**NEWS**

**Adventist Physician Ranked Among Possible Candidates for U.S. President:** Ben Carson, the famous Adventist brain surgeon now retired from Johns Hopkins, continues to rise as a popular prospect for the US GOP presidential primaries.

**Judge's Ruling in Takoma Academy Lawsuit Favors Potomac Conference:** An injunction against a group that sought to operate a parallel alumni association without answering to conference or academy direction has been dealt a blow in Federal Court.

**Nigeria's Civil Violence "Will End Soon" Predicts Adventist Leader, Calling for Negotiations:** Ted Wilson has injected his presidential presence and reputation into the current turmoil in Nigeria, predicting that "in no distant time" religious and tribal strife in that heavily Adventist nation will cease.

**Council of Adventist Denominational Leaders to Discuss Sexuality:** A four-day council on human sexuality has taken place in Cape Town, primarily to study lingering questions on how the Church should relate to "alternative sexualities". (see two related news items immediately below)

**FEATURE, POETRY & PROSE**

(Available to logged-in subscribers; to apply for a 30-day complimentary subscription, click here)

**His Travelers, Part Two: The Beginning and the Dream:** Because of Conference austerity, an inspiring program for youth and children is at least temporarily cut back in the US Pacific Northwest.

**In Non-Praise of Self:** Photographer SM Chen reflects on the "selfie"-centric ways of many of us today, and the prelude to downfall presaged by self-absorption.

---

**OPINION**

**“An Urgent Prophetic Calling”:** Andy Hanson sees various pronouncements by the Adventist Church president, Ted Wilson, as reminiscent of the apprehensions of a Pope, long ago, about the science of Galileo.

**Water from a Rock:** Debbonnaire Kovacs reflects on situations in life when the question, "Is God with us or not?" looms large.
**Sexuality Council, Story 2** "Human Brokenness" requires "Clarity and Tact" Says Wilson Keynote: In his keynote address to conference attendees at a council on sexuality in Cape Town, Ted Wilson described homosexuality as one of a number of manifestations of human "brokenness" in a conference that showcased individuals who claim release from elements of gay lifestyles.

**Sexuality Council, Story 3** Goal Proposed at Council: Preserve Stand & Minister to LGBT Community: The outcome of this week’s council on sexuality is by no means definitive or paradigm shifting, but it does appear to have underscored important issues.

**Loma Linda University Launches National TV Series about Health on PBS:** A highly acclaimed six-episode PBS series on health, sponsored by Loma Linda University, is expected to garner vast viewership, beginning on Friday, April 4, at 6 p.m. across the United States.

**Leadership Webinars for Local Church Leaders Start March 29:** A series of how-to studies on various aspects of local-church lay outreach and ministry will be offered this year by video connection, beginning March 29 and 30 on the topic of ministering to non-attending members.

**News Briefs March 21, 2014:** Hollywood actor Angus T. Jones shared his testimony at a megachurch in Houston, a year after leaving the television comedy Two and a Half Men; CeCe Winans, the well-known gospel recording artist, will appear with Pastor Carlton Byrd of the Breath of Life television ministry, this weekend (March 22-24); Washington Adventist University has fielded the first Adventist student team to participate in the American Mock Trial Association’s regional competition in Richmond; more.
Adventist Physician Ranked Among Possible Candidates for U.S. President

By Adventist Today News Team, March 17, 2014

In poll results announced over the weekend (March 15-16), Dr. Ben Carson, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the suburbs of Baltimore and recently retired pediatric neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins University Medical Center, was the favorite of 11 percent of conservative activists. The poll was taken among those who attended the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) the previous weekend.

Senator Rand Paul received the strongest support in the poll at 15 percent and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie came in second at 13 percent. "Carson fans were excited when their man came third," reported The Economist, "beating heavyweights such as Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Paul Ryan." He shared the 11 percent third place showing with Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and former Senator Rick Santorum.

On Sabbath, March 8, Carson addressed the CPAC crowd. He said "he had planned to enjoy retirement," according to The Washington Times, "but the Good Lord had a different plan for him ... suggesting that he could have a future in elective politics." A political action committee has been launched to raise funds for a Carson campaign in 2016, reported the Daily Mail and it has already raised $2.8 million in its first six months.

Carson's 20-minute speech included both partisan attacks and an appeal for conservatives to do more to help the poor. He described the Affordable Care Act, the signature health reform law passed by the current administration of United States President Barack Obama, as a "massive" government power-grab, according to The Economist and advocated that lawmakers that voted recently to raise the national debt ceiling not be re-elected. He also said that he once belonged to the lower-income half of the nation. "I know there are a lot of people in that [class] who are decent, hard-working Americans who want to realize the American dream," he was quoted by Politico.com urging that conservatives do more to extend opportunities to the poor.

The only Adventist to have any chance of actually becoming president of the United States in at least a century, Carson has a relatively small but loyal following. A number of the participants at the meeting held up banners saying, "Run Ben, Run" and "Carson 2016." He caught the attention of the most conservative Americans when he was invited to speak to the National Prayer Breakfast last year and used the occasion to criticize President Obama who sat on the platform with him.

