**NEWS**

**Video about What Might Have Happened:** Accurate History or Imagination?: The General Conference Session of 1901: Was the 1901 GC Session a gruesome failure or the launching of a new and better structure? Suddenly those controversial narratives are being thrust into the 2015 San Antonio Session mix....

**First Adventist in the White House Might be a Woman:** The wife of a prominent presidential candidate, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who has announced his candidacy for US president on the Republican ticket, is including his Seventh-day Adventist wife, Heidi, prominently in campaign activities. If Mr. Cruz is elected, she could become the first Adventist First Lady in US history....

**Pope to Visit a Waldensian Church for the First Time:**
The leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, will visit a Waldensian church in Turin, June 22, in an act of worship designed to convey his ecumenical openness. The
Waldensians for hundreds of years have refused to acknowledge any pope as possessing general spiritual authority....

**ADRA Celebrates World Water Day:** In recent decades the Adventist Development and Relief Agency has become associated in the public eye with many freshwater projects such as well-digging, distribution of bottled water at disaster sites, and other forms of water provision and distribution....

**Adventist Denominational Leaders Address Issues of Ethnicity & Structure:** A statement drafted and released by the North American Division reaffirms the NAD's commitment to "regional conferences" as the Church's standard-bearing organizational structure in ministry to black minorities in areas east of the Rocky Mountains....

**Society of Adventist Biblical Scholars in Europe to Launch at Theology Conference:** An Adventist association of biblical scholars in Europe has organized with 63 members, emphasizing in its first meeting that "Revival and reformation cannot be a mere repetition of the past."...

**Mission Trip Aims to Prepare San Antonio for World Church Gathering:** For two weeks leading up to Adventist Global Youth Day (March 21), Adventist youth and their sponsors conducted service projects, telling the public they "want more" compassion to be seen on the streets of the city that will host the Church's World Session, July 2-11....

**Adventists in Nigeria Urged to Not Vote in Election on Sabbath:** Adventist leaders in Nigeria are counseling members not to participate in elections tomorrow (Sabbath) and to make their religious convictions a decisive issue in their
Sabbath plans....

**Adventist Church in Europe: Condolences to Families of Those Lost in Airline Tragedy:** Hours after the crash of a Germanwings Airbus A320 jetliner in what increasingly appears to have been an act of operator-sabotage, the Adventist Church in southern Europe has shared condolences with family members of those who perished....

**OPINION**

**God on a Leash?:** Is God entirely and eternally dependent on the performance of the Seventh-day Adventist membership in denying or enabling Jesus' return? Columnist Dr. Lawrence Downing addresses this important question....

**Devotion: Psalm 118, Chanted:** Our last chanted psalm, Psalm 118, celebrates the beginning of Holy Week--a week of shocking reversals, from triumph to despair and back again. While you listen, consider the reversals in your own life....

**FEATURES & ART**

**God Creates an Artist--Not without Opposition:** Virginia Davidson started as an earnest young girl attending a very strict, very conservative school at Wildwood Lifestyle Center in Georgia. Today she is a stained glass artist and is
becoming known for her ampersand lapel pins and brooches, representing women and men serving God together....

**Interview with Kevin Kuehmichel, Pastor Committed to Community Service:** Mainstream Adventist churches are still the norm in the US, but now a church-planting congregation and its pastor are successfully emphasizing service in their community as a strong element of outreach. An in-depth interview....

**Amazing stained-glass Art (VISUAL):** Enjoy more of Virginia Davidson's stained glass art, with stories and answers to prayers....

**Contact:**  
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By AT News Team, March 23, 2015: A video produced for the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is designed to motivate prayer in advance of the GC Session next summer (which only convenes every five years), but its accuracy is now in question. It includes historical drama recreating events surrounding the 1901 GC Session when much of the current organizational structure of the denomination was first crafted. It conveys a traditional message among Adventists: the lack of faith among believers is delaying the return of Jesus.

Placing this notion more than a century in the past creates questions that the producers probably did not intend. “Did all the wars of 1900’s occur because of the lack of humility of the little Adventist band in the 1800s?” asked an editorial published by Spectrum, the journal of the Association of Adventist Forums, the largest organization of Adventist academics.

