Unity in Diversity: Solution Offered to Ordination Debate (NEWS): The Pacific Union Conference has officially proposed action that will permit ordination of women in divisions of the Church where the practice meets with majority Committee support...

What Are Wilson II and His Allies Trying to Do? Hypothesis 1 (OPINION): Some Adventists appear to believe that Church leadership is accelerating divisions in the denomination, to hasten the process of shaking away those who fall short of the standard of faith the Church must display before Christ can return in glory. Ervin Taylor examines the evidence....

Adventist Mother Arrested for Her Baby's Diet (NEWS): Will courts in Florida deny a young, nursing mother the right to supplement her baby's diet using vegan sources only? The story raises issues for conscientious vegetarians....
Appeals Court Protects Parsonage Allowance (NEWS): Is the cost of housing an allowable tax deduction for a minister of the gospel? A federal appeals court has ruled....

The Least of These, the Rest of the Story (DEVOTIONAL): Amazingly, there's a whole category of people missing in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Read some of their stories here....

News Briefs November 21, 2014 (NEWS): Short news reports from around the world include the following: High-ranking Hollywood producer Devon Franklin and actress-wife Meagan Good are keynote-speaking at the Freeport SDA Church's major event in the Bahamas this weekend; Hundreds of SDA churches in North America are hosting Thanksgiving meals this coming Thursday, providing companionship and encouragement with the meal; Egyptian Adventists are shocked at the prospect of their denomination being de-listed as a Christian organization; injuries occurred at the El Cajon SDA Church when a vehicle plunged into a group of people waiting to receive emergency food; more....

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

Adventism and Arts: Series Introduction: Does God ask us to worship with our whole selves, including our bodies and emotions? What is the place of art in worship? Debbonnaire Kovacs introduces a new series on Adventism and the Arts....
From the Wilderness of Africa to Adventism, by Way of the Internet (PROSE): We have received a fascinating short memoir by a Kenyan man, titled "From the Wilderness of Africa to Adventism, by Way of the Internet." You can read Part 1 this week. Part 2 will be posted next week.....

Sunset on the Lake (VISUAL): Nels Nelson, birder and photographer, has sent us some lovely images from the Pacific Northwest. This one, of a sunset over a peaceful lake, calls to mind the old song, "Still, Still with Thee."...
Unity in Diversity: Solution Offered to Ordination Debate

By AT News Team, November 14, 2014

A region that has angered some Adventists by extending clergy ordination to women serving as pastors offered a way out of the divisive disagreement yesterday (November 13) with a suggestion for a solution. The governing body of the denomination's Pacific Union Conference, a judicatory that includes the west coast of the United States, voted a statement that endorses recent actions by worldwide and North American governing bodies and focuses on unity in diversity.

The executive committee of the Pacific Union Conference voted the statement on "Unity Through Diversity." The purpose, said Pastor Ricardo Graham, union conference president, is to support the actions voted this fall at the annual meetings of the governing bodies for the denomination's General Conference (GC) and North American Division (NAD) and to affirm the reports of both the NAD and GC study committees on the Theology of Ordination.

"We all need to focus on preaching the good news of salvation and serving the people in our communities," said Graham. "Our committee believes the best way to do that on a global basis is the way the early church did it: by endorsing different ministry methods in different parts of the world (Acts 15), and trusting church members and leaders to follow the leading of God as they develop effective ministry methods."

This statement may provide a starting point for denominational leaders around the world to come together around an affirmative vote on the question on the agenda for the GC Session next summer. Such unity would largely bring to an end a divisive debate that began in the early 1970s.

The text of the statement:

"Whereas many members and leaders in the Pacific Union Conference: Believe the Bible supports the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, while others do not.

"Whereas some local conferences in the Pacific Union Conference: Have ordained women to pastoral ministry, while others have not.

"Whereas Acts 15 records that: When faced with this kind of conflict while the apostles were still living, the church preserved unity for mission by establishing different practices for different peoples.

"Whereas the North American Division Theology of Ordination Study Committee agreed that: Seventh-day Adventists can disagree on women’s ordination and still have a ‘thorough commitment to the full authority of Scripture’ [1] and, by implication, live together in the same church in unity.
"Whereas the General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee voted: 'To affirm that in spite of the differences of opinion on the subject of women’s ordination, the members of the theology of ordination study committee are committed to the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist church, as expressed through the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.'