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In | Register
Judge’s Ruling in Takoma Academy Lawsuit Favors Potomac Conference

By AT News Team based on Visitor News Bulletin, March 18, 2014

Judge Deborah Chasanow, a Federal District Court chief judge, has issued a preliminary injunction in favor of the Potomac Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in its trademark lawsuit against the Takoma Academy Alumni Association, Inc., (TAAA, Inc.). Adventist Today first reported a year ago on the conflict between the alumni group and the secondary school in the Maryland suburb of the United States capital where Washington Adventist University and Washington Adventist Hospital are located and perhaps 15 percent of the population is made up of Adventists.

The conflict came about when the alumni group incorporated as a charity without permission from the local conference, as provided in denominational policy. Leaders of the alumni group expressed concern about lack of support from denominational administrators and proper handling of donations.

Potomac Conference filed the lawsuit last year against TAAA, Inc., and Henry Pittman (president of TAAA, Inc.), after they received a letter from Pittman’s attorney asking the school to relinquish use of the name “Takoma Academy Alumni Association.” Pittman’s attorney claimed that the school’s use of the name was “unlicensed and unauthorized.”

In an April 18, 2013, statement, Potomac Conference administrators stated that it was Pittman’s organization that was “improperly using the names ‘Takoma Academy’ and ‘TA’ and that [it] was liable for trademark infringement and unfair competition.” The conference administrators alleged that the actions of Pittman and TAAA, Inc., had caused confusion among the school’s supporters. They noted in a fact sheet also issued last year, “We do not want any independent group using the good name of Takoma Academy when in fact it is not affiliated with or sponsored by the school.”

The preliminary injunction of the Federal court was issued March 4 and states that “Defendant Takoma Academy Alumni Association, Inc., and its officers, directors, agents ... and all persons acting in concert therewith, be and hereby are enjoined from: (1) Using the names ‘Takoma Academy,’ ‘TA,’ ‘Takoma Academy Alumni Association,’ and ‘TAAA’ in any manner whatsoever, including without limitation, in connection with the advertising, promotion or sale of any product or service, solicitation of contributions or fundraising, as a logo on Facebook or LinkedIn or any other website, and including, without limitation, on all signs, advertising materials, letters, emails, forms, or any other articles; (2) Operating TAalumni.org website, or any other website whose domain name contains the words [listed above]; (3) Committing any act that infringes the ... marks” or the words listed above.

In a statement issued March 14, Potomac Conference administrators wrote, “We are thankful for the positive ruling that secures ownership of the Takoma Academy brand, protects the good name of our educational ministry and ensures that its legacy remains strong. As a school and alumni we now have opportunity to move forward in strength together, to fulfill the mission of Takoma Academy, which is to lead young people to Jesus Christ, provide excellence in academics and a commitment to service.”

Adventist Today has received no statement from the defendants in this case. The school’s Alumni Weekend takes place April 25-27 and it is unclear if there will be two parallel meetings as there was last year.
Nigeria's Civil Violence "Will End Soon" Predicts Adventist Leader, Calling for Negotiations

By Adventist Today News Team, March 16, 2014

During interviews with journalists in Nigeria, Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, has stated that "in no distant time God will bring an end to" the violence between religious and tribal factions in the northeast region of the country. He is in Nigeria to help celebrate the centennial of the Adventist faith in that country.

Wilson urged talks among "all aggrieved parties" at an airport news conference when he arrived in Lagos last Monday (March 10), according to the Daily Trust. "I will ask that the officials of government, both at state and Federal levels, look carefully to the Bible and to spiritual principles of how to resolve differences," he told reporters. "God does not wish people to settle differences in ways which will tear things apart, but rather to bring reconciliation."

On Wednesday, during a visit with Jonah Jang, governor of Plateau State, Wilson "said that God was not happy with the bloodbath in the north and would soon end it," according to the News Agency of Nigeria. "The insurgency in the north, especially [in] Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and Benue states, will soon come to an end because God is not happy with the bloodbath being recorded in the north," Wilson was quoted in the newspaper Punch.

"We in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not happy that the insurgency in the north is persisting and it is our utmost prayer that God would intervene and bring an end to it," Wilson continued. "Our God is a God that answers prayers and God we believe that in no distant time God will bring an end to it." He pointed out that peace has come to Plateau state despite more than decade of violence there.

Wilson said that Nigeria is a beautiful country in which God is doing great works in the lives of people. He noted that the Adventist Church has expanded greatly in Nigeria and has affected the lives of many people both through "winning souls for Christ" and raising moral standards in society.

There are more than 2,100 local, Adventist congregations in Nigeria with a reported membership over 300,000 and at least 500,000 adherents. Babcock University is affiliated with the denomination as are eight secondary schools, and Adventists operate 15 community clinics, two veterinary clinics in rural areas, the Adventist Hospital in Ile-Ife, Jengre Adventist Hospital, Inisa Community Medical Centre and Edeoha Community Rehabilitation Center. The country has a population of 163 million.
Council of Adventist Denominational Leaders to Discuss Sexuality


Nearly 350 Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders, pastors, academics, and human services experts have gathered in Cape Town, South Africa, for a four-day summit intended to help the worldwide Church better address issues related to homosexuality and alternative sexualities. Around the theme “In God’s Image: Scripture, Sexuality, Society;” the conference at Africa’s southern tip is intended to be “a conversation with key people in the global leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to gain a greater understanding of the issues surrounding alternative sexualities, and to counsel together regarding the challenges the church is facing in this area,” organizers said.