The moral weight of the idea that both World Wars, the Holocaust, the Soviet horrors, Cambodia and Rwanda is based on the quarrels of two or three dozen Adventist ministers in the 1890s is absurd in the view of some. On the other hand, the issue of the delay of the Second Advent and its meaning to a movement that believes that “Jesus is coming soon” is critical and central to Adventist faith.

Pastor Gerry Chudleigh, who has written previously on what happened at the 1901 GC Session and what it says about where authority is centered in the Adventist denomination today, has published a paper challenging the historical accuracy of the video. Click HERE to read the paper.

Dr. Gil Valentine, a historian on the faculty of La Sierra University, told Spectrum that the dream experienced by Ellen G. White which provides a key piece of the drama in the video is presented as having happened at the time of the 1901 GC Session but actually is documented in a letter written almost 20 months later after two major fires destroyed key Adventist institutions in Battle Creek, Michigan. These disasters led to moving the denomination’s main offices from Michigan to Washington DC, a few miles from where they remain today.

Most of the video is brief appeals from Pastor Ted Wilson, the denomination’s president; his wife, Nancy; and two of his vice presidents. The bottom line in these appeals is for Adventist believers to pray for the GC Session coming up in July this year. They express the hope that this could be a turning point for the movement and set the stage for the return of Christ.

One of the major decisions on the agenda for the July session is about the controversy in the denomination concerning the role of women and the meaning of clergy ordination. There is also a proposal on the agenda to modify the denomination’s doctrine on creation, introducing extra-biblical language. Both topics strain the unity of a movement with perhaps 30 million adherents around the world, including many highly-educated professionals and many more of the very poor and largely uneducated rural residents of developing nations in the southern hemisphere.

The implications of the upcoming session and its agenda are significant for Adventists and other Christians who care about the Adventist movement. “The appeal for prayer and heart-searching is very important even if the video’s history is not entirely accurate,” reflected one Adventist pastor who is a fourth generation church member.

NOTE: The video “What Might Have Been” can be viewed on the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Vimeo channel HERE.
Video about What Might Have Happened: Accurate History or Imaginat... http://atoday.org/video-about-what-might-have-happened-accurate-histor...
What might Have Been and What Actually Was at the 1901 General Conference Session

What Might Have Been and What Actually Was
At the 1901 General Conference Session

By Gerry Chudleigh March 21, 2015

Much is said in a recent General Conference-produced video drama, “What Might Have Been Can Be,” about how the GC session of 1901 was a failure and a huge disappointment. The reason for this failure, we are told, is that church leaders refused to humble themselves, put their differences aside and work together in unity. As a result, the Holy Spirit was not poured out on the church in 1901, and the return of Jesus was delayed.

In 2015, according to those telling this story, the church has an opportunity to do it over and to get it right this time. If church leaders from around the world put their different opinions aside this time and ask each other forgiveness for those differences, the Holy Spirit will be poured out and the Lord will return.

This paper will not address the theological issues that some have raised, but will look at the historical premise of the video, which is, at best, misleading.

Our first clue that something is wrong with the video’s narrative is found in the words of Ellen White herself. Here is what she said in November 1901 about what happened at the 1901 GC session, where many initially expected the denomination to split or dissolve:

“During the General Conference the Lord wrought mightily for His people. Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately steppings of the Lord our Redeemer. We praise His holy name, for He has brought deliverance to His people” (Review and Herald, “Bring an Offering to the Lord,” Nov. 26, 1901, p. 1 [761]).

Yet, in January, 1903, as she looked back on the same meeting, she said:

“The result of the last General Conference has been the greatest, the most terrible sorrow of my life. No change was made. The spirit that should have been brought into the whole work as the result of that meeting, was not brought in because men did not receive the testimonies of the Spirit of God.” (EGW to J. Arthur, Jan. 14, 1903.

