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Study Committee Debates Extending Clergy Ordination to Women in the Adventist Church

By Adventist Today News Team, January 27, 2014

The Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), appointed in October 2012 by the officers of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, met for the third time last week in Columbia, Maryland. At least 90 of the 103 committee members made it through the worst winter weather on record for the mid-Atlantic region to be present for the meeting. They worked 12 hours a day throughout the week, ending with a Sabbath of fellowship and worship.

Much of the time was spent in hearing reports from official Biblical study groups appointed by ten of the denomination's 13 world divisions. The committee had met in January and July last year to review interpretive principles and the general concept of ordination as presented in Scripture. This meeting was planned to focus in on the gender issue: Does the Bible and Adventist heritage permit women to be ordained to the gospel ministry?

"More than eight hours" were spent specifically in Bible study of key texts, including the Genesis "account of the creation of man and woman (Genesis 1-3); Paul's counsel to Timothy about the behavior of women in worship (1 Tim 2:12-14, 1 Cor 11); the apostle's 'neither male nor female' description of what it means to be 'in Christ' (Gal 3:28); and application of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 to the contemporary church," reported the Review.

Dr. Barry Oliver, president of the denomination's South Pacific Division, presented a sketch of how a decision to permit the ordination of women might be received by Adventists around the world. Dr. Angel Rodriguez, retired former director of the denomination's Biblical Research Institute (BRI), summarized the Bible reasons for ending gender discrimination in ordination. Dr. C. Raymond Holmes, a retired associate dean of the seminary at Andrews University, urged the committee to maintain a negative position.

The debate on the topic was vigorous. "It's a pity we can't harness some of the heat generated in our committee room," the Adventist Review quoted one committee member on a day of record cold in the northeastern United States. There were "increasingly candid assessments of the differing positions," the Review reported. "Several presenters critiqued the interpretive methods used by those in favor of ordaining women ... and were met by challenging queries." Dr. Bill Knott, the Review editor observed that the committee "is in some sense a civics lesson for Adventist theology and those who care about it."

Opponents advocated the adoption of the "male headship" doctrine which has been taught in recent decades by the Southern Baptist Convention. Opponents also expressed the belief that the denomination should prohibit the ordination of women as local elders as voted by the 1990 GC Session.

"At times, we've had to caution each other about the temptation to describe the hermeneutics of those we differ from as impermissible or unbiblical," the Review quoted committee chair Dr. Artur Stele, a GC vice president and current director of the BRI. He also said that he saw "a growing sense of camaraderie and understanding."

The tide is turning among Adventists toward permitting the ordination of women to the gospel ministry concluded Spectrum, a journal published by the largest organization of Adventist academics. This conclusion was based on an analysis of the reports from the world divisions of the GC. Six divisions recommended approval; the two European divisions, the North and Inter-American divisions, the Northern Asia Pacific and South Pacific divisions. Five said they would go along with letting others ordain women clergy if the GC Session approves the step; Euro-Asia, South America, West Central Africa, Southern Asia and Southern Asia Pacific. Only two divisions are absolutely opposed, although one of these conceded points in favor of ordaining women, according to Spectrum. The Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division reported unqualified opposition and the East Central Africa Division recommended against it, "but representative from division concedes points in favor."

Further evidence that the tide seems to be moving toward including women in ordination is found in the new bulletin released by the official Adventist News Network (ANN) around noon on January 28: "At least 10 of the [denomination's] 13 world division [reports] say that they would either recommend the ordination of women to ministry or would allow it in some world regions without the matter harming church unity." The release quoted Stele, "From now ... we'll be looking for solutions."
The issue of gender discrimination against women is of great concern among a majority of church leaders in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. It is seen as violating Biblical principles of equity and creating a major barrier to the Adventist message in some cultural contexts. Many believe it is one of the reasons why at least half of the young people growing up in Adventist families are leaving the church. Several union conferences in the United States and Europe have decided to begin ordaining women clergy and the Adventist Church in China has been doing so since the 1980s.

In parts of the southern hemisphere where traditional social codes are still widely respected, there is opposition to the extension of ordination to women pastors. A few very conservative Bible scholars in North America also argue that Scripture does not permit it. Pastor Ted Wilson, the GC president, has repeatedly expressed concern that the resulting tensions may split the denomination.

The committee will meet again in June 2014 and attempt to complete recommendations which will go to the GC executive committee in October. That committee will have the final say about what actually goes on the agenda for the GC Session in 2015. Many Adventists around the world are praying that it will find a compromise that will maintain unity in the denomination.

**ANN released the following summary of the division reports:**

East-Central African Division: "After thorough examination of Scripture, the Writings of Ellen White, and the scholarly papers that are for the ordination of women and those that are against, there is still not light as to whether [women] may be ordained as pastors. ... The committee is almost convinced that there are two possibilities: A. Both sides of the debate on women ordination do not really understand the New Testament passages which read like women ordination should not be considered; B. The whole church has not given much thought as to what women may do uniquely and be affirmed to advance the redemptive ministry and mission of God. So, before there is complete clarity about the authentic Scriptural intent about the issue, [our Biblical Research Committee] says ‘not yet’ to the ordination of women. ... Only when the church can continue to ‘seek understanding’ so that the delegates to GC in [San Antonio] in 2015 may produce good results by voting intelligently."

Euro-Asia Division: “Taking into account the cultural context in which the church is to fulfill its service in Euro-Asia Division, and keeping in mind the church’s missiological interests, the [division] Executive Committee discourages the practice of the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry."

Inter-European Division: “Since ordination does not contradict the teachings of the Bible and might foster the mission of the church, we think that there is room for the church to ordain women for pastoral ministry. ... Whatever decision is considered, a basic unity of the worldwide church in faith and practice should be preserved."

Inter-American Division: “There is no explicit mandate in the Bible for the ordination of women to church leadership, yet there is no command against the same. ... The Inter-American Division is willing to accept the ecclesiastical decision taken by the [Church] in plenary session."

