentials) and the election of leaders for regular church offices in missions, conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference. Ordination for the gospel ministry should be for the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2) and not for administrative positions. If an ordained pastor is elected for a church office of organizational leadership, this is a different task from being a pastor (although some functions may overlap). Holding ministerial credentials may certainly be a merit of one who is elected as a leader, but in its theology and policy, the Church should ensure that the two are clearly distinguished, so that ordination does not automatically imply administrative or organizational leadership.

(12) "Improve ministerial training, education, preparation for ordination, and clarify processes, requirements, and qualifications. We recommend that, based on the study we submit, the Church sharpens its processes and requirements for pastoral education and training, and develops better means by which the qualifications of an ordinand are examined, evaluated, and developed."

The SPD has also released a report which provided a summary of six papers by Adventist Bible scholars in its region. The report included the following points: (1) "The foundation principle for the resolution of questions regarding ordination is the use of the correct hermeneutic. (2) The discussion is driven by our understanding of the nature of the church, its role and its function. (3) An Adventist theology of ordination will be based on scriptural principles. (4) Where Scripture is silent on current issues, a theology of ordination must be based on the principles of Scripture, taking adequate account of what Scripture says as applied in its local or issue-specific contexts. (5) The words translated "ordain" have a very wide usage. (6) While the roots of many NT practices can be traced to the OT there is discontinuity between them. There is no practical connection for example, between priests, Levites, elders, and deacons. (7) Ordination is a practice driven by mission and practical needs, informed by biblical studies and theology. (8) The Bible does not command ordination; however it does encourage the church to develop modes of maintaining order in the exercise of its mission. These modes may go beyond biblical practice but must be consistent with it. (9) Ordination is not to be considered a sacrament. Biblical evidence supports the symbolism of the laying on of hands when appointing individuals for a task, but there is no firm evidence for the transfer of grace or virtue in this context. Consequently, we must reject attributing sacramental value to ordination. (10) The theology of ordination informs and is informed by the practical implementation of our ecclesiology, i.e. the global and local nature of the church, which, expressed in its various forms, facilitates mission. (11) The significance of ordination is influenced by culture. In some parts of the world, culture bestows inordinate status upon a minister at ordination. (12) EGW [Ellen G. White] considers that ordination contains an experiential element that has its basis in a call from God. Although some women may not be concerned about non-ordination, for others it creates great angst because of their sense of their divine call, which the church does not seem to recognize."  

This story includes information from tedNEWS and the South Pacific Record, both official news services of the denomination.

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Two Pioneer Women Pastors Ordained at Kettering Church in Dayton, Ohio

By AT News Team, November 20, 2013

“Today we are revisiting the days of pioneers of the Adventist movement when there were women evangelists who raised up churches, who preached and baptized,” said Pastor Dave Weigley, president of the Columbia Union Conference, during an ordination service for Hazel Burns (81) and Margaret Turner (90) at Kettering church last Sabbath (November 16). The event was reported with pictures in an Email bulletin from the Columbia Union Visitor today.

Both women “were second career pastors,” said Pastor Linda Farley, an ordained minister and chaplain at Kettering Medical Center (KMC). Burns left a full-time career in the community and began giving Bible studies. For nearly 10 years she “ministered freely without pay for the Kettering church before being recognized for her service by ... the Ohio Conference,” said Farley. Eventually an invitation was extended for her to become an associate pastor at Kettering Church.

Turner was called away from a nursing career. She took Clinical Pastoral Education classes one quarter at a time and ultimately went back to school and graduated from seminary 40 years after completing her undergraduate degree. She went on to become a board-certified chaplain and ministered to patients and staff at KMC, as well as serving as a local elder.

“Kettering church and surrounding communities still feel the effects of the ministry and mentoring of both of these women, who though retired, remain active in outreach to church and community,” said Farley. During the service, Dr. Raj Attiken, Ohio Conference president, stated, “We regret we were unable to have this service while they were still employed with a paycheck coming.” The Ohio Conference first went on recording requesting authority to ordain women serving as pastors at least as early as the mid-1980s.