"Whereas the 2014 GC Annual Council action: (1) Indicated that the issue of women’s ordination is not an issue on which the church has been able to reach consensus and it doesn’t 'directly involve fundamental beliefs,' and (2) Voted to put before the delegates in 2015 the question of whether each division should be authorized to determine its own policies on the ordination of women to ministry. [2]

"Whereas the NAD Year End Meeting voted a resolution to: 'Encourage expressions of disagreement that are honest and open, based upon a sincere desire to arrive at truth as expressed in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy,' but 'to avoid participating in, or being party to, all forms of unhealthy and demeaning discourse, [and] to govern our communication according to the high standards of Christian conduct ... so that God may be glorified in all we say and do.'

"Whereas we are all committed to the same mission of proclaiming the three angels’ messages, and

"Whereas we are unified in our commitment to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the church, and

"Whereas Ellen White commented that: 'In the different branches of this great work, as in the branches of the vine, there is to be unity in diversity. This is God’s plan, the principle which runs through the entire universe.' [3]

"Therefore: The Pacific Union Conference Executive Committee stands in support of the statements and actions voted at NAD TOSC, at GC Annual Council 2014 and at NAD Year End Meetings 2014, affirming unity in diversity. And we stand in support of a vote at General Conference Session 2015 that will authorize each Division of the church to develop and practice its own policies on women’s ordination, because we believe diversity will best preserve the unity of the worldwide church and will enable the church in each part of the world to fulfill its mission of service and evangelism."

The footnotes included with the full text of the statement:

[1] “We believe that an individual, as a Seventh-day Adventist in thorough commitment to the full authority of Scripture, may build a defensible case in favor of or in opposition to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, although each of us views one position or the other as stronger and more compelling.”

[2] “The biblical example of addressing differences that do not directly involve fundamental beliefs, ... Whereas the unity for which Jesus prayed is vitally important to the witness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, ... Whereas various groups appointed by the General Conference and its divisions have carefully studied the Bible and Ellen G White writings with respect to the ordination of women and have not arrived at consensus as to whether ministerial ordination for women is unilaterally affirmed or denied, ... After your careful consideration of what is best for the Church and the fulfillment of its mission, ..."
What Are Wilson II and His Allies Trying to Do? Hypothesis 1

by Ervin Taylor and Ron Spencer, November 20, 2014

Over the past six months, as more and more statements and reports about the current GC President, Ted Wilson (aka Wilson II), have been disseminated in the pages of the Adventist Review and elsewhere, additional questions are being posed as we near the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio.

These queries have come up recently: "What exactly are Wilson II and his allies trying to do?" "Do he and his supporters have a plan or are these astonishing statements and actions just trial balloons and random talk?" "Are his pronouncements actually his own or are they being composed by others in his immediate entourage, for whom he serves as a front man?" "Does he really believe the statements that are being published under his name?" "Can anyone really be that clueless about the contemporary world?"

The one question that we feel we can address at this time without wandering into some rather nasty territory would be the question of what Wilson II is seeking to accomplish.

There are a number of possible answers. We here wish to begin with our first hypothesis and consider some basis for offering this particular hypothesis. We will consider other hypothesis in later blogs.

Hypothesis 1: Wilson II is attempting to encourage a division in the Adventist Church.

Before providing the basis for offering this hypothesis, it is necessary to clarify the term “division.” First, we do not mean an organizational division as occurred in the Worldwide Church of God or Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. There are a number of political and sociological reasons why this is highly improbable. Second, we do not mean a division involving large segments of the Church. This would involve a relatively small segment numerically, and it would be limited to small enclaves mostly associated with large educational and medical centers. Third, much of this division has already occurred. Thus, we are talking about a more public and visible division. Finally, we are not suggesting that this represents anything new about the agenda of Wilson II. His views have not changed over the last three decades. The only difference is that he and those who agree with him are in a position to operationally carry out this agenda.