North American Division: “In harmony with our biblical study, we recommend that ordination to gospel ministry, as an affirmation of the call of God, be conferred by the church on men and women. ... The committee humbly recommends that the North American Division 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."

Northern Asia-Pacific Division: "We recommend that the World Church place 'Mission First' as a priority and that we focus on sharing the three angels' messages with the world. This means that we recommend that both men and women should be encouraged and recognized by the church through ordination to the pastoral ministry,... We further recommend that the implementation of ordination of women will be determined by each division taking into consideration its impact on mission and unity within its territories."

South American Division: “Women should not be ordained to the pastoral ministry. The church should further investigate the possibility of the ordination of men and women to ministries other than the pastoral ministry."

South Pacific Division: “The [committee] does not see any scriptural principle which would be an impediment to women being ordained. The calling of the Holy Spirit needs to be recognized for both men and women. There is a sense of injustice that needs to be addressed. The mission of the church is a primary determinant of praxis, both in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and in its climax as the Holy Spirit is poured out on both men and women during the latter rain."

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division: “The Old Testament and New Testament demonstrate that no women were ordained... Since there is no biblical support for the ordination of woman pastors, then the ordination of women elders should also not be considered."
Southern Asia Division: “We recognize that there is no direct teaching in the Scriptures or the Spirit of Prophecy that either prescribes or prohibits the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry. ... In the absence of direct teaching in inspired writings we accept the authority of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to take a decision. ... We have no objection if the world church takes a decision to allow certain areas of the world to ordain women to pastoral ministry.”

Southern Asia-Pacific Division: We “will follow the voice of the Spirit and the world church upon its voted decision in July 2015 at the GC Session.”

Trans-European Division: “We propose that a recommendation be brought to the General Conference Session in 2015, that it 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.”

West-Central Africa Division: “The [division] by consensus does not recommend the ordination of women into ordained pastoral ministry. However, if at the General Conference Session the world church votes in favor of women’s ordination, [the division] will not threaten the unity of the church despite its disagreement to such a decision. Instead, we will consider women’s ordination as a matter of conscience, and will continue to study and pray for light on the subject brighter than there is now.”

The ANN bulletin also indicated that the complete documents from the meeting last week will soon be available on the web site of the GC Archives, Statistics and Research office.
Southern Adventist University Locked Down in a Security Threat

By AT News Team, January 23, 2014
Updated January 30 (Update follows story.)

Southern Adventist University and Collegedale Academy near Chattanooga, Tennessee, were both locked down for security reasons Thursday afternoon, January 23. The Chattanooga Times Free Press reported that the lockdown alarm sounded in Brock Hall on the campus, and the university safety alert said it was not a drill. WRCB-TV said an email was sent to students and faculty: "This is not a test. We have executed a campus wide lock down. Campus Safety is investigating a potential threat. Please remain inside and away from windows until a sweep of the campus. Please hold all phone calls. We will send more information as it is available. This is not a test."

The television station transmitted pictures of local police and other agencies on both campuses. Police told WTVC-TV they had received a "credible off-campus threat" and had immediately locked down the university and other nearby Hamilton County schools. By early evening, Chattanooga police told the television station they had taken a "person of interest" into custody at the nearby YMCA.

Collegedale Police identified that man taken into custody as James Gaines, a former student at the University who made threats to use firearms and explosives on the campus and said he was on the way to the campus. The threats reportedly happened around noon and Gaines was not on campus at the time.

"As far as we know right now, the suspect was upset over some delayed paperwork and made a specific threat against the campus," said Collegedale Police officer Tonya Saddler. While police were trying to locate Gaines, they received reports of shots fired inside of Talge Hall, a men's dormitory on campus. Police say they also received 911 calls from students who said they believed Gaines was located inside the dormitory. In the end, police didn't find Gaines in the dorm and there was no evidence of a shooting.

Many students told reporters that all of this was overwhelming. "It's definitely unusual, nothing like that really happens around here ever and it's usually pretty quiet and all of a sudden the swat team shows up so it's a little scary," says SAU student Derek Schutter.

WDEF television Channel 12, the CBS affiliate in Chattanooga, reported that the campus re-opened about 2:30 p.m. when the threat was resolved. There was no danger to anyone on campus, according to authorities.

By early evening, the administration of SAU announced a special worship service for 6 p.m. in the Collegedale Church where information and a question and answer time will be held after a short devotional. Counselors will be available there for any students who wish to speak with someone regarding the incident. Counseling services are also being made available. The statement indicated that SAU was alerted to the threat by officials from Chattanooga State Community College and expressed gratitude to SAU’s Campus Safety and local police for their assistance in keeping the campus safe.

The university is owned and operated by the Southern Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It has an enrollment of about 3,000 students. Update: James Michael Gaines (age 25) was arrested by Hamilton County sheriff's deputies and is scheduled to appear in court on February 6 to answers to charges making false reports, a felony with a minimum three-year prison sentence under...
Tennessee law. He made bail and is out of jail. He was last registered as a student at SAU in 2009 and was at Chattanooga State Community College evidently attempting to register when he became upset about the failure of SAU to provide paperwork and made statements about using firearms and explosives on the SAU campus. Officials from the community college quickly notified officials at SAU who initiated the lock-down. Gaines never actually went to the SAU campus and it appears that the most violent actual behavior in this incident is that of SWAT officers who handcuffed three students face-down on the fourth floor of Talge Hall, a men's dormitory at SAU.
New Chair of Ellen White Estate is First Asian in Role

By AT News Team, January 29, 2014

Ellen G. White, a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and prolific author, appointed a board of trustees to manage her literary estate prior to her death in 1915. One measure of how international the Adventist movement has become is that the new chairman of the trustees is from Singapore. Dr. G. T. Ng is only the 12th person to serve in that role and the first person from Asia. He is also the executive secretary of the General Conference (GC), the second-ranking office in the denomination.

