Adventist Women Focus on Mentoring, Current Issues: Has promotion of male headship theology blunted the rudder and tattered the sails of the Adventist Women's Association? If anything, the prospect of full recognition as ministers has energized them to deeper spirituality and higher expectations in their meetings....

Young Adults Convene Retention Summit: A lifelong Adventist daughter of missionary parents decided to do something big on her campus to reverse the exodus of young people from her Church....

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OPINION

Why We Do and Don't Need the Church: Does the Church exist to foster reform movements to help purify members for translation; or is its purpose to unite an entire body for translation, by uplifting Christ? What does God expect of us? Guest writer Raj Attiken shares....

Moses' Great Disappointment: In context of the Great Disappointment of October 22, Debbonnaire Kovacs imagines Moses' reveries as he drifts from this life on the summit of Mount Nebo, on the borders of Canaan....

Heartache: Harry Banks compares and contrasts the state of mind of the Adventist Church today (in the wake of Annual Council) with that of Christ's disciples on the eve of the crucifixion, and wonders why we seem so blind to the lessons of John 17....

FEATURES

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

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POETRY & THE ARTS

A Parable for Our Time (essay): S M Chen considers the parable of the Good Samaritan in conjunction with how we treat those who differ in sexual identification. "Homosexuality, like the leprosy of olden times, is no respecter of persons," he writes....

Bread of Life (visual): Jesus says he is the bread of life, by which we can become whole again....
Adventist Women Focus on Mentoring, Current Issues

By AT News Team, October 23, 2014

Speakers at the annual meeting of the Association of Adventist Women (AAW) included the only woman who serves as a vice president of the denomination’s General Conference (GC), the first woman to be elected a conference president and a male theologian who condemned what he called “the heresy of eternal subordination” in a critique of “headship theology.” The independent organization held its 32nd yearly gathering last weekend (October 16-18) on the campus of Southern Adventist University (SAU). The theme was “Lifting as We Climb: Women Mentoring Women.”

Dr. Ella Simmons, the first woman to serve as a GC vice president, said in her Thursday evening keynote address that after “agonizing for months” over what to talk about, “I decided to talk about our legacy ... the struggle for equality for Adventist women.” She stated that it was “more for the younger ones coming up than it is for us.”

“The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, is fearful of freedom,” she quoted the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who has been a strong influence in her life, she said. This is why some women oppose equality for women, she observed. When she was elected as a GC officer “everybody worried about the opposition I might face from constituents in other countries,” she told the group. “But the only opposition—the only opposition—I’ve ever faced is right here in this country!” People in other countries, she said, have always accepted her and her role with open arms. She also said that choosing not to fight back when attacked “is another form of mentoring.”

Simmons stated the need to be willing to stand up for what is right, but advised women to choose their battles prayerfully. She said she works alongside people who do not believe she should have her position, but that they can still work together in a civil manner. “It’s just business,” she said several times. “You don’t have to agree. Just work together and get the job done.”

Adventist Today sent Debbonnaire Kovacs, one of the AT editors, to cover the meeting and she has written several in-depth features from the event. Subscribers can read these articles on the people and topics mentioned here in the Features section.

The decision about ordaining women who serve as Adventist ministers voted earlier in the week by the GC executive committee was one of the key issues discussed by a panel made up of several of the key speakers on Sabbath afternoon. The question on the minds of everyone at the meeting: “What can we do between now and July?” The panel's answer: Stay in prayer, stay calm, and work toward making sure everyone everywhere understands that it’s about; letting every division make their own choice, rather than concentrating on the ordination issue itself. “Our church,” a woman in the group pointed out, “is even more diverse now than the one that did vote that individual churches could vote their conscience about ordaining women elders” in 1990. The feature story this week contains extensive excerpts from this panel.

Dr. Sandra Roberts, president of the denomination's Southeastern California Conference, spoke on "Mentoring the Woman Pastor," a practical report on what some of the pastors and local churches are doing in her conference. One thing many conferences could imitate is that all pastors are offered six 3-day retreats at the conference camp facility over a span of two years. All expenses are paid, and they may bring their spouses.
The program is optional, but once chosen, the pastor must commit to all six retreats. Dr. Kendra Haloviak, a professor at the H.M.S. Richards School of Divinity at La Sierra University, serves as assistant to the president for women in ministry. Women pastors meet at her home, where they talk about "anything and everything."