Each of the denomination’s 13 world divisions has sent a delegation of at least 20 persons composed of senior administrators, theology and social science scholars, and “frontline personnel” (pastors, chaplains, and human resources directors) to the intensive event that began Monday (March 17). The keynote address by Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference (GC), is titled “The Truth as It Is in Jesus.”

Pastor Pardon Mwansa, a Zambian who is a general vice president of the GC and chair of the committee that organized the summit, believes that the event is a watershed for Adventist discussion of difficult social and religious issues. “We are dealing with an issue about which the world around us has already formed a perception,” Mwansa said. “We can’t avoid dealing with this matter because those perceptions affect how we express ourselves. The Church needs to clarify its light: we must say where we are on this matter, so that people will understand us and how we view this subject. ... We are a moral group—a church—and we have to shine and say just what the light is on this issue.”

Mwansa additionally underscored the importance of the Cape Town conference by pointing to the persons attending. “This is a meeting to which all church leadership has been invited, and all will attend,” he noted. “The quality of meetings is generally judged by who attends, and here you have all world division officers attending, along with pastors, teachers and human services personnel. The goal is to make sure that what is done here reflects the corporate thinking of the Church.”

The summit organizers are clear that they intend no redefinition of the Church’s historic opposition to all sexual expression other than heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman. Listed first among the summit’s objectives is the goal to “describe the Bible’s teaching on alternative sexualities.” Two of the conference’s first three plenary sessions focus on how to read and understand the Bible’s teachings about human sexuality, as well as specific passages of both Old and New Testaments that address homosexual behavior.

On Tuesday evening, three Adventists who spent major portions of their adult lives in gay or lesbian relationships will relate their experiences in a plenary session panel. Wayne Blakely, Ron Woolsey and Virna Santos each describe themselves as “redeemed” out of homosexual behaviors, and now lead ministries designed to help others make a similar transition. Woolsey, now for many years in a heterosexual marriage, is also an ordained Adventist minister.

The denomination’s legal and employment concerns with legislation about homosexuality in various nations will be in focus at a Wednesday morning plenary panel moderated by Pastor Lowell Cooper, a GC vice president. Two additional plenary sessions on Wednesday afternoon and evening seek to update the international delegation on the latest understandings of homosexuality and alternative sexualities from the perspectives of medicine and psychology.
Dr. Peter Landless, GC director of health ministries, and Dr. Peter Swanson, a licensed psychologist and assistant professor of pastoral care at the theological seminary at Andrews University, will address research findings regarding the possible roles played by genetics and social influences in the formation of alternative sexualities.

On Thursday, the summit will focus on ministry to homosexuals and those practicing alternative sexualities, and discuss how the denomination will relate to church membership for those not following Scriptural teaching about human sexuality. Dr. Miroslav Kis, professor of ethics at Andrews University, will offer an overview of the ethical issues the church must wrestle with at both global and congregational levels as it seeks to be both clear about its loyalty to Bible teaching and compassionate to individuals in various life experiences.
Standing at the beginning of a new year of ministry, Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference (GC), exhorted Adventist denominational leaders to recognize that “human brokenness” is ubiquitous, dependent on the healing that comes only through the restorative power of Christ. All facets of that brokenness, Wilson said, should be approached with the “clarity and tact” and faithfulness to biblical truth that Jesus demonstrated in his ministry on earth.

Wilson’s address came during the opening day of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s summit on sexuality, where pastors, chaplains, academics, health professionals, legal experts and human resource directors are meeting this week in Cape Town, South Africa. He went on to define the parameters of the meeting. Its goals, he said, do not include revising the denomination’s perspective or statements on human brokenness to match “the changeable spirit” of current social trends and values. “Nor have we come to describe that brokenness in any greater way than the Word of God defines every human sin,” Wilson said.

Sin is not a hierarchy of human failings, he said, with some shortcomings “less dangerous or damaging” than others, but an expression of living life out of harmony with God. “We are more accustomed to other sins: we wink at pride, ignore gossip, tolerate hypocrisy and sometimes avoid dealing with lust, adultery and the often-hidden sin of sexual abuse,” Wilson said, adding that “the uncomfortable but undeniable truth [is] that we are all sinners.”

He called it both “inconsistent and morally wrong” for the Adventist Church to isolate practicing members of the LGBT community for discipline “while it ignores those engaged in heterosexual pre-marital sex or adultery. God’s standard for sexual behavior requires that only in the union of one man and one woman in heterosexual marriage can the gift of sexuality appropriately and Biblically be enjoyed. Any departure from that standard must be addressed with similar seriousness and a similar attempt to bring about correction, repentance and restoration.”

“It is the first step toward a new life in Christ when each of us comes to the place where we admit that what God’s Word says is absolutely true about us: We are all sinners; we are all broken,” he said. A major goal of the summit, Wilson said, is to develop an awareness of how to compassionately steer those living lives out of harmony with God toward “salvation and recovery.”