Ng follows Pastor Don Schneider, former president of the Adventist Church in North America who retired from the White Estate at the end of last year. Ng has been a seminary dean in the Philippines, university professor, church administrator and pastor. He was elected a GC officer in 2010.

James Nix, staff director of the White Estate, expressed his pleasure that Ng has accepted the board’s invitation to become chair. He “brings to the position a passion for mission and a deep love for Ellen White,” Nix is quoted in an Adventist News Network release. Promotion of White's writings around the world in many cultures will be a key priority, Ng has stated.
Pioneer Woman Bible Scholar is Dead: Dr. Leona G. Running

By AT News Team, January 24, 2014

Dr. Leona Glidden Running, age 97, professor emerita of biblical languages at Andrews University, died on Wednesday (January 22) in Berrien Springs, Michigan, after nearly six decades of service to the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University (AU). She was a pioneer in a field that is still largely dominated by men in an era when there was no discussion of making a role for women among the denomination's clergy.

“During her long and productive life Dr. Running broke new ground,” stated Dr. Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of AU. “She was the first female professor at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Takoma Park (Maryland) and later here at Andrews. She was the first Adventist woman to earn a doctorate in Ancient Near Eastern Studies (at Johns Hopkins University), with a specialization in ancient Syriac texts. She overcame the grief of losing her husband early in life and built her exemplary academic and professional calling. Following her retirement she continued to share her linguistic skill with graduate students (Syriac, Egyptian, Akkadian, Hebrew, Aramaic, and almost any other language these students cared to learn). And she served the University with her editorial talents, improving a good many of its publications over the years. She was an inspiration to many and an example to us all.”

“Dr. Running holds a special place in the hearts of her Old Testament and Seminary colleagues and former students,” said Dr. Jiří Moskala, dean of the seminary. They “greatly appreciated her mentoring during their Seminary years. She was ... indeed a woman of remarkable skills and influence. We praise the Lord for her life and faithful ministry!”

She “assisted more students in writing doctoral dissertations than any other faculty member of Andrews University,” stated Dr. William Shea, another Adventist Old Testament scholar who worked closely with her on a number of projects. "She has probably touched the educational lives of more Seventh-day Adventist ministers than any other woman except Ellen White.”

Born on August 24, 1916, in Flint, Michigan, to Charles Comstock Glidden and Leona Mary Bertha Boat Glidden, Leona showed an early attraction to languages. Her mother, a teacher, began coaching her in reading skills when she was 3 or 4, and she entered Grade 4 at age 8. She graduated from Adelphian Academy in Holly, Michigan.

Running graduated from Emmanuel Missionary College, the institution that later became AU, as valedictorian in 1937 with a BA in modern languages. She went on to earn an MA in the two main Bible languages, Greek and Hebrew, from the Adventist Theological Seminary in 1955, and a Ph.D. in Semitic languages from Johns Hopkins University in 1964.

She married Leif (“Bud”) Running on May 17, 1942. On August 20, 1946, when Bud was 37 and Leona almost 30, he died while undergoing his third lung operation.

Running served the Adventist Church in many capacities. From 1944 to 1948 she worked in the Foreign Language Division of the Voice of Prophecy media ministry, translating programs and typing scripts in German, Spanish and Portuguese. In 1950 she moved to Washington, D.C., to become the copy editor for Ministry magazine. During these early years, Running often earned far less than her male counterparts for doing the same amount of work. Nevertheless, she continued to do God’s work, traveling to many European countries, promoting the Adventist faith and, at the same time, expanding her cultural experience.

Running began working for the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in 1955, teaching Greek and Hebrew. At the time, the president of the seminary was skeptical about a woman’s ability to teach male students and male students' willingness to be taught by a woman. She began teaching on a trial basis, but in 1956 she was granted regular faculty status and, shortly after, full tenure.

Not content to sit on the sidelines and watch her students, Running was actively involved in their professional and personal development, and her guidance helped countless individuals find their voice. Her strength and determination during a time when women were not always
treated as equals with men, even within the church, were an inspiration to many.

When the seminary was moved from Takoma Park to Berrien Springs in 1960, Running came with it, continuing on as a valuable and dedicated professor of biblical languages. Siegfried Horn, professor of the history of antiquity at the seminary, nominated her to the Chicago Society of Biblical Research and she served as the first female president of the noted, interfaith scholarly group in 1981–82.

Among her many interests, Running traveled extensively. In 1951, she traveled with Del Delker to the Paris Youth Congress and to seven European countries. Later she published *36 Days and a Dream*, recounting their trip. In 1957, she joined Siegfried Horn’s first guided study tour in Europe and the Middle East. She wrote another travelogue from this trip, published in 1958 as *From Thames to Tigris*. In 1965 she traveled through Europe and studied six weeks in Israel, ending with a trip through western Turkey and a cruise of the Aegean isles. In 1970, she again traveled through Europe to spend eight days in Iran, a weekend on Cyprus, and 10 days in Israel. In 1974, she taught during a summer session at Newbold College in England, then spent three weeks in France and Germany.

For many years Running collected articles, journals and books on women in ministry. She donated the collection to the Center for Adventist Research in the James White Library. The most notable of her multiple publications is *William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius*, published by Morgan Press in 1975. It is a 436-page biography of the man known as the “Dean of Biblical Archaeologists.”

She retired from her faculty position at her 65th birthday, but for 21 years she continued to teach Egyptian, Akkadian and Syriac in the seminary, finally quitting in May 2002. At the May 2012 commencement ceremony, Running was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Andrews University.