There is a noticeable difference in what younger and older pastors want to discuss, Roberts observed. Younger ones tend to talk about dress, getting more education, how to pastor friends, and working from early jobs where they take what’s offered to ones that will match their unique gifts. And there is particular interest in dating, marriage, balancing family and work, and mothering—what do you do with a pastor who has a baby? Older women are more likely to want to talk about church issues, the ordination issue itself, and deeper waters, both spiritual and practical. “All,” said Roberts, “just want a safe place to hang out and talk.”

Friday morning Dr. Stephen Bauer, professor of theology and ethics at SAU, spoke on the issue of "headship" which is currently being promoted by a few Adventist Bible scholars. He called it “the heresy of eternal subordination,” the belief that authority is linear from God to Christ to the Holy Spirit, and thence to man and then woman. He believes this concept began or was encouraged by anti-Trinitarians.

If “Christ was begotten, has an origin, and is eternally subordinate to the Father ... In my opinion, if they didn’t already have their views about women, they wouldn’t have found this theology.” Bauer said that when Ellen White spoke of the headship of Adam, she was speaking of his headship of the race as a whole, not of the headship of all men over all women. He said that headship of the race has passed to the “second Adam,” Christ, the only head of the Christian church. As a pastor he learned that when some of his churches had only female elders, they suffered a lack. When others had only male elders, they suffered a lack. In Bauer’s view, “we need both.”

There are differences between the mentoring styles of women and men stated Dr. Gloria Ceballos, a chief nursing officer who shared statistics about mentoring. She defined several related roles. A coach is for specific, measurable goals or projects. A sponsor is one who will actually connect someone to opportunities, sell the protégé’s abilities, and even put their reputation on the line for the mentee. Mentoring is much more open-ended and can include all of the above. A mentor shares his/her own mistakes and allows failure as an option, seeing that as a way of learning.

Men are far more likely to actively sponsor their mentees, Ceballos stated. Research shows that men mentored by men have the greatest leap in career advancement and compensation. Women mentored by men also reach higher career goals and higher compensation, but not so high as men. Men mentored by women had no measurable career or pay differences, and women mentored by women score the lowest on these scales. Ceballos gave specific advice on how to change this.

Two women currently serving as senior pastors addressed the group. Dr. Tara VinCross serves in Philadelphia, one of the largest cities in the United States, where she leads one of key Adventist congregations and directs a church planting and outreach ministry which involves scores of young adult volunteers. Pastor Jennifer Scott spoke on "courage." She is the senior pastor of the large congregation on the campus of Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas, where one of the Bible scholars on the faculty has been an outspoken advocate against the ordination of women clergy.

On Sabbath morning the group joined the congregation at the Collegedale Church and heard Dr. Gordon Bietz, president of SAU, gave a powerful and moving sermon entitled “Quiet No Longer.” He used the framework of Tamara’s story in the Old Testament to show how dysfunctional family dynamics have a negative effect on victimized women, and he exhorted Adventists to bring abuse into the light and work for healing and an end to domestic violence.

Two women were honored with the Woman of the Year Award, Roberts for spiritual leadership and Freddie Harris for lifetime achievement in community service. Harris is the co-founder and co-leader with her husband of the only in-patient drug treatment program operated by Adventists in North America. More on the Woman of the Year Awards will be reported in future feature stories in Adventist Today.
In her welcome, Dr. Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, president of AAW and a professor at La Sierra University, stated that the organization “the best-kept secret in Adventism” and “we are out to change that!” She encouraged women everywhere to become involved and to invite their friends. If you are interested in the organization’s stated mission, “issues of the human rights of women, which include freedom from abuse of all kinds, access to opportunities within society, and their full participation in all activities and levels of leadership within the Church,” you may go to its website [www.aaw.cc] to join and learn more about it.
Young Adults Convene Retention Summit

From a News Release, October 23, 2014

A lifelong Adventist and daughter of missionary parents, Natalie Bruzon is tired of seeing young adults walk out during a sermon and sometimes joining them. Feeling disconnected to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, she even considered attending a nondenominational Christian church.

“The struggle is real,” said Bruzon, a student at Union College (UC) in Lincoln, Nebraska. Bruzon decided she wanted to see something change for her generation and became the driving force behind the three-day summit of student leaders from the Adventist colleges and universities in North America that began today (October 23) on the UC campus. The event gives young adults the opportunity to discuss ways that Adventist young adults can stay connected with their church and how the church can stay connected with their generation. The focus is “being a part of the solution.”

Last year student leaders were invited to sit in on the annual meeting of the governing body for the Adventist denomination in North America. The student body presidents who attended “felt that the Adventist church needed more young adult support,” said Bruzon. “One of the big issues in the church right now is that 60 to 70 percent of our young adults, 18 to 30 years old, are leaving.”