After Weigley recognized and affirmed the “specific and personal” calls to ministry each woman had received from the Holy Spirit, he stated they were “pioneers in their own right,” and offered the ordination prayer. Pastor Rob Vandeman, executive secretary of the Columbia Union Conference, concluded by saying “Better late than never. We apologize for the delay in getting these to you,” before presenting their ministerial credentials, the same ones given to every retired, ordained minister in the Adventist denomination.

Dayton, Ohio, has one of the largest per capita populations of Adventists in the Midwest. The denomination's health ministry in the metropolitan area includes eight hospitals, a retirement and assisted living complex and Kettering College of Medical Arts with an enrollment of about 1,000. There are a dozen Adventist churches in the metro area and they cosponsor a major social service agency, Good Neighbor House. The denomination also operates Spring Valley Academy with grades K-12 and three child care centers. This story is based on a bulletin from the Columbia Union Conference Visitor. A video of the service is available at http://vimeo.com/79566262, beginning at minute 16:20.
Documentary on Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists Released in DVD

By Adventist Today News Team, November 21, 2013

The award-winning, feature-length documentary film entitled Seventh-Gay Adventists will be released for private purchase Friday (November 22) after more than 70 showings across North America with nearly 14,000 in attendance. It has generated much discussion and some debate.

The film simply tells the stories of three gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists who wrestle with how to reconcile their faith, identity, and sexuality. One young man spent five years in "ex-gay" therapy trying to become straight. Another was an Adventist pastor in Brazil who was fired for being gay. The third is a lesbian mom from the Midwest who wants her daughters to grow up with her beliefs, even though she knows her church might not accept their family.

"These are Adventists whom we followed for two years," said Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer, the couple who produced the movie. "They all desire a way to reconcile their faith and sexual identity. Their voices, especially combined with the verité style of filmmaking, add a not-often-heard perspective to the conversation about this topic."

Growing up Adventist means knowing you belong. And being Adventist is about much more than a set of beliefs--it's a close-knit community not easily left. Discovering you are gay in this community often means loss and exile from all that has been home. The film follows the raw and moving journeys of these three as they wrestle with deep questions and struggle to find a place where they can integrate identity, love, and belief.

David loves Jesus, but he might not go to heaven. At least, that’s his deepest fear. For the last five years, his "ex-gay" therapist has tried to help David become straight, but his heart’s desire is still to be with a man. As a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with family members in prominent leadership positions, David knows that being gay is not okay. Gays are promiscuous, hedonistic, and decidedly un-Christian—or at least that’s what he’s always believed.

"Whatever one’s position regarding homosexuals and the church may be, this film is worth seeing because it candidly probes issues with real human faces and stories," stated Dr. Roy Gane, author and seminary professor. "The movie, which simply tells stories rather than taking an advocacy stance, is powerful. It can, I believe, do much to make Adventists more compassionate in this controversial area," stated Dr. William Johnsson, retired editor of the Adventist Review.

This is "a must-see documentary film about the crossroads between faith and sexual identity. Thank you for being gracious and generous and for putting a spotlight on grace," said Pastor Ray Dabrowski, who served as communication director for the General Conference from 1994 to 2010. "The film is superb, a poignant and profound experience beyond any I’ve seen on the subject," stated Chris Blake, author and professor of English at Union College.

The film will immediately be available in digital format for immediate download and DVDs and Blu-ray format will be shipped in the near future. Orders can be placed at the website http://buy.sgamovie.com, and for the long weekend of Thanksgiving, from Wednesday (November 27) through Sunday night (December 1), it can be viewed free at http://buy.sgamovie.com/buy. Use the code watchfree.

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As a young child, I was afraid of darkness. When put to bed and the lights turned out, I imagined menacing gorillas lurking nearby. I swear I saw their shadows skulking across my walls in the reflection of moonlight. Gorillas do not sing lullabies, and going to bed could be sheer terror. Many times I feigned thirst and bellowed for mom to retrieve me a glass of water just to get her to turn on the lights. Pesky gorillas, they would disappear quicker than light, and I knew they were waiting for the darkness again to scare the willies out of me. Being a child was not easy, and there were no bible texts about gorillas; I know because I checked.

“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:5).

The meaning is the Light shines unceasingly, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Good news. I wish I had understood this as a child. The promise is Light will dispel darkness, but sometimes I find a troubling paradox: Darkness in the Light.