“We have come here because we are committed as a people to speaking the truth to each other and to the world around us, and because we are committed to learning how to speak that truth as Jesus did,” he said. Wilson relied significantly on Scripture and the writings of denominational co-founder Ellen G. White to describe Jesus’ approach to sharing truth. “[Christ] was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He spoke the truth, but always in love,” Wilson said, reading a passage from *Steps to Christ*, White’s classic volume about conversion and spiritual rebirth.
The meeting is scheduled to include testimonies from former members of the LGBT community who have wrestled with brokenness and now describe themselves as “redeemed” from that lifestyle. “The honest stories that we will hear will undoubtedly report those times when we as members of God’s remnant church have failed to communicate the love and thoughtfulness of Jesus,” Wilson said. “We must listen as they tell us about their struggle and their pain; and we must not let our pride pretend that their mistakes are any worse in the sight of heaven than the ones we ourselves have made.”
Goal Proposed at Council: Preserve Stand & Minister to LGBT Community


A panel of experts discussed how best to negotiate issues surrounding the gay and lesbian (LGBT) community in a way that both upholds the doctrinal position of the denomination and acknowledges the realities faced by people with alternative sexual orientations. Those realities are already impacting the life of the church, panelists said Tuesday (March 18) at the summit on sexuality convened this week by the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“Church membership runs the gamut between actively gay people and those who deny that reality,” said Pastor Willie Oliver, co-director of the denomination’s family ministries department. “We’ve encountered [these realities] everywhere for years. People are hurting and experiencing feelings that some of us may not want to acknowledge.”

Currently, the governments of 18 nations and 15 U.S. states recognize gay marriage. More than 100 countries have decriminalized homosexual behavior. Thirty-four of 54 African countries, however, prosecute it as a crime, said Karnik Doukmetzian, general counsel for the denomination, in an overview of legal realities.

One practical example, Doukmetzian said, is whether an Adventist pastor can legally choose not to marry same-sex couples based on conscience. “Make sure legislation in your country allows clergy to opt out,” he said, urging administrators and pastors to advance a response designed to protect religious liberty.

In the sphere of employment, too, the law can affect the Adventist Church, said Lori Yingling, associate director of human resources at the GC office in Silver Spring, Maryland. “Because we are a religious organization, in the U.S. we have a legal ‘carve out’ that allows us to hire only Seventh-day Adventists,” Yingling said, noting that the exception allows church institutions to require conditions of employment based on the working policies and beliefs of the church that potential employees must agree to.

But beyond the legal and employment questions are the struggles of real people, said Pastor Brett Townend, president of the denomination’s Northern Australian Conference. “We think it is about policies, politics and protocols, but it is about people,” he said. “If we just make pronouncements that rub salt in very open wounds, we aren’t helping. We must both preserve our church and deal with the very real pain these individuals are experiencing.”

Panelists also considered the growing need to minister to Adventist young adults exploring or struggling with questions of sexual identity. “What we’re seeing, particularly on college campuses, are students trying to discover who they are,” said Elaine Oliver, co-director of the GC family ministries department. “Sadly, many Christian parents are silent about this topic. When we’re silent dealing with our children’s identity issues, there are many voices out there willing to help them figure out how to deal with their identity. We can no longer afford to be silent.”

Pastor Ekkehardt Mueller, associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, strongly agreed. Young adults today are “bombarded with messages in the media.” Mueller noted a “shift” in mindset as younger generations increasingly approach gay and lesbian issues through the lens of social justice rather than morality.

The panel, moderated by Pastor Pardon Mwansa, a GC vice president, also discussed whether church membership should be granted to LGBT people who are celibate. “The very least we can do is recognize that orientation itself is
not sinful,” Townend said. “Did Jesus die for [LGBT people]? Does he want them to enter into a relationship with him? I would baptize them without too much hesitation.”

Townend acknowledged that such a move could generate a surge of conversation in local congregations, but said that “discussions must start from the position of listening, not condemnation.” Church, he said, should be a “safe place” where mentors are assigned to newly baptized members who are wrestling with sexual issues.

Asked how he would respond to an LGBT person actively working to change their sexual orientation, but failing, Dr. Peter Swanson, seminary associate professor of pastoral care at Andrews University, said he would “affirm” the person’s “persistence,” but would ask whether the person’s goals were “unrealistic or unattainable.” Another factor, he said, could be whether the person has the love and support of a circle of Christian friends and family members.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Kwabena Donkor, an associate director at the Biblical Research Institute, presented a paper on the hermeneutics of Bible passages about homosexuality. He said a main point of contention is that people who disagree on an interpretation are often coming to the text with different suppositions: “traditional” versus “contemporary” hermeneutics.

“Contemporary hermeneutics creates a distinction between what the text meant [at the time it was written] and what it means [today], and this marks the shift from traditional hermeneutics,” Donkor said. The goal of contemporary hermeneutics “is to set in motion this so-called extra linguistic world, the projection of new worlds of meaning.”

One anonymous delegate asked in a handwritten note if a believer in contemporary hermeneutics would be accepted at the conference. Donkor replied that the church needed to maintain open discussion with people who believe in such an approach. For example, he said, those who espouse contemporary hermeneutics offer an exegetical viewpoint on the Genesis 19 story about Sodom, which is translated into semiotic and literary terms to show how homosexuality has come to dominate the meaning of the story. Donkor said contemporary hermeneutics assert that the Sodom story is taken as a linguistic signifier, where the primary referent is not homosexuality, but injustice, which is expressed as a breach of hospitality customs and attempted homosexual rape. “They are denying the basic premise that this was actually an attempt at homosexuality,” Donkor later told ANN. “But as a church we need to dialogue with people who have these presuppositions. ... We write them off as ‘liberals,’ but labels don’t help. They are committed and we need to understand them and talk with them.”
Loma Linda University Launches National TV Series about Health on PBS

By AT News Team, March 20, 2014

On April 4 at 6 p.m. on both coasts a national television series on health sponsored by Loma Linda University will premiere on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in the United States. This first major media initiative by the Adventist health sciences center will reach about 72 million households, very likely the largest audience in the history of the Adventist movement.