The student senate at UC took up the idea and looked at various possibilities, events and other ways they could generate awareness of the issue. Feeling that they needed something different from the usual campus spiritual activities, the senate concluded that they needed a long-standing solution in the form of a five-year plan and a committee to steer it.

“As church members, we felt like we needed to do something to help,” explained Bruzon. “Everything I do is powered and encompassed by my beliefs,” she told her classmates. “I never stray from them.”

Passionate about her new-found goal, Bruzon organized a committee of UC students to figure out how to reach young adults of all ages and educational programs. The committee is not directly affiliated with the student government, but works independently.

“Our purpose was to discuss issues that we see in the church and reasons why we would not want to stay in the church, to bring to light this problem of young adults leaving.” Out of these discussions developed the idea for the summit.

As part of this week’s summit, two representatives from each Adventist college and university in North America have been invited to Lincoln and the committee has invited four speakers. “The summit is not so much to offer concrete solutions, but more of presenting the young adults’ voice,” Bruzon explained. “We want to bridge the communication gap that we have with our church leaders.”

Over the next three days there will be four "think tank" sessions of guided discussion. Information from these sessions will be compiled, followed by a short presentation on the results. Then there will be a general discussion. Any young adult can participate in the discussion, and those who are not young adults are welcome to listen. The
summit will wrap up with breakout groups exploring questions such as: Why do young adults leave the church? Why do young adults stay? What can we give the church? What would we like the church to give us?

The speakers will include Pastor Allan Martin from the Arlington Adventist Church in the suburbs of Dallas; Pastor Ben Lundquist, young adult ministries director for the denomination's Arizona Conference; Dr. Ron Pickell, pastor of the Berkeley (California) Adventist Church and coordinator of public campus ministries for the denomination's North American Division; and Pastor Harold Alomia, senior pastor of the College View Church on the UC campus.

The students also launched a social media campaign on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with the hashtag #iAmTheChurch. This hashtag was intended to raise awareness about the summit, but organizers hope the campaign will also initiate critical thinking by young adults across North America, challenging them to consider what role they will be playing in the church five years into the future.

“We are the church of tomorrow. What are we going to be doing in five years?” ask students in a short video created as part of the campaign. “Are we going to be passively sitting on the pews and complaining about everything we don’t like, or are we going to be actively part of the solution?” The goal of the committee is that the student leaders who participate in the summit this week will continue the movement.

“The committee members are really passionate and have done all the work to make this possible,” said Bruzon. “It’s been amazing the way every single one of them has stepped up, taken on a project, and volunteered to be a part of something.”

The summit and the committee are especially important to Bruzon because she personally wants to see young adults take an active role in the church and a step forward in their spiritual journeys. “This committee has made me aware of the role church plays in our lives,” she explained. “It’s made me take it more seriously and actually look at it from a new perspective.”

“I would love to see committees like this in other schools,” she added, “to see young adults raising their voices and saying they want to be a part of the Adventist church, and strive to make things happen. I would love to see us take a part in our own problem and be proactive about it.” As for Bruzon’s five-year plan, she sees herself still actively and passionately involved with the committee and its mission to reach young adults struggling to connect with the Adventist Church.

"I hope this is a genuine, authentic grass-roots uprising," a retired NAD officer told Adventist Today. "We need a new generation of deeply rooted, centrist Adventist young adults to take hold of the church."

If you want more information about the movement join #TheFiveYearPlan (#TFYP) on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram. The video can be seen at this Web address: http://youtu.be/iA2TYBng9c8
Adventist Social Workers to Convene within NACSW

From a News Release, October 20, 2014

A new forum for Adventist social workers will be launched during the annual convention of the major Christian professional organization in the field. The Adventist group will meet for the first time at 1 p.m. on November 7 as a section of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) yearly meeting in Annapolis, Maryland.

The NACSW convention is scheduled for November 6 through 9 at the Double Tree Hotel in Annapolis. All Adventist social workers are invited, especially those in the Baltimore-Washington region and from the United States east coast.

The initial meeting of the new group will offer the opportunity for Adventist social workers to get acquainted with each other and to make plans for future activities, including an online listserv, document library and discussion board. There will also be discussion about possible presentations for the Adventist group at future NACSW conventions.