Besides countless former students and friends around the world, she leaves to mourn her nieces, Merry Habenicht Knoll and husband Thomas Russell Knoll Sr. of Walla Walla, Washington, and Cheeri Lee Roberts of Queensbury, New York, along with grandnieces and grandnephews: Rebecca Knoll Lawrence and husband Jay Lawrence of St. Charles, Missouri, with two children, Matthew and Michaela; Thomas Russell Knoll Jr. and wife Deanna Marsh Knoll of Olympia, Washington, with two children, Judson and Jakob; Jonathan Andrew Knoll and wife Bonnie Rick Knoll of Burleson, Texas, with two children, Makena and Emmalee; Deborah Knoll of Naples, North Carolina; Teresa Roberts and husband Falah Fatmi of Fairfax, Virginia, with Sophia and Sabrina; Heidi Roberts of Hood River, Oregon; and Eric Roberts of New York City.

*Much of the information in this article is from an obituary provided by Andrews University.*
Deadline is Here for North American Pathfinder Camporee August 11-16

By AT News Team, January 30, 2014

Updated January 31

The deadline to register for the North American Pathfinder Camporee is this week. At least 20,000 people had registered by last week and it is expected that 36,000 individuals will attend, making it the largest gathering of Adventist young people in the world. **Update: The deadline for early registration at the lowest cost as been extended to March 1.**

The event is organized every five years by the Center for Youth Evangelism (CYE) at Andrews University with the collaboration of Pathfinder Clubs across North America and in more than 50 countries outside the region. It is held at the Experimental Aviation Association (EAA) air show facilities in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, one of the few places large enough for such a massive gathering.

The Oshkosh camporee is a landmark event for adolescents growing in Adventist families in North America. For most of the young people in attendance it is literally a once-in-a-lifetime experience and becomes a cherished memory. Pathfinder Clubs raise funds for more than a year to pay for their travel, equipment and program fees. A number of sponsoring organizations make contributions to help with cost, but the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination does not fund the camporee.

"Forever Faithful, the theme for 2014 is based on the outstanding historical Old Testament character Daniel," explains CYE director Pastor Ron Whitehead. "He lived in the world, right in the epicenter of civilization at that time and yet was not conformed by it." The story of Daniel will be portrayed in dramas each evening when the entire camporee gathers around a large stage.

Featured speakers will be Pastor Sam Leonore, chaplain at La Sierra University, and Pastor Gilbert Cangy, youth director for the denomination's General Conference. The evening programs will also include music groups, interactive quiz contests, opportunities for young people to help with translation into sign language and other languages, and an Investiture for those completing requirements for various awards and honors.

During the day a wide range of activities will be available, including community service projects, off-site excursions, classes in many topics related to the outdoors and nature, a drilling and drum corps competition, the EAA museum and a golf tournament on Friday. In addition there will be a parade with marching young people in downtown Oshkosh and a baptism on Sabbath afternoon.

*Adventist Today welcomes stories from groups making the trek to Oshkosh in August. Please send information about your fund raising activities, travel plans and stories of the impact of this event to atoday@atoday.org by Email. Put "Camporee Stories" in the subject line.*
With Food Stamp Cuts, Adventist Community Services Preparing for More People in Need

By AT News Team, January 31, 2014

As the United States Congress votes to cut significant funding from the program that feeds the poor in America, Adventist community service ministries across the country were already seeing increases in need. Still popularly called "food stamps," the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) budget reductions will take about $90 a month away from each of nearly one million families, many of them employed full time at such low pay that they cannot adequately feed their children. "That is one meal per day off the table," an Adventist who works with poverty and nutrition told Adventist Today.

Community food pantries operated by Adventist churches have been reporting large increases in the numbers of families asking for help over the last year or more. For example, Good Neighbor House in Dayton, Ohio, was providing food for about 650 people each month in 2012 and that increased to 1,300 per month in the last half of 2013. Adventist community service centers in a number of other cities across the country gave Adventist Today similar reports.

"It's frustrating," said Sheila Hendricks, executive director of Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington. "People should not have to make a choice whether to pay the electric bill or feed their family; not in our country!" She stated that the food program was already hampered by many kinds of restrictions before the latest cuts were proposed. Poor families cannot use food stamps to get necessary staples like "laundry soap, dish soap, paper towels or toilet paper," and they can only get U.S. Department of Agriculture surplus items once a month no matter how small the amounts get.

Tom Randa, executive director of Good Neighbor Community Center sponsored by the Adventist churches in Lincoln, Nebraska, told Adventist Today that his volunteers have been providing food to more than 600 families each month through the fall, but "from the numbers, I can't really make a solid conclusion as to whether changes in government funding for SNAP benefits have affected our numbers" because "sources of our food in Lincoln are very low." The lack of supplies of donated food limits the number of families that can be assisted.

The Coalition for Human Need, a national, secular organization that includes all of the regional food banks in America, has reported that the food banks are having difficulty increasing the supply of groceries donated to them. The food banks get their donations from large grocery companies and as these corporations become more efficient at reducing waste in their operations, the amount of surplus inventory they can donate declines.

Marcia Ehlers, assistant director at Good Neighbor House in Dayton, said, "I can't depend totally on the food bank [so] we rely on individual donations through our churches, through the Golden Buckeyes seniors group" and other civic organizations." Several churches of other denominations also give Good Neighbor House regular donations in cash and food supplies, although it is an Adventist agency. She tries to get on the agenda at three or four groups each week to make a plea for their help. There are 70 to 80 other food pantries in the metropolitan area that also get supplies from the food bank.

An early indicator of the impact of the changes in the SNAP program, Ehlers reported, "We have seen an increase in our volunteers" because the law in Ohio now requires recipients to do 40 to 70 hours of volunteer work each month. Even though most are single parents and already have full-time jobs, they have to find a way to do this additional work "because they need the food. I know we are going to have a lot more people coming in."

More than one of the directors that Adventist Today interviewed mentioned another trend: The increase of senior citizens who come in for groceries because they have grandchildren living with them and their budget cannot cope with the additional food needed. And, "some people who were donors in the past are now in the line getting served."

Ehlers also believes in prayer to raise the resources her center must have to meet the needs of the poor in this Midwestern city hard hit by
changes in the manufacturing sector. "If you pray with faith, God's going to come through," Ehlers told Adventist Today. She told two stories that are powerful examples for her.