But in April 1901, as the meetings were drawing to a close, she wrote:

“Who do you suppose has been among us since this Conference began? Who has kept away the objectionable features that generally appear in such a meeting? Who has walked up and down the aisles of this Tabernacle? The God of heaven and His angels. And they did not come here to tear you in pieces, but to give you right and peaceable minds…. (General Conference Bulletin, April 25, 1901, pp. 463, 464).

But then, again, in 1903 she wrote about the 1901 GC session:

“One day at noon I was writing of the work that might have been done at the last General Conference if the men in positions of trust had followed the will and way of God. Those who have had great light have not walked in the light. The meeting was closed, and the break was not made. Men did not humble themselves before the Lord as they should have done, and the Holy Spirit was not imparted.” Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, Page 104.
Does that negate what she wrote in April, at the close of the 1901 meeting?

“I was never more astonished in my life than at the turn things have taken at this meeting. This is not our work. God has brought it about. Instruction regarding this was presented to me, but until the sum was worked out at this meeting I could not comprehend this instruction. God's angels have been walking up and down in this congregation. I want every one of you to remember this, and I want you to remember also that God has said that He will heal the wounds of His people” (General Conference Bulletin, April 25, 1901, pp. 463, 464).

So what are we to make of this? Ellen White tells us in 1901 that every time she thinks of the 1901 session she is filled with “sweet solemnity” and “a glow of gratitude.” Yet, she says 14 months later that the 1901 session was “the greatest sorrow of her life.” For a mother who had buried a baby, a teen-aged son and her husband, this is a strong statement. She tells church leaders that God Himself “brought deliverance” at the 1901 session, healing the wounds of His people, but she says in 1903 that “no change was made” and God was unable to pour out His Spirit there, because the leaders were stubborn and proud.

What is going on? Was Ellen White wrong in her understanding of what happened at this meeting? If so, was she wrong in 1901 or in 1903?

There is another possibility, a resolution of the apparent conflict that stands up to historical examination: the 1901 session was remarkable for several startling changes that blessed the church for more than a century to come, and the 1901 session was remarkable for at least one disappointing failure that left the church forever poorer.

In 1901 Ellen White seemed to look through a broad lens at the “astonishing” successes of that session, and in 1903 she seems to have looked back through a narrow telescope at the disappointing failure, which by 1903 dominated the attention of Adventists at church headquarters in Battle Creek, Mich.

Of great importance in this discussion are Ellen White’s four words: “No change was made.” This seems to contradict Ellen White’s earlier declaration that God Himself had brought deliverance to His people during this session. And it seems to contradict all Adventist church historians, who agree that the most important organizational changes in the history of the church were made at the 1901 session. Huge changes that decentralized and distributed the church’s decision-making processes were proposed, discussed, voted and put into place, often immediately. The most significant of those changes continue today.

1. Autonomous union conferences were created. Unlike the “districts” that they replaced, the unions answered to their own constituents who voted their own leaders, constitutions, bylaws and policies. Ellen White was clear on the reason for unions: “It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences” (Manuscript 26, April 3, 1903).

2. Departments were created at all levels of church structure, and the boards of the previously independent ministries (schools, sanitariums, publishing houses, missionary societies, religious liberty associations, Sabbath School associates, etc.) were dissolved and brought under the direction of the church at local, union and GC levels.

3. The GC Executive Committee was enlarged, with representatives from around the world. (It has also been enlarged several times since 1901.)

4. The office of GC president was abolished, replaced by a chairman of the executive committee who could be (but wasn’t) replaced at every meeting. The presidency was restored in 1903.

So huge changes were made, notwithstanding Ellen White’s statement in 1903 that “no change was made.” Obviously, Ellen White’s comments in 1903 were targeted toward specific areas of church leadership where “no change was made” not toward the huge changes that she had called for and that the session delegates had actually voted and enacted.
In 2015 it is important that we understand what worked in 1901 and what didn’t work— lest we make the situation worse by killing the good things that were done in an effort to not repeat the bad.