This year’s convention will feature a presentation by John Gavin, MSW, professor of social work at Washington Adventist University (WAU). This workshop will be on the topic “Building Strong, Faith-based Volunteer Programs” and is scheduled for Friday, November 7, from 10:15 to 11:15 a.m. in the hotel’s State Room. The workshop will focus on research about the opinions of Adventist members on public policy conducted by Gavin, Dr. William Ellis and Dr. Curtis VanderWaal. Ellis teaches history and political science at WAU and VanderWaal is chair of the social work department at Andrews University.

For more information about the NACSW convention or the forum for Adventist social workers, contact Gavin by Email at wausocialwork@gmail.com.
Pastor Sergei Litovchenko, the Adventist minister who was taken by armed men during the Sabbath worship service in Horlivka in eastern Ukraine on September 27, has been released and reunited with his family, reports the Adventist News Network (ANN). Large numbers of people around the world have been praying for his safety and freedom. It is unclear why he was detained, although remarks were made by the armed men who disrupted the Adventist church service that "this is an Orthodox country."

A new union conference in Latin America was approved last week at the annual meeting of the General Conference (GC) executive committee. The Adventist churches and local conferences in the nation of Panama will withdraw from the South Central American Union Mission to become the Panama Union Mission. Costa Rica and Nicaragua will continue to be part of the previous structure. This is a rapidly growing area for the church with nearly 300,000 members and perhaps twice as many adherents. With this reorganization, the denomination's Inter-American Division will have 23 union conferences, the most of any division worldwide.

A high court in Kenya has ruled that an Adventist employee of the nation's forestry service cannot be compelled to work on Sabbath. The Industrial Court held that Robert M. Nyaringo was denied his constitutional rights to freedom of religion under Article 32 and that the efforts of officials to compel him to participate in training from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday was improper and unlawful, reported The Star newspaper in Nairobi. He is an instructor at the Kenya Forest Service College in Londiani and a local elder in the Adventist denomination. He had been assigned to attend paramilitary training, which was scheduled for six days a week, including Saturdays.

Mark Meulenbroek, an Adventist in New Zealand, has been awarded $40,000 by the court after he was fired for refusing to work on Saturdays. He had worked for Vision Antenna in Invercargill since 2004, installing television and audio systems and was considered a model employee, reported TV Channel 3. In 2011, he reconnected with the Adventist faith in which he had been raised. He was fired in September 2012 for refusing to work on Sabbath. The Human Rights Review Tribunal found Vision had discriminated against Meulenbroek and had ignored its obligations under the Human Rights Act. The company had not considered keeping the Sabbath a "good explanation" for getting Saturdays off and could have done more to accommodate him, such as allowing him to work Sundays instead, the tribunal found. The tribunal has ordered the company to pay Meulenbroek $40,000 for lost wages, legal expenses and his loss of dignity. Robert Kee, director of the government Office of Human Rights Proceedings, said the case was an important warning for small companies who might think they can overlook the rights of employees.

Adventist church administrators in western Jamaica have pledged to become more involved in the community action, according to The Western News published in Montego Bay area. Pastor Glen Samuels, the newly elected president of the denomination's West Jamaica Conference, announced during his installation that local churches in low-income neighborhoods such as Rose Heights, Mount Salem, Flankers, Canterbury and Norwood will provide tutoring, counseling, free clinics and other humanitarian outreach.
Why We Do and Don't Need the Church

by Raj Attiken, October 20, 2014

A few days ago I received an announcement about yet another symposium that claims to expose one more heresy within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It prompted me to reflect on why, despite so much of the nonsense happening within our church family, the Adventist Church needs to exist and, in fact, flourish. The reasons are many. The church can be a community where we journey together as brothers and sisters always and everywhere toward the Christ who is always anywhere and everywhere. It can be a community where we support and nurture each other through the various contours of the journey as we learn to go deep with the Divine. It can be a committed community that gives heartfelt emotional support, and welcomes, and forgives. It can be a community that teaches us to love well and live well, and to advance hope and joy to all people. However, there are a few “not-so-good” (in fact, lousy) reasons why the church should exist. Among them is that it gives a pretext for groups such as those conducting the symposium to claim legitimacy for their conjured-up causes. If the church did not exist, such groups would not have a captive audience to which to market their conspiracy theories (think contemporary Christian music, contemplative prayer, spiritual formation, emerging church, meditation, etc.) and infuse fear, suspicion, mistrust, and insecurity in the hearts of people. It is a twisted irony that these groups derive their life from the very church that they allege is in apostasy. To the informed it is also amusing that the issues these groups warn Adventists about as “hot” issues are those that have been around within Christian circles for decades and centuries! In the larger geopolitical and geo-religious world today, we see how groups who hold visions of religion that are more “religious” than religion resort to unhealthy and often violent means to establish their visions of religion. In the process not only do they do untold harm to people but they also misrepresent and distort religion. If there were no Adventist Church, groups such as the organizers of the recent symposium and their ilk will have to find new audiences to feed their need to control, to infuse fear and suspicion. They will also need to find new ways to legitimize their identity and existence. But, if there were no Adventist Church, most of us will not have a community that we call home — a community that gives shape to our faith, our worship, our relationship, and our service. I don’t expect the Adventist Church to go away, at least not anytime soon! I wish, however, that sanity will prevail in our faith community, and that more and more of us will create new landscapes of faith, hope, and love, rather than of fear, guilt, and insecurity.