The basis for this hypothesis is as follows: Wilson II has stated that he believes we are really “in the last days.” He believes that the institutional Adventist Church is indeed “The Remnant Church,” and that the Adventist Church is going to be the key element in bringing about “The End.” He also believes that before “The End” comes, “The Shaking Time” will take place in the Adventist Church. This is the real purpose of his “Reform and Reformation” ideas. He believes that “The Shaking Time” will cause all of the divisive elements in the Church, i.e., the individuals and ideas that he and his allies do not like, either to leave or somehow be caused to exit the Adventist Church. He believes that only a purified and reformed Adventist Church will be able to deliver "The Loud Cry." "The Loud Cry" will cause persecution of the Adventist Church, as the things Ellen White says will happen will start to come to pass. The only way all of these things can take place “quickly” is to force the split now, as soon as possible.
If even half of these statements are accurate representations of what is going on in the mind of Wilson II, the Adventist Church is in big trouble. One solution would be to stop Wilson II and his allies as quickly as possible, but not later than the next GC Session, before he can carry out his plans. The most straightforward way of doing that is for the Nominating Committee to replace him as GC President. If they will not do it, then let a motion come from the floor to that effect. Do we have any confidence that such actions will actually come to pass at the next GC? Not really, given the lack of political will on the part of those who have covertly previously expressed their true opinions.

We invite comments as to whether our Hypothesis 1 is or is not credible, as well as other opinions of what Wilson II is trying to do. Any and all other thoughtful ideas about what's really going on are also encouraged, as well as what might be done by the ordinary church member.

If anyone wishes to send a confidential message to Ervin Taylor and Ron Spencer with his or her reactions, email erv.taylor@atoday.org. All communications will be held in strict confidence.
Adventist Mother Arrested for Her Baby's Diet

By AT News Team, November 17, 2014

A 24-year-old Adventist woman was arrested in a suburb of Orlando, Florida, because she insisted she wanted to raise her baby on a vegan diet, according to both the local ABC television affiliate and Tech Times. Sara Markham was processed by the Casselberry Police Department but has been subsequently released and regained custody of her baby son, Caleb.

A pediatrician that Markham took the baby to became concerned because of weight loss. The doctor directed Markham to take the baby to the hospital immediately and begin the use of animal-based infant formula. The young mother purchased vegan baby formula instead and took her baby home.

Child protective services personnel were informed that the baby had not been taken to the hospital and as a result Markham was arrested and charged with child neglect. Markham follows a vegan diet and wants to raise her son on a vegan diet. She was attempting to breast feed the baby and finding it difficult to do so.

The child had lost more weight than was acceptable in the view of the physician and was considered in a condition of “failure to thrive.” It is unclear to what extent the vegan baby formula was part of the problem.

Mark O'Mara, the attorney for Markham, told the ABC television affiliate that the doctor told the mother to take her son to the hospital after she told him she was opposed to using an animal-based infant formula to supplement breast feeding. There is no information on the extent of the baby's condition because both the doctor and child protective workers have refused to discuss the case with journalists.

Despite the fact that Markham has regained custody of the baby, she still faces charges in court. "There's no case," Bo Markham, the baby's grandfather, told Tech Times. "There's no abuse. There's no neglect. There is simply a doctor who has been challenged by a mother and he didn't like it."
Appeals Court Protects Parsonage Allowance

By AT News Team, November 20, 2014

The United States Federal Appeals Court in Chicago has thrown out a lawsuit which challenged an income tax provision for clergy that has existed for decades. It could have cost Adventist pastors and perhaps the denomination millions of dollars.

The policy in question allows clergy to exclude from taxation the costs related to housing. It is called the "parsonage exclusion" because the concept dates from a time when many Christian congregations provided a rent-free home for their pastor. When the personal income tax was introduced in the United States, the rental value of a parsonage could have been considered income despite the fact that no cash was involved and the exclusion protected against this. In recent decades it has come to be simply a portion of each minister's salary that is considered a housing allowance.

Clergy generally work from home offices and often use their homes for meetings, appointments with members and other people who need pastoral care, and entertaining related to their professional role. Because of the parsonage exclusion they are not permitted to take a home office deduction as are other taxpayers in the U.S.

The Freedom From Religion organization sued key government officials because of the tax exemption, which was passed by Congress in 1954. Section 107 of the Internal Revenue Code permits a "minister of the gospel" to designate a defined portion of their compensation as a housing allowance which is excluded it from the income tax.