One phrase from Ellen White ties together everything that happened in 1901, 1903 and the months in between: “kingly power.” Ellen White began her work at the 1901 session by calling for the end of kingly power. Kingly power meant that the person at the head of an organization thought it his job to make decisions for the group and to make sure that everyone obeyed his decisions. She was not impressed by the claims of a “kingly” GC president who said a committee had made the decisions, when, in fact, the GC president controlled the committee. Ellen White found kingly leadership to be contrary to the gospel and to the leadership style of Jesus. She saw kingly power in many places, including, first, dictatorial GC presidents and, second, dictatorial heads of the sanitariums, schools, publishing houses and other stockholder-owned organizations. The creation of unions solved the first problem by ending the need for local conferences to get permission from the GC for everything they did. And the creation of departments solved the second problem by placing all parts of the medical, educational, publishing and other ministries under the authority of mostly local and union conferences, with a few answering to the GC.

The 1901 session was all about decentralization. It was about moving decision-making away from individuals and toward committees, and it was about moving decision-making down the flow charts to the levels where the work was being done. The night before the 1901 GC session began, Ellen White laid out her radically changed view of the role of the GC in the now world-wide work of the church:

“In reference to our [General] Conference, it is repeated o’er and o’er and o’er again that it is the voice of God, and therefore everything must be referred to the [General] Conference, and have the [General] Conference’s voice in regard to permission or restriction, or what shall be and what shall not be done in the various fields…. [But] the work carried on all over our field demands an entirely different course of action” (Transcript of Ellen White’s comments in Battle Creek College Library, April 1, 1901, pp. 1–3).

This is particularly interesting because some people were apparently repeating parts of a statement that she herself had made in 1875, that “when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but surrendered” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. III, p. 492 {PC 422}, 1875). Now, in 1901 she calls for “an entirely different course of action.” But what, exactly, would be “entirely different” from the GC having the final word on “what shall be and what shall not be done in the various fields?”

The creation of unions almost immediately answered that question. Now, when local conferences sought wider council or permission to make changes in ministry methods, they appealed to their union, not to the GC, thus eliminating both the need and the possibility of the GC president, or even the GC committee, controlling how ministry was done in all the conferences around the world. Evidently, months later this change, which freed leaders everywhere to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, was still bringing to Ellen White “a sweet solemnity … and a glow of gratitude to [her] soul.” In the years immediately following 1901, union decision-making made it possible for the conferences and missions to continue doing the ministry of the church while the GC and health leaders were preoccupied with fighting for control of the denomination in Battle Creek.

Departments were meant to resolve the other conflict of kingly power: the battle of independent ministries to remain independent. Before 1901 almost all ministries of the church were owned by stockholders and governed by their own boards.

Nothing illustrated this conflict better than the collision of wills between the president of the GC, whoever that was at the moment, and Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, president of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Kellogg believed that Battle Creek Sanitarium was the most important part of the work of the Adventist Church and that he was uniquely qualified to make all decisions regarding health ministry. When the “San” burned in 1902, Kellogg initiated a massive campaign that involved drawing resources from every Adventist facility and organization in the world to rebuild the Battle Creek Sanitarium as an institution of international renown. Others, including Ellen White, believed the
resources of the church could be used much more wisely by spreading them around the world.

At the 1901 session there was great rejoicing at the sight of the leaders of almost all the independent ministries laying down their “kingly power,” and promising to become subject to the decisions of church committees at the appropriate levels. Through this time of rejoicing, Kellogg seems to have kept a low profile and made no firm promises. He was no doubt pleased to see the abolition of the GC presidency (for two years) because he now became the single most powerful leader in the church. He had as many loyal supporters on the GC Executive Committee as anyone did, and saw an opportunity to take control of the church along with control of the medical work. When that didn’t happen, he stubbornly consolidated his ownership of the sanitarium and the medical work.

In 1903, Ellen White and other church leaders watched helplessly as Kellogg, refusing to accept input from either the church’s pioneer and prophet or from the church’s elected leaders, took one step after another separating himself and the Battle Creek Sanitarium from the church. The loss to the church over the next few years, in terms of finances, leadership and membership, was huge. For Ellen White, the loss was also deeply personal, because she had known and worked not only with John Harvey Kellogg since he was a child, but with his parents and siblings, as well.