Dr. Raj Attiken was born in Sri Lanka, attended the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University and then served as a pastor in the United States. He was elected secretary and then president of the Ohio Conference where he served in denominational administration for nearly three decades. He is the author of a book on leadership which can be obtained from www.adventsource.org, the resource center of the North American Division.
Moses' Great Disappointment

By Debbounaire Kovacs
Submitted October 22, 2014

I am so tired. I've climbed so many mountains, crossed so many deserts... well, actually, crossed the same one over and over. I'm too old for this, Lord. Are we there yet? We've been nearly there so many times. We could have crossed the Jordan forty years ago if it hadn't been for those naysayers. Well, enough of that.

I keep trudging up, ever up and up. It reminds me of the times on Sinai with you, Lord. Such astonishing memories! Mountaintop times. Did I imagine them? Have I really seen your feet on a sapphire pavement? Your back passing by? Stop. Have to stop for a minute. I'm out of breath. The view is amazing. It will be even better from the top, I know. I'll go on in a minute. Really, I can't complain; you've kept me in unbelievable shape for a man my age. Like Father Abraham, or one of the old patriarchs. I'm 120 years old! Three lifetimes in one. Forty years in Pharaoh's court. Seems like (I can't help laughing) seems like a hundred years ago! I've got my breath back; I'll go on climbing now. Forty years tending sheep. Seriously, those are the days I miss! So easy, so peaceful. The Call, which I still can hardly believe...and forty years tending your children—ten times as hard to manage as the most cantankerous old ram I ever had to deal with! These are the years that have whitened my hair and made me ready to give up a hundred times. Ahh! What a view! I knew it would be breathtaking. I turn and turn, and I can make out all the land we've been promised. I think God is enlarging my vision—it seems impossible—do I really see the Western Sea? The Negev? The valley of Jericho with its palms? I see the sun shining on the hills and plains, and I see my people, free. Free! Any day now—any day, we'll cross—What? What's that, Lord? I don't get to—are you serious?! This must be my imagination—you've got to be kidding me! After all this...all I've done for your people, all I've suffered? I don't get to go?!

...Oh. Well, you're right, of course, I did take credit as if I were the one miraculously providing the water for them...that one time...But you have forgiven me, right?...Oh. Well, then, that's okay. Your will. It's all I've ever wanted. Whatever you think is right, Lord...I'm getting sleepy...

OH WOW, LORD!!!

Click on these links to see views from Mt. Nebo:
http://www.sacred-destinations.com/jordan/mount-nebo Great photos including the Memorial Church of Moses
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1M9k8hQOJ0
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YArO_D Rcik
If you are really ambitious, there's a whole collection of 200 Mt. Nebo tours here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-atQ7-CQS0&list=PLBctv3TeTcuUDf-34F7s9ljVEUJIAk7z
Heartache

by Harry Banks, October 23, 2014

I haven't been able to make myself read all through the daily reports of the Annual Council. I've been too heartbroken.

For the past several months I've been hanging out around John 17 -- you know, the prayer of Jesus just after the last supper and before his crucifixion. As you may remember, it is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus we have. I don't know why but it seems like I need to hang out there to see if I can catch the smell, the tension, the calm, the inspiration and the dread of the moment the great hinge of history was to turn.

For several weeks I've just been trying to comprehend verse 6, where he tells his Father, "I have manifested your name..." What a strange phrase... What would I think if my neighbor came over to my house and said, "I have manifested your name to the new people that moved in next door"?

Huh... What?

What exactly do you do when you manifest? I don't care if you use some of the other translated words, such as "reveal"; the questions still come. Do you talk? Do you act? Do you love? Do you hate? Do you touch? Do you avoid? Do you forgive? Do you rebuke?

When I told Larry, at the Sabbath morning Bible study at the In His Step Community Fellowship about my reflections on "manifest," he said "manifest" would represent "all" that Christ did and taught and was.