"We ran out of tomato sauce," a staple in cooking family meals in this part of the country. "There was none in the food bank or at other pantries. I went in the office, shut the door and prayed." Moments later she received a phone call. "A friend said there is a wreck on the highway. There are 38,000 cans of tomato sauce. Can you use it?"

Another time the center was completely depleted of dishware to distribute. "I prayed again and within 45 minutes got a phone call from a country club. They said we are trying to give away our old china. Do you want it. It was six vans full."

"The Bible says a lot about the poor," said Hendricks. "God expects us to take care of the poor, but it is easy to forget that when we live in a country that is fairly affluent. We are going to be held accountable. It is very important that we take care of those who are less fortunate."

There are more than 400 cities that have an Adventist Community Services center, although most of these are entirely volunteer operations that open only one day a week. Fewer than 50 have employed a professional, full-time director and are open to the public several days a week. The smaller operations generally provide only a food pantry and clothing program or maybe a thrift store. The larger agencies often provide additional services such as medical and dental clinics, literacy and English-as-a-Second-Language classes, job-finding and health promotion activities.

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The Smoke of a Thousand Villages

By Jack Hoehn, January 29, 2014

In 1836 young David Livingston’s heart was captured by a few words from veteran missionary Robert Moffat about what he had seen in Africa. “I have sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages where no one has ever heard the name of Christ.”

Those words were passed on down to me by my father, Gus, and my mother, Olive Hoehn, who accepted an appointment as Medical Missionaries to Kendu Bay Adventist Mission Hospital (near where President Obama’s father came from) in Kenya. And as a 5-year-old child, I smelled the sweet odor of cow dung fires from some of those villages. My contact was brief, but although you can take a child out of Africa, it is very hard to take Africa out of a child.

So I grew up wanting to be a jungle doctor and go back to the mother continent. I am very white by culture and genes—Scottish, English, with a little Cree from my Hudson Bay Canadian ancestors, and very German from my father’s Canadian immigrant family. I did not see a person of color on my Vancouver Island homeland until I took a train ride on the CNR with a black porter after age 2. But to prepare me for Africa, my mother got me books by Paul Hamilton Hume White, an Australian physician with his own brief experience in Tanzania that he grew into a series of 20 Jungle Doctor books for children that I still have on my library shelves.

Jungle Doctor Goes to Africa, Jungle Doctor Fights Witchcraft, Jungle Doctor and the Leopard, each 100-page book published by the Paternoster Press fed my young imagination with a white doctor and black assistants ministering to the exciting physical and the touching spiritual needs of Africans. As I grew up in Southern California after my father was repatriated from Africa quadriplegic from polio, I still dreamed of Africa—my tall, young playmate with large plugs stretching his earlobes, the 3 foot lizard on a tin roof of a mission house, the sudden throb of Plasmodium falciparum parasites exploding in my brain, and sometimes, in the morning sun, I remembered the smoke of a thousand villages where no one had heard the name of Christ.

When I met a beautiful, kind, intelligent, and cheerful red-headed nursing student from Paradise (zip code 95969, look it up), I let her know fairly early on that life with this Loma Linda University medical student would lead to Africa. For some wonderful reason that did not put an immediate end to our relationship.

After choosing the generalist specialty of Family Practice (because Jungle Doctors needed to be generalists) and hanging around friendly surgeons a lot during my University Teaching Hospital residency in Calgary, Deanne and I were sent by all of you Adventists to Africa.

A godly machine.

So let me stop here to tell you why I love Adventism in specific and organized religion in general. Organized religion does things we could never do by ourselves.

God-lovers—no matter how sincere and how wonderful their solitary walks in the woods with Jesus or their spiritual encounters with God himself while climbing mountains—don’t build schools, don’t build hospitals, don’t train nurses and doctors, don’t run orphanages, don’t print books, don’t educate President Obama’s father by their sincere spiritual solitary selves. Churches do that.

Ellen White, and St. Paul, and Harvard University would all be impossible without a church structure to support and empower them. Jesus didn’t come to have 100 solitary sheep; he went out and risked all to bring that one lonely sheep back to the fold! He came, God bless us, to build a church! Religion is not something imposed on Jesus; Christianity is something Jesus has imposed on us. “On this Rock will I build my ecclesia and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

Adventism is a very organized church.
We have pay scales between 80 and 140%. We have Departments with Secretaries. We have Missions with Directors. We have Unions with Presidents, and we have Dorcas Societies, all of course, for Heaven’s sake. We have children who give one egg out of every 10 that their hen lays to the church, and Radiologists who give all their fees for Sabbath work to the church, and giant manufacturers of garbage trucks who tithe and double tithe before they pay their taxes. And it used to be, because we didn’t have enough ourselves, we went every year to our neighbors and asked them to give us more in Harvest Ingathering.

So this godly machine called a church does together what none of us individual believers alone could ever do. An Adventist congregation does things in a community together that we could not do alone. We collect money for fighting abuse of street women; we gather supplies for the Ronald McDonald house next to our hospital; we have a program of organized religious education for all our children; we may have a school or support schools in places we cannot even pronounce like Teyateyaneng (been there, seen that).

Adventist conferences and unions can have high schools and colleges, and hospitals. Divisions can have universities and media centers. And the General Conference can send elderly males all over the world keeping it running (if they have any time left over from promoting their opinions on a 144-hour creation week and the sanctity of male headship).

Why I still love it.

Frankly, I’m very glad for this godly Adventist machine, feeble and defective as it may be, for it trained me as a child in righteousness; it gave me a place in my youth to be out of Los Angeles in the mountains at summer camps; it later brought 750 beautiful young women to Pacific Union College to give me the pick of the pack; it taught me to be a fully qualified physician with faith, integrity, and skill; it exposed me to theologians like Maxwell, Heppenstahl, Provonsha, Robert Olson, Leslie Harding, Leo Van Dolson, Gordon Hyde, and Hans Heinz to nourish my soul. It taught me German in an Adventist school in Austria. It flew me to Lesotho, and then to Zambia. It let me stand in the Obamas and Nelson Mandela’s children.