Clergy taxes are further complicated because the law also defines them as self-employed despite the fact that in the Adventist denomination and other faiths they are actually employees of either a denominational entity or the local congregation. As a result, there is no employer to pay half of the Social Security tax (FICA) and clergy must pay the Self-Employment Tax (SE Tax) which is double the amount of the FICA amount deducted from the paychecks of most employed Americans.

Last year a lower court responded to the Freedom From Religion lawsuit by ruling that the parsonage exemption violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which prohibits Congress from making a law "respecting an establishment of religion." If this decision were to stand it might have meant that clergy would have to pay significantly more in taxes or that denominations would be re-defined as normal employing organizations with the cost of half the FICA, etc. Either way, it would cost the church more to operate unless clergy incomes were significantly reduced.

Todd McFarland, associate general counsel for the Adventist denomination's General Conference, told the Adventist News Network that he was pleased with the November 13 decision. "The Adventist Church has a long history of a commitment to separation of church and state; however, granting pastors this longstanding tax benefit does not violate the Establishment Clause," McFarland said. "The government grants tax breaks for all kinds of people and..."
businesses."

Other exemptions, McFarland said, include teachers and professors working for educational institutions, military personnel, employee lodging for the convenience of the employer, as well as certain taxpayers living abroad. Many religious organizations have long depended on the tax benefit for the compensation package paid to their clergy in the U.S.

Pastor Ivan Williams, ministerial department director for the denomination's North American Division, said that Adventist pastors can have a decent wage from their "base pay," but depending on where they live, their cost of living adjustments are usually drastically behind and not commensurate. The parsonage exclusion gives them the ability to exempt their housing expenses from their taxable income. Williams said the after-tax benefit to Adventist ministers is estimated at 5 to 10 percent of their total compensation package.

The court ruled last week that the Freedom From Religion Foundation lacked standing to challenge the exemption because the group had not suffered damage personally. The Seventh-day Adventist denomination in the U.S. had joined a "friend of the court" brief in the case in April along with more than 30 other denominations and religious organizations.

The ruling was the latest step that began with the filing of the lawsuit in 2011. The Freedom From Religion organization seeks to eliminate any accommodation made for religious organizations and religious professionals in the legal structure of the country.
In Matthew 25:31-46, we find the familiar story of the sheep and goats. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he is depicted as sorting “all the nations” into two groups: the sheep and the goats. The division in this story is made solely on the basis of their treatment of those who are “hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or in prison.”

I suddenly realized something on this reading—where are the “least of these”? This grouping shows only those who served or didn’t serve. Where are those who were served? Here’s where my imagination went:

I was a child, seven years old. I lived in the streets of Kolkata in 1813. My stomach used to growl, but not anymore. It was so unused to food that it took emptiness for granted. I had given up, too. I sat by a wall, staring vacantly at nothing, my arms and legs like sticks. You stooped down beside me, and you gave me rice. I will never forget your eyes.


I was an angry young man in England in 606. My family had been killed in barbarian wars. All I wanted was vengeance. I learned to fight, and I did it well. I killed many barbarians. Then I killed the wrong man, a man with power. I huddled in a dungeon, waiting to die, eating nothing but my bitter fury day after day. You came day after day. I hurled curses. You prayed. I spit on you. You spoke gently to me. I was never so furious as the day you made me break down and cry.

Where do I stand? Because of you, on my way to die I looked with compassion on the hangman. Astonished, I stand with the sheep.

I was a young girl in the Appalachian foothills in 2012. I had only rags to wear, or so it seemed to me. You came and brought bags of clothes, nicer than any I’d ever seen! When I wore them, I was almost beautiful. I found a man, had a child, lost the man, found another. If I could only find one with money, I could buy really nice clothes.

Where do I stand? I grew to depend on the resources of outsiders. You had so much! You could keep giving to me, it wouldn’t hurt you. I fought another woman at a table of used clothes. She didn’t deserve it like I did. I stand with the goats, but I don’t know why. It’s not fair!

I was a woman who lived in a Bedouin tent in northern Africa in 1976. We had no water except the wadi we shared with our camels. My children were often sick. You came. You worked with us to dig a clean well. The water tasted strange. It was so clear and so cold.