Entitled Life On the Line, the program will features courageous individuals and turns their journeys into moving documentaries that convey important health information. “Working on this series has been an amazing experience,” said Patricia Kelikani, director of Advancement Films, the 12-time Emmy Award winning production team. “This show isn’t just about the doctors, but how real people find meaning in the midst of a tragedy. This is where the real story lives and their strength of spirit shines.”

Narrated by celebrity host and journalist, Lisa Ling, the stories are from the health care system based at Loma Linda which serves one-quarter of Southern California and equips medical teams to travel around the world, as well as supplies medical missionary professionals for the global mission of the Adventist denomination. The show will include stories from California to the Amazon, Haiti and Egypt as they all fight a similar battle: to stay alive.

The first six half-hour episodes: (1) “Heart to Heart,” the story of a family whose newborn baby desperately needs a heart transplant to survive. (2) “Out of the Rubble,” the life of an 8-year-old Haitian boy who was trapped under earthquake rubble for three days. (3) “End it Now,” three child abuse victims as they learn to move beyond the trauma and live their lives to the fullest. (4) “Baby Blue” shows how doctors from opposite sides of the globe collaborate to save Egyptian babies born with congenital heart disease. (5) “Armed for the Challenge,” an athlete who sets out to prove that disability doesn’t mean inability. (6) “Anchoring Hope,” a medical boat from Loma Linda University providing much needed health care services for people living in the underserved Amazon jungle.

Life On the Line will air on Fridays with repeats throughout the week. During each viewing, two episodes will appear back-to-back. In addition to airing on the PBS World Channel in April, the show will also be released on PBS stations throughout the country in July. For the full schedule, previews and more information: https://www.lifeontheline.tv
Leadership Webinars for Local Church Leaders Start March 29

By AT News Team, March 19, 2014

A series of Leadership Webinars will be provided throughout 2014 by the Center for Creative Ministry, a resource organization affiliated with the Adventist Church in North America. Each event will be offered twice at different time slots to accommodate time differences across the continent, but they are not duplicate or continuing sessions.

In many places groups of leaders in a congregations, such as the elders or church board, come together to participate in the Webinars and spend additional time discussing the presentations and making local applications. There is also limited space for individuals to join in from their home or office or wherever they can get online.

The coordinator and key presenter for the Leadership Webinars series is Pastor Monte Sahlin who has spent more than 40 years in the Adventist ministry, including roles in church administration at all levels of the denomination. He has written more than 20 books, hundreds of research monographs and magazine articles and produced several series of training videos. He has been invited to nearly a thousand local churches to conduct assessments over the past 30 years.

The concept of Leadership Webinars was tested in the denomination's Ohio Conference during 2013 and many requests were received from other places to participate. This year it is offered across the NAD and overseas so far as space is available.

Each Webinar is a live event with opportunity for participants to ask questions either through an audio connection or a text channel on the dedicated web site. It does not require special equipment or programming, but can be accessed easily from any computer that can get on the Web. Groups can attach a video projector to a computer and throw the visuals onto a screen or a wall. The PA system can also be connected to a computer so that a group can easily hear.

The first Leadership Webinar this year will be offered Sabbath afternoon March 29 at 4 p.m. Eastern time (1 p.m. Pacific time) and again on Sunday morning March 30 at 11 a.m. Eastern time (8 a.m. Pacific time). The topic is "Dealing with the Dropout Problem: How to Reconnect with Former and Inactive Members."

Most Adventist congregations in North America have about a third of the people among their members who no longer come to church at all. Two thirds of Adventists report that they have a family member or a close friend who has stopped going to church. It is a significant concern to local leaders.

The other topics planned for this year, include:

May 3/4 - "Recruiting Volunteers: How to Find the Help You Need"
June 21/22 - "Creating a Strategic Plan for Your Church: Setting Goals and Steps to Implementation"
September 27/28 - "How to Increase Giving in Your Local Church"
October 18/19 - "Helping Church Members to Be Effective at Sharing Their Faith"
November 15/16 - "How Your Church Can Impact Your Community and Become Visible"

It is necessary to pre-register with the online Webinar system in order to get the private web address for these events. Once you register, you will also get handouts in advance which can be copied for a group. If you prefer the Sabbath
afternoon time slot, click here to register:  https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/413811322

If you prefer the Sunday morning time slot, click here to register:  https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/774975762

For more information, dial (800) 272-4664.
Hollywood actor Angus T. Jones shared his testimony at a megachurch in Houston, Texas, last Sabbath (March 15), a year after leaving the television comedy Two and a Half Men where he had played the role of Jake for ten years. He said he was not living the life that he wanted to live as a Christian and found himself rediscovering his faith as he became an Adventist. He spoke at the World Harvest Outreach Church, according to KHOU Channel 11, the CBS television affiliated in Houston, which has worship services both on Saturdays and Sundays. He admitted that he felt guilty about blasting the sitcom and asking people to stop watching it in a video produced by an independent Adventist ministry. He is attending school in Colorado now and appears on the show occasionally.