There is a darker side to John’s “light into darkness” statement; darkness that torments me. God can be vague and distant, like a wilderness. “But my beloved had turned away and had gone! …I searched for him, but I did not find him. I called to him, but he did not answer me” (Song of Solomon 5:6). Like Tar Baby in Uncle Remus Folktales, God sits speechless as I pummel him with my supplications. Long ago I shed the skin of immature drive-thru faith, praising God for finding lost keys or a parking space at the mall. Instead, I progressed into the dark realities of faith in a world often broken and entirely mad. God perplexes me. Theodicy harasses me. His thoughts are not my thoughts; my ways are not His ways (Is. 55:8-9); my faith trampled by reality.

Temporality struggles to fathom eternity. Measured space struggles to fathom infinity. We talk of a relationship with God and how eager He is to have a relationship with us, but listen to Job, ‘O that a man might plead with God as a man with his neighbor! ’(Job 16:21). The Light can be very dark indeed. “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these” (Is. 45:7).

When I am in the wilderness, my prayers remind me of the ascending smoke rings of Lewis Carroll’s Caterpillar, dissolving into nothingness.

David complains the Lord sets him in ‘dark places…in the lowest pit,’ and plaintively asks why God has rejected Him and hides His face from him. See Psalms 88. Again, Job: “Where now is my hope? And who regards my hope? Will it go down with me to Sheol? Shall we together go down into the dust?” (17:15-16). A believer understands Hell when she experiences the non-responsive God. I now understand the complaint of the Deist: God wound us up and wandered off. I know the angst of the Existentialist: no Presence; no encouraging words whispering in my thoughts. There is abundant hope, but not always for me. It is often just dead as if God had vanished. “My soul cleaves to the dust” (Ps. 119:25).
There is no intervention, no mediator in the opaqueness of God. His concealment defines Him as Mystery while driving me nearly mad. I am free to explore possibilities, answers, theologies and God, and I do, endlessly, yet He remains detached. Biblical promises are not guarantees in this life. Scriptural promises can simulate odds in Las Vegas. They produce expectations; I throw the dice and expect more than ‘snake eyes.’ I cry out from my suffering, awaiting something. Faith confronts the void. My spiritual riddle is like ‘playing solitaire while the King of Hearts is well concealed,’

or another verse might be: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

With the darkness of Light, I feel like Habakkuk (3:17). Nothing works; prayers leap into the abyss; production fails; self-worth plummets and God’s footprints disappear in the retreating tide. Habakkuk knew this murky swamp and chose to rejoice, a form of hope. Swallowed by opaque obscurity, Job made his famous illogical claim: “Though He slays me, I will hope in Him” (Job 13:15). Job also chose hope. Ravaged by the sudden loss of family, a distraught wife, feeling deserted, falsely accused, yet he hopes while in blinding darkness (see Job 19).

Frustrated, we contest God; we ask hard questions: Would a Friend invite the Devil to harm His loving ally in a cruel game? Is this the “God of love”? Would Job have believed had he known he was the ball in a soccer game between God and Satan? Was Job a such a plaything? The conundrum of this story alone challenges my faith. Job trusted even though God resembled the mute stone idols He condemned, adding an ominous nuance to “Jesus, the Rock.”

What do we do when our prayers seem to fall lifeless to the ground, when God is judged absent, and life feels pointless? We either run, or frantically rearrange the chairs on our deck of faith as cognitive dissonance is not uncommonly the underbelly of faith. Sometimes, worst of all, we stop believing.

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

The dynamics of belief in an invisible God drive the darkness of Light. Suffering darkness is unavoidable. Fortunately, spiritual nightfall does not describe the whole Christian life, but if you are a Christian, your lights will go out, sometimes briefly, sometimes at length, but always an inexorable attack on trusting God.

I have concluded three things. First, regardless of faith’s vicissitudes, I believe. Jesus, my example, trusted regardless of challenging evidence. Promises, assurances, and consolation deserted Him. The cross concealed God, and Jesus, feeling forsaken, submitted to the unknown, uncertain there would be tomorrow. He is Light shining into my darkness. Believing can seem absurd, strangling the life out of you; yet we are to trust like Jesus. We do not surrender our faith when evidence overruns our reality and chains us to the dusty dungeon of despair; we endure. We too will have a cross, and it will teach us that lesson.