Where do I stand? Because of you my family lived and grew strong. We shared our water with all the travelers who came our way. I stand with the sheep.
I was an old man, lying in a hospital in Chicago in 1998. I had the best doctors, the best drugs. They were “doing all they could.” That’s what they would say. Maybe it was true, but it wasn’t enough. I was dying. You came and sat beside my bed. You didn’t offer empty platitudes. Just your presence. Your hands. Your tears. We shared the same air, you and I. Miraculously, I got better.

I was an old man, lying in a hospital in Chicago in 1998. I had the best doctors, the best drugs. They were “doing all they could.” That’s what they would say. Maybe it was true, but it wasn’t enough. I was dying. You came and sat beside my bed. You didn’t offer empty platitudes. Just your presence. Your hands. Your tears. We shared the same air, you and I. Miraculously, I got better.

Where do I stand? After my recovery I used part of my fortune to found a new clinic. It helped many people, and I’m glad. I got the best doctors, the best drugs, the best treatments. But here’s what helped me. Every day, I sat with the sick and offered my presence, my hands, my tears. I stand with the sheep.

I am a man/woman, living in __________, in 2014. I moved to a new home/church/job, where I knew no one. I was a stranger, uncomfortable and feeling timid, even though I’m really not that timid usually... You came. You smiled and spoke kindly to me. You showed me where the copier/bathroom/break room was. You asked me about myself and my family. You listened.

Where do I stand? After you came into my life, I ________________

[Author’s note: This is a choose-your-own-ending story.]
Hollywood producer Devon Franklin and actress Meagan Good will speak will be the keynote speakers for a major event this weekend organized by the Freeport Adventist Church in the Bahamas. Several hundred young adults and teens are expected both from the island nation and internationally. Franklin and Good are married and will tell the story of their romance as well as their spiritual journeys. As senior vice president for production at Columbia Pictures, Franklin is probably the highest ranking Adventist in Hollywood.

Hundreds of Adventist churches across the United States will have Thanksgiving dinners for their local communities next week. For example, the Williston Herald in North Dakota announced Tuesday (November 18) that people "who may not have a place to go to spend the holiday" are welcome at the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 701 Second Avenue from 3 to 6 p.m. on Thursday, November 27, for "turkey, mashed potatoes, corn, rolls and different kinds of pie" donated by at least 14 local businesses and prepared by volunteers from the congregation. "This is not about the church," Pastor Peter Simpson is quoted. "It's about giving people a Thanksgiving meal with no strings attached. Everybody is welcome." The Williston Adventist group is small and a new congregation only recently begun.

Adventists in Egypt have expressed concern about a new law which may affect their status. Leaders were "shocked" by article 112 of a draft "personal status law ... which does not recognize the denomination as Christian," according to a report dated November 17 from the All Africa news service, quoting the state-run Middle East News Association (MENA) as the source. The report included a quote attributed to Adventist leaders in Egypt: "Our wise government recognizes the Seventh-day Adventists as a Christian denomination entitled to exercise its religious rituals and provide educational and health services to the whole society," and this article contradicts the state's recognition. "The denomination called upon the minister of transitional justice and the designated committee not to approve excluding them from the Christian denominations, as stated in the article," the news service stated.

At least two women were injured when a car plunged into the crowd waiting outside an emergency food pantry at El Cajon Adventist Church in the suburbs of San Diego, California on Tuesday (November 18). "A line of more than 230 people waiting for food" when a "42-year-old female driver ... backed her Volkswagen Jetta into a parked car [and] then rapidly accelerated forward and into the waiting crowd," reported Channel 7, the NBC television station in San Diego. "A 74-year-old woman and a 33-year-old woman were smashed into the wall behind them." The two women were taken to the hospital as well as the driver and a passenger from the Jetta. Volunteer Elizabeth Barnette said it was "an average Tuesday" for the food program at the church before the crash. The event is held each Tuesday from 4 to 5:30 p.m. in the church's gymnasium, Pastor Richard D. Smith told the San Diego Union Tribune. Volunteers provide boxes of groceries for 150 to 250 families each week. It collaborates with Feeding America, he said, and he called it "Soup and Spirituality" because a community worship is provided after the food distribution. Many people crowded in for prayers on Tuesday night following the accident, he said. "It has been a traumatic day for everyone." The congregation has more than 500 members and is part of the denomination's
Southeastern California Conference.