Adventist Health System (AHS) will move the headquarter staff for its 24 Florida hospitals into a new office on the main Florida Hospital campus in downtown Orlando by the end of March, reported the Orlando Sentinel. The 300 personnel involved have been working from several locations around the Orlando area. The national headquarters of AHS will remain in Altamonte Springs, a suburb of Orlando. AHS is a health ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination that operates a total of 44 hospitals across the South, Southwest and Midwest.

The Adventist Book Center (ABC) in Keene, Texas, will receive a $25,000 economic development grant from the city's Business Development Corporation, according to the Keene Star local newspaper. It was approved last Thursday (March 13) and will assist in the cost of merging the bookstore with a vegetarian food market. The business had total sales of more than $3 million in 2013 and paid $13,328 in sales taxes Jorge Velez, sales manager of the ABC told the newspaper.

CeCe Winans, the well-known gospe recording artist, will appear with Pastor Carlton Byrd, the Adventist evangelist who leads the Breath of Life television ministry, this weekend (March 22-24) at the Oakwood University Church in Huntsville, Alabama. The event is the Spring Revival for the television program and the theme is "Thy Kingdom Come." Winans has won both Grammy and Dove awards over the years and produced a number of albums.

Washington Adventist University (WAU) provided the first Adventist student team to participate in the American Mock Trial Association's (AMTA) regional competition in Richmond, Virginia recently, reported the Columbia Union Conference Visitor. Although WAU students have participated in mock trial exhibitions over the years, this was the first year that the team was able to compete officially. This became possible when a religious exemption by the AMTA relieved them from competing on the Sabbath. Eight WAU students, one timekeeper and two coaches attended. The team competed directly against students from the University of Richmond, William and Mary College, Pennsylvania State University and Wake Forest University. On Sabbath, the WAU students worshiped with the Ephesus Church in Richmond.
By Andrew Hanson, March 20, 2014

By Ted N. C. Wilson in the March 2014 issue of Adventist World, with commentary by Andrew Hanson.

In his essay, Ted lists his “four great concerns for the church today”:

1. A loss of Seventh-day Adventist identity among some of our pastors and church members.
2. The growing tide of worldliness in many of our churches.
3. The danger of disunity.
4. A spiritual complacency and apathy that leads to a lack of involvement in the mission of the church.

It seems to me that Ted’s worries echo the concerns of the Papacy when confronted by the scientific discoveries published by Galileo.

Galileo confused revealed truths with scientific discoveries by saying that in the Bible are found propositions which, when taken literally, are false; that Holy Writ out of regard for the incapacity of the people, expresses itself inexacty, even when treating of solemn dogmas; that in questions concerning natural things, philosophical [i.e., scientific] should avail more than sacred." Hence, we see that it was Galileo’s perceived attack on theology (which is the unique domain of the Magisterium and not of scientists) that elicited the alarmed response from the Church.*

Let’s see if I can make the case using Ted’s own words.

A LOSS OF IDENTITYNow, here is precisely my concern: too many of our pastors and members have failed to recognize, or have forgotten, the divine prophetic calling God has given us as a church. There’s a growing tendency to minimize our differences with other denominations. Much of this comes from the neutralization of the Bible as God’s Word. It is so important that we base our beliefs on the Word of God, using the historical-biblical method of studying the Scriptures, and approaching prophetic understanding from the historicist perspective. God’s Word must be foundational to our belief, faith, and practical living. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth if we will study, pray, and listen to God’s voice.
The "historical-biblical method," sola scriptura, while useful in supporting the notion of a six day creation and Sabbath rest must be explained away when considering the first of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.”

When pastors and members challenge the historical-critical method, Ted argues that church members have rejected the leading of the Holy Spirit or forgotten God’s “divine prophetic calling.”

It seems to me that Wilson’s fundamental concern stems from his belief that questions concerning natural things, philosophical [i.e., scientific] should avail more than sacred. He argues that these questions undermine the Church’s identity as the home of God’s remnant people.

Loss of identity can create a GROWING TIDE OF WORLDLINESS.

Wilson argues that change minimizes our differences with other Christian denominations.

Standards that were once cherished by Seventh-day Adventists in the areas of diet and dress, recreation and amusement, and Sabbathkeeping are fast becoming things of the past… This is no time to flirt with the devil’s dress, diet, amusement, and worldly influences. Christ living in our lives and dwelling in our hearts makes a dramatic difference in how we live.

Standards required of Sabbath keepers have undoubtedly “changed” during my lifetime. Wedding and engagement rings, earrings, Sabbath meals “out,” shorter dresses, swimming, roller-skating, movie attendance, and praise music are almost universally tolerated today. Ingathering has lost steam. Attitudes toward television, “worldly” universities, saxophone solos in church, beauty salons, coffee drinking, appropriate church dress, and divorce have changed. Discussions regarding the legitimacy of homosexual partnerships and women’s ordination also indicate changing attitudes.

Loss of identity can create THE DANGER OF DISUNITY.

This is a time for all to unite in Christ under the banner of His truth, to preach His message to the world. God has given to the Seventh-day Adventist Church a divinely inspired church organization, and mutual agreements called church policies, which under the guidance of the Holy Spirit are part of what helps to hold us together as a worldwide family. To discard or ignore these mutual agreements violates a sacred trust and creates unnecessary discord.