Secondly, when your Christian experience is pitching black, praise and thanksgiving are essential. Daily, count your blessings. Gratitude is a light switch in the black hole of spiritual darkness.

Finally, The Incarnation means God “lives and moves and has His being” (Acts 17:28) in the society of humanity. He embeds Himself in the molecular structure of our lives, the foundation of who we are as human beings, having to work things out as we work things out. He limits Himself. God incarnates into our feeble thought patterns, our misconceptions, our wrong-headed notions about life and the hereafter. He is there in our careful plans, our quotidian efforts, our creations, and our character flaws. Like the song, He has become “one of us.”

When bad decisions occur and nasty consequences result, God is there plodding through our messy stuff like a crafty GPS redirecting our erroneous course. We laugh... He laughs; we weep... He weeps; we stumble... He stumbles, always sharing our humanity because that is the decision He made in the wards of eternity long before we went to hell (Eph. 1:1-5). He has incarnated into ordinary people living mundane lives. He is the ultimate Other, the “ Stranger on the bus just trying to make his way home.”

My faith cannot be built on expected goodies, or miracles and promises, but only on His claim of who He is. Jesus is straight from the heart.
of the Father where He continues to adore me, in spite of the sewer I often make of my time here. When frustrated and depressed, when my fog envelopes God, that is just my broken self in a flawed world, my crumbled sinful existence living out the curse (Gen. 3:17). Ineluctable suffering just is, and like Job, I hope in hope. Perhaps I am beginning to understand the Incarnation on a deeper level and commencing to comprehend the Light after all; for the gorillas have gone.

i All biblical texts are from New American Standard Bible, 1972.

ii Uncle Remus Folktales, Joel Chandler Harris, 1881.

iii Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, 1865.


vii Ibid.

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Sh’m a 3, Loving God with All Your Mind

by Debonnaire Kovacs
Submitted Nov 20, 2013

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy...mind...

When I walk by the river and think of mind, I think of flow, of current, of direction. The river is born to seek the ocean, and that’s all it does. Our minds were born to seek God, but they, unlike the river, have free choice. We are even free to choose to believe we have no free choice. Consider that one for a minute!

I see the river doing all kinds of things at once, just like my mind. In the middle, it’s rushing along without much impedance, heading ever downhill. Then there are stretches that rush and ruffle over rocks and sandbars—impeded, but not letting the obstacles stop it. In fact, you could anthropomorphize (not that I would ever be guilty of that!!) and say the river seems to enjoy the obstacles.

Along the edges, there are spots where the river slows, circles, seems to get nowhere, but as long as it’s still connected to the main flow, that part of the water will move along, too, just at a different pace.

I mentioned last week that people used to be able to care for this river, to keep an open channel. I got to wondering what things I do, or could do, that keep an open channel in my mind?

I’ve noticed that one thing that makes the river flow more freely is rain. At first, I thought of this in the usual, even clichéd interpretation of rain as adversity, but for the river, rain is not adversity, rain is life. Rain, to fill my mind, might be the water of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

Side waters might be good, for breaks, but how can I keep them from becoming separated from the flow, and getting stagnant?

I can use my mind to love myself by not allowing obstacles to get me down, by not speaking to myself in hurtful ways I would never use with another, by, as a friend of mine puts it, “paying attention to what I’m paying attention to!”

I can use my mind to love others by my words, written and spoken, by listening carefully when they speak, and watching their faces for the things they can’t say in words.

I can use my mind to love God by casting out into the depths of that immense, unfathomable love, by thinking of that love and patience and majesty, by trying (and failing!) to put some of it into words.

How do you keep your mind flowing free with love?

_______________________ Share your thoughts about this article:
Andrews University—the Philippine Connection

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted Nov. 20, 2013

Adventist Today is on the media lists of many organizations, including Andrews University, so when we received a press release concerning the AU Symphony Orchestra’s Fall Concert (full info below), we intended to simply release it, for the benefit of those who might be in the area. Then we received an update that changed it from a press release into a feature story.

Becky St. Clair, Media Communications Manager, sent out an update that the concert had now become a fundraiser for Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda relief for the hard-hit Philippines. When AT called St. Clair to ask how this had come about, here is what she had to say:

“Claudio Gonzales, our orchestra director, has taken the orchestra to the Philippines; I believe they went in 2009. He’s also been involved in music festivals in Asia, and one year one of those was in the Philippines. So he already has an interest and an involvement with Asia. When he heard that our Filipino club on campus was working to collect funds, he contacted them and asked if they would be interested in partnering.”