My own son, Jonathan, was born in your Maluti Adventist Hospital, where mothers and babies slept in the same beds, and when crowded, on the floor on mattresses under the beds. You built a nursing school at Mwami Adventist Hospital. You allowed dozens of young medical doctors to come and shadow me, learning things about medicine and mission that Loma Linda could not teach them. You paid for wonderful friends like Hurlows and Rogers and Ashleys and Shepherds and Stahlneckers and Collins and Reimches and Courtneys and Schmidts to come and work with me, giving us round-trip tickets, a place to sleep, food to eat, and a small home base deposit to come back to. Adventists at your hospital in Zambia ministered to the Wesleyan Methodists, the Instrumental and the Non-Instrumental-Churches-of-Christ, the Southern Baptists, and the Fathers from the Catholic Kachaberi Mission. You gave guest rooms to the U.S. Ambassadors to these countries, and a place for Canadian, German, Norwegian, and American governmental funds to join to your own offerings in making bad things better, and good things safer.

Who could not love Adventism for what an organized church can do that no one individual could ever think of doing by themselves? All Christian churches, fallen and unfallen, have done more good in this world than any skeptic club or Sunday Assembly of atheists playing church has yet dreamed of doing. Even bad churches still do good works; even TV Evangelists and Popes can surprise us by acting like Christians. The Christian God came and built an organized church. And Hell? Hell No! Hell can not prevail against it.

Adventism shines in the darkness.

I’ve been in Walla Walla now nearly twice as long as I was in Africa, and even here in the USA the strength and beauty of organized religion gives a beautiful newly remodeled Hospital and a top class Adventist University to our community. The Adventist grade school is a model; the Adventist academy has been remarkably personal and loving to our children. These things don’t happen without organized religion.
But in North America where society was largely founded on Protestant Biblical principles, sometimes the beauty of Adventism is not appreciated as much as it should be, especially by our children who have known nothing else. So ten times I have gone with or taken back groups of students to Africa to see, in the light of the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages.

There are many reasons why I strongly support spending a little filthy lucre on short-term as well as long-term mission trips. I can explain to you the very real benefits both to the missionaries (especially young ones) and to the recipient mission fields. I’ve heard the remarks around the table about “Christian tourism,” “Jesus junkets,” and “Don’t we have enough problems here?” I have felt the sting like Mary did when I hear again, “Shouldn’t this money have been spent on our poor.”

Yet here is why I always support students who ask me for a donation for a “mission trip”: Because I long for them to see Adventism at its purest and finest.

I want them to see what a positive and uplifting force for good their religion is. I want them to glimpse what happens in an African village with smoke rising from a thousand huts; with blood flowing from a thousand wars; with women suffering from a thousand subordinations; with men suffering from a thousand pots of beer; with babies suffering from diarrhea; with all suffering from a deep dark fear of spirits and demons and ghosts. I want them to see with their own eyes that “where sin abounds, there grace abounds much more.” I want them to know how gracious and beautiful basic Adventism is in those villages with smoke rising on a thousand green hills.

I’d walk with them through the streets of Mangochi in Malawi, where before David Livingstone arrived was a major slaving center. (Organized Christianity alone stopped that.) But now in 2014 about 9 o’clock on a Saturday morning, we’d still go past piles of rubbish next to dirty, half-naked children with runny noses. At the edge of town we would still see women cooking over campfires, and men recovering from last night’s Chibuku. We’d see skinny dogs sniffing at human excrement, and broken, empty houses, whose owners were missing from HIV/AIDS, but then surrounded by dark green mango trees we’d come to a little Adventist church. Already you’d notice the ground under the mangoes swept clean by simple brooms. And inside the simple brick-walled church, you’d see very rough benches smoothed not by machines but by Sabbath after Sabbath of human bodies crowding happily together on those benches. Those bodies would all be bathed by a Sabbath bath. Their clothes would be neater and cleaner than any you had seen walking to the church. No tobacco smoke, no hangovers in this crowd. And a lot of optimism. Adventists are a happy people; they are glad to see each other; they love to teach and to challenge the teacher. Heaven offers a lot to people from Mangochi. Most of them have been to school, some to university. It is true that 20 years ago women only taught in the Kindergarten out in the yard under the trees, but that is not true now. Adventism changes things. Adventism is a movement that moves people up. A nicely dressed young woman with a university education might be teaching your Sabbath School lesson today. And the choir would be full of young enthusiastic voices, likely complete with body swing and hand motions. And there would be cell phones and texting.

The happiest, cleanest, best educated, most optimistic, kindest people you could find in Mangochi on a Saturday morning are gathered in the local Adventist Church. Eating Kosher; avoiding alcohol and tobacco; paying attention to the education of both boys and girls; going to school and weekly to Sabbath school; believing that the dead die and don’t hang around to bother the living; hoping that we near the end of human history and their corrupt governments, and expecting the Kingdom of Heaven at the door; knowing from childhood that Jesus loves me—this I know—these are good things, these are powerful things, these are Adventist things.

Sometimes, in the morning, I have seen the smoke of a thousand villages, and I see that the best of these villages are those that have a little Adventist church, and a little Adventist school, or a little Adventist clinic in them. At the core, basic Adventism does good things to hurting people and their needy communities. The world needs things done that none of us can do by ourselves in splendid spiritual isolation, in freedom from congregation, in standing outside the church criticizing its many failings. It is worth fighting from inside the church to refresh, recover, revive, and restore the best parts of Adventism—to put the move-forward back into the Advent Movement.
I feel guilty, the way Joseph indulges me. The baby is six weeks old; I’m perfectly capable of walking the few hours from Bethlehem to Jerusalem! But he insists I ride the donkey, at least most of the way. I admit I love to just sit and gaze down at my baby. He’s so cute! I know all mothers think their babies are the cutest, but I’m pretty sure I’m right.