OK, I agree that is probably a true statement but "all" is not very descriptive... Have you noticed that when you include "all," you lose the detail?

It reminds me of the mother who was encouraging Johnny to eat his string beans. "Just think of all the starving children in China." To which Johnny replied, "Name five."

So I got to wondering... What would be the top 10 items that should be noted to give a sketch of what manifesting is about?

OK... so I'm not ready to commit to the list yet... But I'd be glad to hear what you think should make the list.

I have gotten far enough to realize that Jesus would be the only one who really could "manifest" a perfect, divine, Father. We might give witness to such a manifestation... And we might reflect... But "manifest"?... Yeah, I'm thinking that's a little out of the reach of Mr. and Ms. Finite.

Then there is that "I have manifested your name." How do you manifest a name? Which raises the question, what's in a name? What makes up a name?
What are you actually manifesting when you manifest a “name”? Could this idea of “name” be much more multi-dimensional, multi-cultural, multi-multi, than our ideas of dictionaries, names, and definitions?

When I was working with database stuff I had tables and tables of data (2D). One of my applications had 1,200 tables; one table had 2.8 million records. One day I picked up an article on data mining where they talked about extracting information for what they called a data cube (3D). A couple of years later I was talking with my replacement, and he was describing even more dimensions and facets to data structures. Could that have any resemblance to this John 17 idea of a “name”? Sorry, I don’t have any answers here… and this is about as far as I have gotten on John 6… haven’t even touched the “ones you gave me” part.

So I haven’t gotten very far on my working through John 17… but there is a part coming up that keeps lurking in my peripheral awareness…

It’s the part where Jesus appeals to his Father to intervene on behalf of those “which thou gavest me” “that they may be one.”

Hmm… OK… so within 24 hours this contentious bunch of disloyal, uncomprehending ones “thou gavest me” (disciples) are going to encounter the crisis of their lives.

What is missing from this picture? There is no loyalty oath being passed around for signature. And even those who avow loyalty will fail miserably. There is no threat of job loss for anyone having a misconception of the GPS coordinates for heaven (remember Philip… just tell us and we will follow…). And after this crisis the disciples didn’t spend their time writing position papers getting ready for Pentecost.

I really do not mean to depreciate the prayerful careful work of our research teams and study task groups. But observe that Jesus seemed to think that he needed divine Father intervention to implement “that they may be one.” Perhaps as well researched and well positioned for full authority in governance as our finite efforts might be, we may still fail if we slip in our “abiding” (John 15).

Again, I don’t mean to find fault… I just mean to remind myself that if I’m ever to grow toward unity with my fellow sinners (whom Paul calls “saints”) it will have to come from a divine source. (I use the term “sinners” to highlight the necessity for divine redemptive intervention.)

Like I said at the beginning, I have been too brokenhearted to finish reading the daily accounts. It seems the jockeying for position, the covert and overt coercions, is so far removed from this prayer for unity at this point of the crisis of the universe.

The other prayer I find myself drawn to frequently is the prayer of Daniel in chapter 9. Why is it that it is a government statesman rather than a priest who prays, “We have sinned and committed iniquity…”?

Should we even expect our “church” leaders to be capable of enforcing unity? Historically prominent institutional leadership in scripture times seemed to fail frequently. After all, I’m human and very flawed. Why should I expect more from others?

I do believe I need to join Daniel in confessing “our” wickedness, our indifference, our corporate “gong show” (remember 1 Corinthians 13: without love we are like a sounding brass).

Some things I feel I need to confess…

Regardless of our views on “headship,” “creation,” “job threats,” how can we not hold Brother Ted up in prayer for the
trials he and his family are enduring?

So the leadership ducks the responsibility of leading the way on some issues… (I didn’t say I hadn’t read any of the reports… I just said I hadn’t read all of the reports).

So just how long did it take the church to agree on Christ’s being “fully God and fully human”? Maybe 200, 250 years. Our entire denominational history isn’t even that old. “The nature of Christ” was just one of the basics, not some 28 of a future 150… (OK, so I’m just being contentious… The Council of Jerusalem reduced requirements… they didn’t expand them. I don’t know if anybody has noticed that.)

And about the threat of job loss… What kind of “faith” do I have if I’m intimidated by administrative bullying? One of the quotes shared at the passing of Bill Loveless… “And courage is always necessary.”