**Ground-breaking ceremonies for a 500-bed Adventist hospital in Uganda** were reported by *The Observer* newspaper this week. The Kireka Adventist Hospital "will be the biggest Adventist church project for the next five years," wrote columnist Ssemujju Ibrahim Nganda. It "will provide ... general medical services, surgery, physiotherapy and dental services," as well as specialists in "orthopedic, pediatric, obstetric and cardio-thoracic surgery, radiology, urology, dialysis, ophthalmology, etc. In truth, I don't know what all these things mean but they point to a big dream by the Adventist church. The church has more than five acres ... overlooking Mbuya Military headquarters and Kyambogo University." The new health ministry is a project of the denomination's Central Uganda Conference.
Adventism and Arts: Series Introduction

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2798/features/articles/adventism-and-arts-series-introduction

By Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted Nov. 20, 2014

During the time I have been Features Editor, I have been collecting stories of above-the-ordinary use of arts within Adventism, and I have decided to do a series on the stories I have now. If you or your church use the arts in an exciting way, please email me at artseditor@atoday.org. Note: this will likely not be a weekly series; there will be other stories and articles interspersed with it. But you will begin seeing at least one story on Sacred Arts per month, and when possible, those articles will include links to our Poetry & the Arts section for more photos, videos, etc. of the arts in question.

First, here’s a background on the subject from my own point of view.

I have always loved arts of all kinds: music, painting, drawing, sculpture, all the things we traditionally think of as artistic. Perhaps it was that interest that led me to realize while I was still quite young that lots of things we don’t think of as “artistic” actually are: cooking, childcare, teaching, designing everything from a room interior to a new piece of technology, homemaking, bridge-building… I came to believe by my 20s or so that everyone—every single person created in the image of a creative God—is artistic in some way. It’s a matter of finding that artistic expression and then dedicating it entirely to God for whatever use God chooses.

I didn’t begin to wonder—yet—at the relative paucity of arts in Adventist worship. In my youth, most sanctuaries displayed a nature scene and/or a painting of a head of Christ, and a bouquet of flowers. Most have always given some thought to lighting and color in decorating. That was about it. According to my memory (historians may correct me) it was around the time that we began to reclaim the centrality of grace, in the 70s and 80s, that some churches began using banners, at least with words like “peace” and “love” on them, often with borders, scrollwork, or imagery as well. We have always been big on music, of course (and on arguing which music or style is most or least worshipful). Choirs and individual musicians within the Adventist community regularly win world acclaim for their sacred music (though secular music can also be an act of devotion to God).

Late in the 90s, when I received in the mail one day a brochure advertising a “Sacred Arts Conference,” I experienced a literal, physical thrill I can’t describe. I had never heard or seen the words “sacred” and “arts” together, and they seemed to me to be a call to the epitome of holiness and worship. That particular church (First Friends Church of Akron, Ohio, and I’ll never know how or where they got my name) had a Sacred Arts Committee, whose mission, they said, was two-pronged: to “reclaim the place of arts in worship,” and to reach out to the artistically-minded within their congregation and outside it in ways they might embrace more fully than spoken sermons.
I went to the conference, which offered dozens of workshops in every conceivable form of art as worship, and came home more thrilled than ever. I wanted a Sacred Arts Committee in my own church! My success with this wish in the intervening 15 years or so has ranged from slight to nonexistent. For the past eight years, I’ve begun to attend a local multi-denominational church on Sundays as well as my Adventist church on Sabbaths, and I’ve learned an enormous amount about using all five senses in worship. Union Church doesn’t have a Sacred Arts Committee per se, but they do have a budget for arts, and the Worship Committee bends every effort to seeing to it that the visual experience of the church in candles, altar furnishings and so forth, the music, the sermon—every facet of the worship service—fits together around the Scriptures for that day. Their stated goal is to reach all kinds of people in ways that help those people experience the presence of God and follow that presence wherever God may lead in their lives all week.

Where are the arts in Adventist churches? They are still developing. Over time, besides all that is listed above, some churches have begun to use skits and dramas, though that remains controversial. Even more controversial is worship or liturgical dance, though I personally know nothing that is more likely to reduce me to tears of awe and I have seen this in Adventist churches occasionally.