“Nothing, Joseph, just laughing at myself. Don’t you think our baby is cuter than all other babies?”

Joseph’s sun-burned grin is one of my favorite things about him. “Well, of course!” he agrees, and walks on. The donkey plods patiently beside him. I keep on staring down at my baby’s face, trying to memorize it. He changes so fast. Look how filled out he already is. I can hardly remember what he looked like when he was all scrawny and wrinkly, in the stable. Oh, that night! I can’t think of it without a shudder. But then the shudders are overtaken by chills of wonder, remembering the stories the shepherds told. I wish I could have heard the angels sing!

But I shouldn’t be greedy. After all, Gabriel himself talked to me!

It’s kind of funny. I have lots of friends who have babies, and I know this feeling of awe, of staring into the face of a brand-new human and trying to memorize it, is universal among mothers. We all talk about how they change, and grow, and how we know them, but don’t…so at first, my thoughts are the thoughts of every mother. But then it always turns to a different kind of awe. Remembering Gabriel’s announcement to me, and the pain and division that brought, and then Joseph’s dream, which set everything straight. It hardly seems true, though I feel ashamed to admit it. But then there were those shepherds…

Yeshua wakes suddenly, looks up at me, and smiles widely, a new skill he enjoys tremendously. “Oh, look, Joseph! Look at him smile!”

Nearly three hours have passed by the time we reach the city, and we must find a place to stay and prepare our best Sabbath clothes for the ceremony tomorrow. This is a ceremony I’ve looked forward to since I was a little girl. A woman, a wife, justifies her existence by producing a son, especially by producing him first. Joseph is very proud of me. Of course, I am an indulged wife, and I know Joseph would be proud of me even if I’d had daughters, or no children at all. But I’m deeply grateful to God for a son. I wish we could afford a lamb instead of just two doves. Joseph says the Holy One knows our hearts. Anyway, he points out, no sacrifice would be worthy enough to redeem the life of God’s own Son!

I look down at my baby again. He looks so ordinary, gazing around at movement and light. Just another baby…

The next day, bathed, anointed, and dressed in our very best, with my mother’s borrowed necklace adorning the baby as is traditional, we stand before the priest. Joseph holds Yeshua and says to the priest, “This is my firstborn son. He is the first out of his mother’s womb.”

There are more prayers, then the priest takes the baby, holds him up, and intones the blessing: "May the Lord make you as great as Ephraim and Menasheh. May the Lord bless you and keep watch over you; May the Lord make His Presence enlighten you, and may He be kind to you; may the Lord bestow favor on you, and grant you peace. May the Lord guard you from all evil, and guard your soul. Let many days and years of life and peace be given to you."

His tone of voice is matter-of-fact, even bored. He does this all the time—just another baby…
A disturbance arises nearby and I turn my head, startled. An old man, his face alight with an unearthly joy that reminds me of Gabriel, is hurrying toward us. Just as the priest is about to hand Yeshua back to his father, this man takes him instead and cries out, almost weeping, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

I am standing there with my mouth open while this man blesses my baby. Suddenly, he turns to me and his eyes pin me like a spear. In a quiet, intense voice, he adds, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

I feel a shiver of fear and reach for my child. But the excitement isn’t over yet. Many people are already looking our way, and more begin to gather when an even older woman I have seen in the temple before comes over, takes one look at the child in Simeon’s arms, and begins to sob praises and thanks to God. She cries out to the onlookers that all those who are looking for the redemption of Israel should take note of this baby. Some come closer, craning to look at Yeshua, who has been awakened by the tumult and turns his toothless baby grin on one and all.

I watch the faces. The priest and some others looked irritated a minute ago. Some looked curious. Some looked excited. But when they look at his little face and he smiles, not a one is able to keep from smiling back. Faces all around me are softening, hands are reaching to touch his curled fingers, some voices are cooing nonsense to him. A few are praying, echoing the old man and woman.

The shiver of fear is turning to a shiver of awe and a…what can I call it? A presentiment. A feeling that already, he is changing the world around him, and things will never be the same.
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS BELIEVE

Fundamental Belief Number One

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (bold mine)

The words “divine,”[1] “infallible,”[2] and “trustworthy” [3] connote a wealth of ideas and/or feelings in addition to their literal or primary meanings. In this context they proclaim irrefutable intellectual and emotional certainty.

That is, who is prepared to argue that God is not divine, infallible, or trustworthy?

However, according to Seventh-day Adventists Believe, the words of the Bible are “embodied in human language with all its limitations and imperfections” and reflect “the education and culture of the [Biblical] writers.” [4]

This equivocating language, while undercutting the claim of infallibility, is helpful when Adventists are confronted with something we don’t believe exists.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment.
(2 Peter 2:4)

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

(Mark 9:43, bold mine)

This same equivocating language is also helpful when considering divine commands and the trustworthiness of Biblical history.

From Numbers 31

They fought against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every man....

They took all the plunder and spoils, including the people and animals, and brought the captives, spoils and plunder to Moses and Eleazar the priest and the Israelite assembly at their camp on the plains of Moab, by the Jordan across from Jericho...

Moses, Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the community went to meet them outside the camp... “Have you allowed all the women to live?” he asked them. “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord’s people.

Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man...”

The plunder remaining from the spoils that the soldiers took was 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys and 32,000 women who had never slept with a man.

Now to a suggested rewording of that vitally important first Fundamental Belief:

In the Bible, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. Salvation (Latin salvatio; Greek σωτηρία; Hebrew yeshu’ah) is being saved or protected from harm or being saved or delivered from some dire situation. In religion, salvation is stated as the saving of the soul from sin and its consequences.