And since part of my career I’ve been a systems analyst, I learned that sometimes there can be a need to reframe issues and perspectives…

I’ve been wondering lately if part of our problem stems from the fact that our hybrid Methodist Episcopal system for General Conference, Union, and Conference administration (remember, it is congregational for the local church) and our idea of ordination (which is different from laying on of hands) are really Roman Catholic trappings we have not shaken off; and may contribute to the problem we seem to have resolving other issues. Could we be trying to solve them in the wrong framework? Sorry, just thought I’d ask?

So back to the heartache… How can a people who seem to be just as contentious as disciples at a last supper, just as disloyal, just as unknowing, ever find the love, forgiveness, encouragement, faith, patience, and courage to “be one” without the Father’s divine intervention? As I mentioned before, I do have a “Master of the Universe” certificate… but it was made very clear to me that there is no local or heavenly jurisdiction for a finite holder of such a certificate.

I’m thinking we all might need to join in the Daniel prayer club… Confess our corporate evil; and beg, “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake” (Daniel 9:19, KJV).
Dr. Ella Smith Simmons thought she could take early retirement and travel with her husband. Then she got a startling call from then GC President Jan Paulsen. Basically, he asked, “If you were asked to be a VP, would you do it?” When Simmons got her breath back, she agreed to pray about it. God seemed to be saying yes, but Simmons assumed it would be sharply opposed. “But,” she told us, “if God can shut a lion’s mouth, he can shut an Adventist’s mouth!” [Personal note: Some of us have first-hand experience of this fact!]

When she was elected, there were some who wouldn’t speak to her, and of course some “nasty blogs,” which she wisely refused to read. God said, “I’ve already taught you how to do this. Think back on the lessons I’ve taught you all along [referring to stories she had told us about her earlier professional and church life, of ongoing opposition and unfair or even trumped-up criticism].” She says Dr. Paulsen continued to intentionally mentor her, giving her assignments where she could learn how to operate, and show that a woman could carry the load.

Interlude: We’re heading across campus to lunch, and I am behind three young college women. On a whim, I ask, “Hey, can I ask you guys something?” They turn courteously, ready to direct the older lady to the restroom, or whatever… I ask, “If you felt called to be a pastor, do you feel you could do that?” Two of them look a little blank. “Well, yeah. Sure!” The third is unsure: “Well, you know, some people quote Paul, about how only men should lead the church…” But then she says, “But if God said, Sonya,* I want you to be a pastor, then yeah, I’d have to do that.” (*name changed.)

Dr. Gloria Ceballos’ father didn’t want a daughter; he thought women were basically useless. He went so far as to say, as he neared death, that no woman could have any part of his funeral. She grew up, therefore, always questioning herself, “but I told myself, ‘I’ve gotta do what I’ve gotta do!’” Her husband became her mentor, telling Ceballos, “We’re going to college, both of us, and we’re both getting our masters’ degrees!”

Jennifer Scott started out with respiratory therapy, but took extra religion classes. She says her profs were “so saturated in grace that it changed my whole life and my love for the church.” As she was finishing her degree, Richard Frederick and Randy Wisbey sat down with her and asked, “Why aren’t you considering pastoral theology?” Scott said no at first, but eventually worked her way through seminary with her respiratory degree. She was invited into ministry by Bill Loveless, whose recent death, a loss to all of us, hit her especially. She has been pastoring for 24 years now. Today, she teaches a different sort of “respiratory therapy”—the pneuma of grace.
Interlude: On the way to another meal, I poll another trio of young women. One says it’s sometimes hard to tell if God is calling you or it’s just your own idea, but all agree that if God called then yes, they would be pastors. I ask if they have personally seen discrimination or opposition, and they say no, and share stories of women pastors they know.

Tara VinCross, pastor of an urban church in Philadelphia where the average age is 27, was leading a workshop once when she saw the penny drop for one man. Late in the conference, he suddenly said, “Wait! You’re that Tara VinCross, the one I’ve been hearing about?! But…you’re not angry! You’re like Moses! You’re kind and compassionate!” He seemed downright tearful and later invited her to speak at her church. At her first board meeting at GC, David Weigley was seated in a prominent position because he was going to give the devotional. When he saw VinCross, he pulled forward one of the small chairs from the edges of the room, sat in it, and invited her to his seat.

Carla Baker, NAD Women’s Ministries Director, had a father who had insisted all his children go to public school, but when she went to college, she really wanted to go to an Adventist one. He “threw roadblocks” in her way, but the women of her church banded together, bought her all the things she would need in her dorm room, packed her up, and one of them drove her to school.