As she thought in 1903 about all the possible turning points that might have brought about a different ending to this sad story, she focused her attention on the GC session of 1901. If only Kellogg and his supporters had humbled themselves and entered into the spirit of the occasion—as others had done—the medical work, and Kellogg himself, might have been saved. But there was enough blame to go around. The GC leaders had also failed to treat Kellogg and his associates with kindness and humility. But, whoever was to blame, Ellen White was heartbroken.

It is in this context that Ellen White recounts the dream of what might have happened if “men in positions of trust,” “those who have had great light” had humbled themselves in 1901 and worked together (several paragraphs are omitted for space):

To the Battle Creek Church

One day at noon I was writing of the work that might have been done at the last General Conference if the men in positions of trust had followed the will and way of God. Those who have had great light have not walked in the light. The meeting was closed, and the break was not made. Men did not humble themselves before the Lord as they should have done, and the Holy Spirit was not imparted.

I had written thus far when I lost consciousness, and I seemed to be witnessing a scene in Battle Creek.

We were assembled in the auditorium of the Tabernacle. Prayer was offered, a hymn was sung, and prayer was again offered. Most earnest supplication was made to God.

No one seemed to be too proud to make heartfelt confession, and those who led in this work were the ones who had influence, but had not before had courage to confess their sins.

There was rejoicing such as never before had been heard in the Tabernacle. Then I aroused from my unconsciousness, and for a while could not think where I was. My pen was still in my hand. The words were spoken to me: “This might have been. All this the Lord was waiting to do for His people. All heaven was waiting to be gracious.” I thought of where we might have been had thorough work been done at the last General Conference, and agony of disappointment came over me as I realized that what I had witnessed was not a reality.

After recounting this “What Might Have Been” dream, Arthur L. White, grandson of Ellen and James, says, “In other references to the same experience she placed the responsibility very largely upon the leader of the medical work, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. *Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years, Vol. 5.* p. 239.

Why is it important that in 2015 we understand that, according to Ellen White, some good things happened in 1901,
while some other good things did not happen?

In the years leading up to the 1901 session, Ellen White was adamant that the local conference and mission leaders needed to take more responsibility for prayerfully making their own decisions about how to do God's work, without referring decisions to the GC. “Have those in Battle Creek been given superior reason and wisdom that God will not give those in the churches and conferences?” (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 325). And, “Has the Lord to go to Battle Creek, and tell men there what the men working in distant countries must do?” (EGW to A. O. Tait, Aug. 27, 1896. Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers, no. 9, p. 32).

At the same time, the church needed Kellogg and other “kingly” leaders, including the GC president, to humble themselves, surrender their need to control everything, and support important decisions made by other people.

So here is the danger in 2015: that some will misrepresent Ellen White’s 1903 appeal to John Harvey Kellogg and his supporters at Battle Creek as a call for increased centralization of decision-making, when they were, in fact, the opposite.

Yet, there must be a lesson from Ellen White’s counsels to GC leaders, union leaders, conference leaders, local church leaders, and leaders of independent ministries. Perhaps it is this: trust your fellow church leaders and members. Respect church processes at the world, division, union, conference and local church levels, especially at the levels closest to where the work is done. Do not act as if anyone who does things differently from you is an enemy. Pray for humility and for the infilling of the Spirit of God.

Gerry Chudleigh has worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church for more than 46 years. He currently serves as communication director for the Pacific Union Conference, though the views expressed in this paper are his own, not necessarily those of his employer.

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First Adventist in the White House Might be a Woman

By AT News Team, March 26, 2015: Texas Senator Ted Cruz announced this week his campaign to become president of the United States. His 42-year-old wife, Heidi Cruz, is an Adventist from a family with a multi-generational record of missionary service. She could become the first Adventist to live in the White House.

Mrs. Cruz has been a vice president at Goldman Sachs, a leading firm in the finance industry, as well as the mother of the couple’s two young daughters, Caroline (age 7) and Kathy (age 5). She has taken a leave of absence from the company for the duration of the campaign.

The couple met when they were both young staffers in the 2000 presidential campaign of George W. Bush. She worked as an economist on Bush’s presidential staff and then for Condoleezza Rice in the National Security Council staff, according to a profile in USA Today.