[1]

di·vine

adjective
**devine**: relating to or coming from God or a god

**in·fal·li·ble**

*adjective*

**infallible**: incapable of making mistakes or being wrong—unerring, unfailing, faultless, flawless, impeccable, perfect, dependable, trustworthy, reliable, sure, certain, safe, foolproof

_Synonyms_: precise, accurate, meticulous, scrupulous, never failing, always effective, faultless, impeccable, perfect, precise, accurate, meticulous, scrupulous, precise, accurate, meticulous, scrupulous

"The very nature of inspiration renders the Bible infallible, which means that it cannot deceive us. It is inerrant in that it is not false, mistaken, or defective" (Lindsell, Harold, *The Battle for the Bible*, Zondervan, 1978, p.31).

Some literalist or conservative Christians teach that the Bible lacks error in every way in all matters: chronology, history, biology, sociology, psychology, politics, physics, math, art, and so on (Geisler & Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press, 1986).

**trust·wor·thy**

*adjective*

**trustworthy**: able to be relied on as honest or truthful, reliable, dependable, honest, honorable, upright, principled, true, truthful, ethical, virtuous, incorruptible, unimpeachable, responsible, sensible

_Synonyms_: loyal, faithful, staunch, steadfast, trusty, safe, sound, reputable, accurate, authentic, authoritative, believable, convincing, credible, ethical, honest, honorable, principled, realistic, sensible, truthful

As luck would have it (my aunt would say “Providence” rather than “luck,” but I’m reserving judgment), Aunt Calista Banderspackle was visiting me in my garret room in the north tower of the Adventist Today building at the exact moment this column’s assignment arrived. Aunt Calista had just finished calling down fire from heaven on the soulless Scrooges (her words) who had confined me to such humble digs, and she had switched to her interior decorating advisor mode when I heard the familiar squeak of the vertical clothesline pulley outside my window.

“What’s that?” my aunt barked. “Something needs oiling.”

“My editor is sending me an assignment from his office on the first floor,” I replied. “The pulley isn’t electronic, so it’s totally secure, which is how he likes it.” Opening the window, I unclothespinned a small note from the line.

“Give me that,” growled Aunt Calista, who does not like to be interrupted while lifecoaching. She snatched the note and unfolded it. “I need 700 words on the controversy over model constitutions,” she read aloud.

“What’s a model constitution?” I asked.

“I know where he’s going with this,” she huffed. “The General Conference would like every union to have a ‘model constitution,’ because then the unions have to slavishly follow everything the GC votes. But some unions won’t play along.”

“Okay,” I said. “I’ll write the column later.”

“No you won’t,” she said. “I have some ideas about this.” Aunt Calista can recite Robert’s Rules of Order from memory and has even learned to repeat crucial chapters backward just in case. “Crank up that old lap top and take notes,” she commanded, giving my 1990s Leading Edge a glare that would have melted the plastic on a less sturdy model.

“First off,” she continued, “we’re going to ignore all of the upper-echelon yimmer-yammer and start from the ground up. Even the lamest yahoo knows that the local congregation is where things happen. Conferences, unions, divisions, the GC—they’re all just support systems. Right?”

“Right” is the only possible response to an aunt with .50-caliber eyes and a wrestler’s build, so I murmured it and added, “What’s your plan?”

“I am going to write a model constitution for the local church,” she said. “And it’s going to address all of the really important issues. Once local congregations get whipped into shape, everything else will fall into place.”

“Fire away,” I said, fingers over the keyboard, and Aunt Calista began to speak. After editing out the volcanic emotion that accompanied most of the following concepts, I can now hereby offer these initial ideas to church board chairpersons everywhere.
The Banderspackle Model Constitution
(Preliminary Thoughts)

Robocalls shall be made to church families early on Sabbath mornings so that everybody gets to Sabbath School on time.

Stun grenades shall be deployed among little knots of foyer greeters who insist on chatting with each other rather than welcoming visitors.

An illustrated guide to the latest highfive and fist-bump moves shall be provided to greeters so that all age groups may be appropriately welcomed.

Mule blinders shall be provided to greeters so that their eyes will remain on the faces of visitors whom they are welcoming, rather than rolling sideways to wink at passing friends.

AMBER Alert-style messages containing bulletin announcements shall be incessantly beamed across the screens of tablets, smartphones, and other devices belonging to attendees.

Low-power Tasers shall be issued to deacons to deal with male sermon-sleepers. (“Women do not sleep in church,” states Calista Banderspackle.) A cord from a belt-mounted power supply shall be fed up the deacon’s coatsleeve and shall end in a palm-positioned shock unit. A single friendly shoulder-pat will instantly restore alertness to the most somnolent.

No lentil loaf made from a recipe older than a decade shall be allowed at potlucks. The loaf shall be judged with the use of the color cards found in the Banderspackle Scale of Food Grayness (available soon at your Adventist Book Center).

No meat-eating potluck guest shall be subjected to propaganda stating that homemade veggie burgers or sloppy joe mixtures or faux meatloaf casseroles are “just like” dishes containing real meat. They are not.

( Brace yourself for the entire Banderspackle Model Constitution, which will shortly be available in ABCs. Aunt Calista is on the warpath.)

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant of the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

There are no comments.
Anonymous

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Beacon Christian Students Post Video

http://www.atoday.org/article/2300/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/beacon-christian-students-post-video

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted January 29, 2014

Beacon Christian School is a Seventh-day Adventist elementary school in Lewiston, Idaho. It has been providing quality Christian education since 1918. The students recently posted a video on youtube of the historic meeting of Europeans with Native peoples in what came to be called America. They called it KLNY Colony TV Breaking News. Watch the play here.

Learn more about the school here.

[Adventist Today is interested in posting links to plays, music, movies, etc. done by Adventist individuals or groups. Send short descriptions and links to artseditor@atoday.org]
The Record Keeper

http://www.atoday.org/article/2303/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/the-record-keeper

The Record Keeper is an ambitious project, sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, to retell the story of the great controversy in a way that will intrigue a wider segment of today's population. Find out for yourself what the hype is all about.

The official teaser: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqATTCrzOv4

The Pilot Episode: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBZ7tTErQQM.