Loss of identity can lead to SPIRITUAL COMPLACENCY AND APATHY.

Increased spiritual apathy and complacency is prevalent in the lives of many. We need to examine our lives to make sure that God is working in us in a vital way. Recent surveys indicate that the overwhelming majority of church members believe the doctrinal essentials of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but there is a growing complacency about sharing their faith. They’re part of the culture of the uninvolved, rather than the culture of the involved. There is
little passion for sharing their faith in Jesus Christ. There’s no urgency in their souls.

It's no wonder that Ted's concerns mirror the official reaction of Pope Paul III. Ted, like Pope Paul III, makes the assumption that members and pastors advocating a scientific literary analysis of scripture, compromise Church authority, thereby challenging its exclusive theology and “divinely inspired” church hierarchy. This advocacy is identified as a demonic distraction that results in a membership that lacks unity, passion, and urgency when it comes to sharing their faith.

Ted, the good news is that the Catholic Church survived Galileo, and the Adventist Church can survive biblical literary analysis.** You say so yourself.

Of course, we do not get to heaven by what we eat, or by how we show ourselves to be religious. We have salvation through the power and the blood of Jesus Christ…God is in control and leading His people. Does the church have challenges? Yes, but I see evidence of the Holy Spirit moving powerfully among His people.


** A literary analysis is not merely a summary of a literary work. Instead, it is an argument about the work that expresses a writer's personal perspective, interpretation, judgment, or critical evaluation of the work.
Adventist Today

Water from a Rock

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
submitted March 19, 2014

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Exodus 17:1-7

This passage brings back some great memories for me. When my children were one, five, and seven, this story came up in the kindergarten Sabbath School lesson. We always liked to try to come up with one or more songs to sing that had to do with their lessons, and this week we couldn't find one. So Robin, the five-year-old, with eagerness in his little face, said, "Let's make one!"

So we set out on an adventure that lasted, as I recall, all week. It was reasonably easy to set their memory verse to music for the chorus. All of us but the baby contributed lines and concepts to the stanzas. There was a lot of rewriting and refiguring, and giggling. One night we had visitors to our worship, and they added some unique bits. Today, every line has some special meaning to those of us who were involved.

One of these days, perhaps I'll get up my nerve and sing it on YouTube so you can hear how it goes. But for now, here are the lyrics:

Water from a Rock
It was a long, hot, tired, and dusty day,
And the people had walked a long, long way.
Now they were so thirsty,
Their throats felt downright dusty.
"Give us water NOW!"
I hear the angry people say.

(chorus)
"Bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure;
The promises of God our King are true forever more.

Moses' heart grew heavy as their anger grew.
So he walked to a quiet place he knew.
“Lord, you’ve got to help me—
I think they’re going to scalp me!
I don’t know where there’s water
And I don’t know what to do!”

(chorus)

“Take your helpers and head toward a rock.
And I will show you where to stop.
Lift your staff and let it drop—
You’ll have water that won’t stop—
Streams of living water
From a common desert rock.”

(chorus—with feeling,
And ending with a flourish!)
His Travelers, Part Two: The Beginning and the Dream


by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted March 19, 2014

Last week, you read a story about the amazing work a group called His Travelers is doing in the Upper Columbia Conference. We promised you some history, and here it is.

In 2008, when Patty Marsh was new in the Children’s Ministries Department at Upper Columbia, a woman called with an interesting request. Could she borrow some youthful energy? The woman explained that she had been faithful in her church for years, doing Vacation Bible Schools and other forms of children’s ministries. But she wasn’t getting any younger, and things were getting harder for her. If only there were some youth or young adults to help, to bring in the energy and enthusiasm that only youth could bring. She would plan the program—she just needed lively helpers.

“I tried and tried,” Marsh reported to Adventist Today, “but I couldn’t find it. It bothered me all that summer and fall.” So she talked with her conference, who willingly gave support to rent some. Youthful energy, that is. She hired a team of four young people, paid on the same level as camp workers. The conference would pay half, and the college which each team member planned to attend would give an additional one-half of salary scholarship. (Walla Walla, Southern, Avondale.)

By late spring the following year, the His Travelers program was born. “I had them come in for a week of training. I had no idea what I was doing. It’s very frightening, looking back. I had to ask myself, What am I doing!?” Marsh says she didn’t know what she had gotten herself into, or, for that matter, what she had gotten these kids into. But she persevered. The training wasn’t just for doing music or stories for VBS. The team members had to be able and willing to fill in wherever the participating church needed them. Not only might they sing, lead songs, tell stories, and help with crafts, but they also worked in some kind of local community service; anything from cleaning up a park or painting a room to doing something fun with local teens. The churches were to plan the program, provide room and board for the team, provide the space, the set-up, and leadership for the program, and so on. The team brought the pizzazz and a variety of talents.

That first summer, the team of four went to seven churches in the conference, for one week each. As usual, when the Spirit leads, the results were astounding. Marsh could tell you stories all day. Like the one about the young man from Australia who said, “There’s power in balloons.”

In balloons?

They were eating at a mall one day, and he said, “Watch.” He started creating balloon shapes, animals, and so on. In seconds, he had a crowd of children, as well as adults. But Patty Marsh
really knew the young balloon-maker was onto something when a woman, clearly intrigued, asked her, “What is this about? Is it happening here?”