Here is what I believe:

It is extremely likely that all forms of human arts from drawing to dance were originally intended for use in worship—true and false worship! The Bible clearly shows this. To use dance as one example, the priests of Baal danced themselves into a frenzy in a supposed attempt to reach their god, and so did the Israelites around the golden calf which may have represented the Egyptian goddess Hathor but certainly did not represent the true God who had rescued them from Egypt. On the other hand, the Psalms speak more than once about worshiping God in the dance, and in Judges 19:21ff, the story is told of the young women who danced in “the dances” for a “feast of the Lord.”

The sacrificial system set up by God used every single sense to reach the soul; sight, sound, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. The only officers were priests, Levites, and musicians, and the entire service was all about passionate, emotional turning from sin (in the sacrifice) and response to God (often in singing and/or prostrate prayer). I believe we have always been and are today called to a whole-body form of worship: in other words, to love God with all our hearts, souls, and strength, as well as with our minds, at which we Adventists already excel.

How do you worship God with your entire being? Let the conversation begin!
I was born and brought up within a non-Christian family. Neither my parents nor my grandparents had anything to do with Christianity. In 1963 Kenya gained its freedom and everything began to change, whether it was society, religion, education or the political arena.

At that time, education was based on sponsoring churches. There were Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant-based schools. In these schools one had to follow the very same fundamentals beliefs of sponsoring domination. To me, this felt like a journey to nowhere, because one was under force. Young people followed certain beliefs because of education rather than their own faithfulness. In the later years because of wrongly planted seeds, Kenya had to experience a big exodus in the church.

I joined a church missionaries’ school which was under the sponsorship of Church of Scotland, which was an outright Protestant. I had no interest in this. One reason was that our parents had our minds poisoned into understanding that any white person was an enemy of a black man, a colonizer, and all of white man’s things were bad.

My eldest sister was in a Catholic school and I would at times follow her to the church for the Sunday services. Here we were taught about the Ten Commandments and would chant them in a chorus manner.

It was during this time my uncle, Kenyan Seventh-day Adventist book evangelist Njaga wa Karanja, hit the road and started preaching inside the buses and at the market places. Many people liked and enjoyed listening to him.

I liked his ways and manners of teaching the Bible. Those roll pictures of the dragons and Daniel in the den of lions were very wonderful to me. The manner he taught the Ten Commandments created a Protestant in my soul. But no one wished to join him; a man who attended the church
on Saturday looked abnormal or even as some kind of lunatic.

But soon, I refused to join my sister in attending her Catholic church. I was young and even today, I don’t understand where the powers to engage her came from. I told her I need not go to the church to pray to their idols. From that day I parted with her.

By the 1970s a new Christian movement became popular in Kenya’s central area: the Greek Orthodox Church. Many elder people joined it. My grandfather who was a member by then tried to push me into it but I refused.

I remained for many years without being a member of any church. I continued reading my Bible and enjoyed it. Both the books of Daniel and Revelation meant a lot to me. How I hated Babylon the great! In my soul, I held the utmost respect for my uncle and his Seventh-day Adventist church, mostly because of the manner in which he could interpret the Bible. I believed the scriptures were the true word of God.

Before the 1990s, I joined the Anglican Church and become an elder, serving as a secretary for three good years. In the fourth year I resigned from this post. I feared I was getting dried up in spirit and always thinking of leadership.

It was at this time that I broke into writing and within a very short time, I become a friend of many writers and editors. Many could not understand how someone with only a standard seven education (the first seven years of education in Kenya) could be contributing such good articles. I enjoyed serving God and my community in this way.

By then I was working as a domestic servant to a white man’s family. They had many, many different kind of books and I was allowed to read any book so long I would keep it clean. I also could buy books for myself. I remained an Anglican for many years and had no desire to move out of it. But then everything changed.

To be continued...
Sunset on the Lake

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2795/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/sunset-on-the-lake

Photo by Nels Nelson  
Submitted Nov 20 2014

“…So in the stillness Thou beholdest only  
Thine image in the waters of my breast.”  
From “Still, Still with Thee,” by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Commonwealth Lake Park, Beaverton, Oregon
Nels Nelson of Oregon is a birder and amateur photographer. He primarily takes photos of birds to document species, but on occasion, takes photos of flowers or lovely scenery. We are sure you will agree he does a beautiful job with this inspiring photo. You will see more of his work here!