As a result of this collaboration, the new press release states that “The Andrews University Symphony Orchestra, Howard Performing Arts Center, and Andrews Filipino International Association (AFIA) are all partnering to send 100 percent of the evening's proceeds to the Philippines via ADRA (Adventist Development & Relief Agency) International.”

This is not just a charitable outreach from a university that is trying to carry out Jesus’ commission to care for the world. Andrews University has several students and at least one faculty member with family and friends in the Philippines. One of the students, Rebecca Nicolas, was born and raised in the Philippines. She grew up near Guiuan, about four hours by car from Tacloban, much of which has been destroyed. She had only come to Berrien Springs this past summer, to study early childhood education, and when she still hadn’t heard from her family a week after the storm, she was frantic.
Local television station ABC57, out of South Bend, IN, interviewed her on November 14. At that point, Nicolas could only say, “I’m still hoping… my heart really breaks because of my loved ones, my family.”

However, good news was to follow. An AU staff member posted the ABC57 interview on Facebook, and hours later, one of Nicolas’ distant relatives saw the story and posted that her family was still alive. Nicolas was afraid to believe it until she saw her brother on his bicycle, searching for food on the island. Clearly, they are not out of danger and difficulty, but they are all alive, and Rebecca Nicolas, along with her friends and family, are praising God.

Another student, Eia Racasa, learned after three days that her family were all right, but Professor Arleen Saliba said that a cousin was still missing.

The Red Cross, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, World Vision, and others are working hard to help the approximately 10 million affected by Typhoon Haiyan, reportedly one of the worst storms ever to hit land. **There are many ways you can help. Here are a few:**

- [www.adra.org](http://www.adra.org)
- [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- [www.worldvision.org](http://www.worldvision.org)

**To learn more about and watch videos of the stories above:**
- Student Can't Find Family
- Student Found Family
- Residents Learn Fate of Family

**And if you’re in the Andrews vicinity, here is the information about the concert:**

Andrews Filipino International Association (AFIA) will also be selling apparel at the concert and will give 100 percent of their proceeds to ADRA for Philippines relief as part of the AFIA fundraising campaign for the Philippines: Many Hands, One Hope.

Directed by Claudio Gonzalez, music director, and Jose Meneses, assistant conductor, the ensemble will perform Rossini’s *Overture La Gazza Ladra*, Paganini’s *Concerto for Violin & Orchestra* and Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony No. 2, “Little Russian,” Op. 17.*

The orchestra also welcomes guest soloist Haoli Lin, winner of the Andrews University International String Competition 2013.
Tickets are available online at howard.andrews.edu or by calling 888-467-6442. General admission is $5; students and seniors are $3; children 12 and under are free.

Special thanks to WAUS and United Sports Apparel for their support of these fundraising efforts. WAUS is a 24-hour all-classical radio station located on the campus of Andrews University. United Sports Apparel has been operating in Stevensville, Mich., since 1973 providing top brand active sportswear and street wear for men, women and children.

The Andrews University Symphony Orchestra is the core ensemble of the orchestral program at Andrews. In addition to their current series at the Howard Performing Arts Center, the orchestra travels within the Great Lakes region as well as internationally. Since 2006 they have performed in Italy, Austria, Germany, France, the Philippines and Costa Rica.

Haoli Lin, Andrews photo
“Where is the way to the dwelling of light?
And darkness, where is its place,
That you may take it to its territory
And that you may discern the paths to its home?

“You know, for you were born then,
And the number of your days is great!

“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail...?

“Where is the way that the light is divided,
Or the east wind scattered on the earth?

“Who has cleft a channel for the flood,
Or a way for the thunderbolt,
To bring rain on a land without people,
On a desert without a man in it,
To satisfy the waste and desolate land
And to make the seeds of grass to sprout?

“Has the rain a father?
Or who has begotten the drops of dew?
“From whose womb has come the ice?

And the frost of heaven, who has given it birth?
“Water becomes hard like stone,
And the surface of the deep is imprisoned.

Job 38:19-30, NASB
"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Matthew 25:40