So the young man taught the team to make all kinds of balloon shapes.

They learned a lot of other things, too. For example, when they do community service, it’s not just about the team doing something for the town. They try to get the local youth involved and helping, as well. They do useful work several afternoons, and then one afternoon is just for fun. One team member was an expert at geo-caching. That one went over big! Then there was the preaching. That wasn’t really supposed to be part of the package in the beginning. All the team members, even those who were theology majors, were very reluctant to preach. But by the end of the summer, all of them were preaching.

By the summer of 2013, Marsh was fielding three teams, who visited 21 churches from Washington to Idaho. But Marsh felt she was losing her ability to keep tabs on everything and offer sufficient support to her teams. She tried to visit most churches at least once during the week her team was there, and that was becoming impossible. She is the director of three other ministries besides children’s: Women’s Ministries, Adventist Community Services, and Disaster Response, and now her Administrative Assistant hours have been cut. She cannot coordinate 21 weeks of children’s programing and community outreach and keep up with all her other responsibilities with only a half-time assistant. So this year, with disappointment, she is going back down to just one team, with four members.

“My dream,” she reported, “is that we would have teams like this in every conference, who can go out and help local churches, especially small ones, do work they couldn’t do alone. We talk all the time about losing our youth. Well, I’m here to tell you, we are not losing our youth—we are losing our children!” Marsh has done a study for her local conference that shows heavy losses, with attendance drastically dropping at the Primary and Junior level. “Young people can reach children in ways older people cannot.”

She tells of a team who visited a low-income trailer park where they gathered around 25-35 children. Not one of them had ever seen a Bible or knew what one was. When the team member asked if any could name a Bible character, one finally asked, “Is there one named Mary?” The team member asked if they knew who Jesus was. No, they didn’t.

They all came to the VBS. Their “tough guy” older brothers and friends heard about it. They knocked on the door one morning where the team were having worship before the work of the day began. “What are you doing?” they asked.

“We’re having worship.”

“Can we come in and worship with you?” The rest of the week, those teens came to worship and even joined in the activities.

That Sabbath, almost all those kids came to church. The pastor changed everything, just for them. He had a very simple service, with the kids singing, very few announcements, and an
If Marsh has a favorite story, it might be this one: She was visiting a church where the team were all dressed in Bible costumes. In one room, a young man who was talking to a group of children about prayer. “It’s like talking to a friend,” he told them. He asked for a volunteer to pray, and one little girls raised her hand. “I will. But I don’t know how. Will you teach me?”

Marsh reports that she sat there with tears in her eyes while this young man taught a little girl how to pray.

It takes work. It takes money. It takes training. (We just might do another article on the training and church screening process, for the benefit of other churches who might want to try this.) But it’s essential. This denomination was begun by youth. It will probably be led to the end by youth.

“With such an army…” There’s no need to continue the quote, is there?
In Non-Praise of Self


by S M Chen
Submitted March 19, 2014

People, in general, have a natural curiosity in seeing themselves, presumably as others see them. Whether in the mirror or in photos, still or video. While a bit of this seems harmless enough, and even desirable (in the case of mirrors, wherein the purpose of the viewer might be to ensure proper grooming), it can be carried too far.

Social media, in particular, comes to mind. Digital cameras and their ilk permit the rapid acquisition and transmission of images. In recent times, a new word has wormed its way into our vocabulary: ‘selfie.’ A self-portrait.

Ellen Degeneres, host of the most recent Oscar awards ceremony, took and posted one. In her case, it was a somewhat generous gesture, in that a number of other celebrities were included.

The vast majority of ‘selfies’ one finds on social media, however, are of the individual himself/herself, and presumably usually taken by the subject.

I find this preoccupation with self sometimes cute, but more often not so. At worst, I think it indicative of a deeper malaise.

Self absorption/aggrandizement is not a recent phenomenon. It dates from a time before Earth was created, and lay at the root of what Holy Writ describes as ‘the mystery of iniquity.’

History is replete with the tales of those whose trajectory was downwards after an overt lack of humility (‘Pride goeth before a fall.’). Lucifer became Satan. Nebuchadnezzar was reduced to eating grass. The life of the rich man who decided to build bigger barns, in Christ’s parable, was required of him the very day of his decision.

I noticed this tendency to emphasize self before the advent of social media. I was taught in school that the proper sequencing of personal names or pronouns and oneself should be: “She and I” or “John and I.”

Years later, my children would invariably say: “Me and her” or “Me and John.” My attempts to correct them could not overcome the influence of their classmates and the vernacular of the day. I remember hoping they were not being taught such usage in the classroom.

Christ’s life and teachings emphasized the importance of living for others, at the expense of self. He rebuked the mother of James and John, who had asked that in His kingdom they be allowed to sit next to Him. Much as a servant, He washed the feet of His disciplines in the Upper Room, providing an example of the necessity of role reversal and altered thinking if one is to grasp what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. He loved and accepted everyone else; himself
least of all.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, once was unable to attend an event at which he was scheduled to speak. Attendees expected to hear an inspiring, perhaps profound sermon, delivered by a surrogate. Instead, they were treated to a powerful one word message he had delivered in absentia: ‘Others.’

If one must preserve (for posterity?) a visual record of one’s presence at a given place and time, here is one (humble) suggestion.