Sandra Roberts was at a multi-denominational conference on women in ministry, and another woman said, “We’re all lobsters, and we have to get over that.” Roberts asked her what she meant. “Well, you know how lobsters in a pot crawl all over each other to get to the top and don’t care who they step on?” Sandra told her, “Not us, we work together and have a wonderful, loving, positive experience.” She ended up featured in a “Youth Magalog” (that has since folded), telling the story of the way Adventist women work together to help each other to get where God is calling them.

Conclusion: Two of the young SAU women tell me of a friend who is a senior and will be going with her boyfriend to seminary, where both of them will seek M. Divs and pastorates. “How does this work?” they asked their friend. “Will you pastor the same church together?” The friend told them, “We don’t know, we’ll follow God, but he supports what I want to do and I support what he wants to do, so if we just get one call at first, that’s where we’ll go.”

http://www.aaw.cc to learn more about AAW: www.aaw.cc
“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, ‘Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.’

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, ‘He that showed mercy on him.’ Then said Jesus unto him, ‘Go, and do thou likewise.’”

* * *

“Then shall the King say also unto them on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed...’”

But the priest protesteth, ‘Lord, when I looked upon the man, I could see that he was not like unto one of us, but was a sinner, who preferred his own kind. I knew that he was not destined for the kingdom. So I passed him by.’

Whereupon the King saith, ‘Who made you to be judge over man? If thou thoughtst this man would not inherit the kingdom, all the more thou shouldst have shown mercy and kindness, because, for this man, the only heaven he might know wouldst be on earth.’
And the Levite, not knowing what the priest before him had said, also protesteth, ‘Lord, the man must have been a sinner. Otherwise, why wouldst he have been attacked? The Lord protecteth His own, doth He not? And from the way he dresseth, his appearance to your servant was unnatural, and unbecoming to that of a man. I could not risk being defiled by such a one as he.’

The King saith, ‘Thou likewise art guilty. For what was the second greatest commandment given unto thee by My Son?’

The Levite replieth, ‘To love my neighbor as myself.’

‘And didst thou do that?’ asketh the King. ‘Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.

*  

I don’t pretend to understand homosexuality, or some other forms of alternative sexuality, for that matter. And what we don’t understand, we often fear. Holy Writ tells us that perfect love casts out fear. Might imperfect love do the same, or something similar?

I admit to being somewhat homophobic in the past, this trait in no way diminished by being accosted once in a restaurant restroom by a fellow who reminded me of Liberace in both demeanor and dress.

Then, through serendipity, by virtue of friendship with a hospice nurse, who home-visited men dying of AIDS, I had occasion to become acquainted with some of her patients. Some were intelligent, perceptive, sensitive, and gentle. One I would never have suspected as being gay. He was a writer and his rugged good looks reminded me of a slender Rock Hudson. He observed, more a statement than a question, ‘Do you think that, in a society such as we live in, I would choose this lifestyle?’ He wasn’t even in a relationship at that time, but it didn’t matter; he had become HIV+ from the past, and his Kaposi’s sarcoma was a grim visual reminder of the ineluctability of Galatians 6:7.

I know what Holy Writ says about homosexuality. I have also come to believe that, for at least some, sexual orientation is genetically predetermined. Regardless of the cause (which may well be, in some cases, multifactorial), the response that would seem most acceptable, to society in general and its (oft self-appointed) guardians of virtue in particular, is celibacy. But is it fair to demand that?

Homosexuality, like the leprosy of olden times, is no respecter of persons.

The life and teachings of Jesus provide no example of His interaction with individuals of alternative sexuality.

We do know, however, how Christ related to those marginalized by society and the pious—women of ill repute, tax collectors, publicans, lepers, the halt and the lame. He treated
them with dignity and respect. And love and healing.

Being sinless, He had the moral authority to say, “Go, and sin no more.” I lack that authority, but can still love those whom I am quite sure He would have loved, or would love today, did He live among us.

We are told angels walk among us. Who is to say what outward form those angels take? To me it is more probable that they would be the less socially desirable than the converse.

The writer Kurt Vonnegut admonished us to stay soft. Not to harden our hearts, which makes us impervious to the promptings of the Comforter.

Being human, I know I will err. I would rather err on the side of mercy than justice. Why? One of the Beatitudes concerns mercy. None concerns justice. We are told not to judge. That is God’s business.

In His parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ did not say why the priest and the Levite avoided the wounded traveler. In my version, I posit a reason that I consider plausible.

With apologies to Lord Chichester, if I cannot see Him more clearly, I yet wish to love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly.

For love represents the distillation of God’s relationship to man, from the beginning.
Bread of Life

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2750/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/bread-of-life

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" John 6:35