Presidential politics first captured Mrs. Cruz’s attention when she was 12 years old and read an article in Time about Ronald Reagan, reports a profile of the family by Andrew Harnik from Associated Press (AP). She would later become a Capitol Hill intern and then a government employee.

Reflecting on her family’s commitment to world missions, Mrs. Cruz told a reporter for the San Luis Obispo Tribune-News that her mission is public service. Senator Cruz has praised his wife for being willing to put all of the couple’s savings ($1.2 million) into his 2012 campaign to get elected a Senator, as reported by the New York Times in 2013.

“Two threads have been common to Heidi Cruz’s family for generations,” Harnik writes in the AP profile of the candidate’s wife. “Medical careers and strong religious faith.” Specifically, Adventist faith. Heidi is the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Peter Nelson. He is a graduate of the School of Dentistry at Loma Linda University and has done short term missionary service more than 25 times over the years.

Both of Mrs. Cruz’s grandfathers were doctors, as were several uncles. Her maternal grandfather, Dr. Olavi Rouhe, served for decades as a missionary physician in the Congo. Her great-grandfather was the president of Loma Linda University at one time, according to the San Luis Obispo Tribune-News.

Mrs. Cruz attended Adventist schools as a child. Her primary education was at Valley View Adventist Academy in Arroyo Grande (California), near her home town of San Luis Obispo, where her father has a dental practice to this day. Both of her parents continue to be active in the local Adventist church, recently raising significant funds to upgrade facilities at Valley View. She completed her secondary education in 1990 at Monterey Bay Academy, and Adventist boarding school about 150 miles north.

Her Adventist education prepared her for one of California’s best colleges, Claremont McKenna, where studied math and economics. She went on to complete an MBA at the Harvard University School of Business and a graduate degree at the Free University of Brussels in Belgium.

Mrs. Cruz’s brother is Dr. Scott Nelson, chief of pediatric orthopedic surgery at Loma Linda University. He spent five years as a missionary doctor in the Dominican Republic with CURE International, a nondenominational agency that focuses on childhood bone deformities. In January 2010 when an earthquake devastated Haiti, he immediately organized a team, chartered a plane and “sweet talked” the airport tower into letting them land. In the first week he did about 90 surgeries, his father told the San Luis Obispo Tribune-News.

He was honored with the Humanitarian Award of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons for his service in
Haiti, but he told his hometown newspaper, “The best payment I ever got was two mangoes and a hug.” He graduated from Pacific Union College in 1992 and from the medical school at LLU in 1996.

Mrs. Cruz traveled has seen her parents volunteer at missionary clinics in Africa, Vietnam, Mexico, South America, the Philippines and other Pacific islands. She went with them on some of these trips as well as traveling with them to many places in the U.S. “I think those early travels made me expansive in terms of the things I wanted to do,” Mrs. Cruz told AP writer Harnik.

Another early influence in Heidi Cruz’s life was operating a business. “She and her brother had a running bread business out at Gopher Glen Apple Farm for six to eight years when they were growing up,” her mother told Harnik. “We probably made 200 loaves a week,” Mrs. Cruz told the AP writer. “I think it definitely taught us the value of hard work. We were used to being highly productive at all times.”

Harnik reported that “beginning at age 6,” Mrs. Cruz was earning about $150 a week from the bread sales. She later used the money she saved to purchase a car and to pay for some of her first year in college. “The kids woke daily at 5 a.m., read their Bibles, practiced piano, went to school and baked bread. Lots of bread.”

About her husband, the candidate for US President, Mrs. Cruz told the AP’s Harnik, “He has an incredible heart, but he’s not the kind of person that’s trying to do what everybody wants him to do. He’s trying to do what he thinks is right, and he has an innate ability to really not worry about things beyond his control.”

Of course, Mrs. Cruz sees her husband differently than do the journalists and political commentators. “He’s always the first one to go, ‘Hey, let’s take a break. Let’s go to a movie.’ He never misses date night. Loves to play games,” she told Harnik for her AP profile. “He loves ‘The Princess Bride.’ I think that’s his favorite movie.”

The Senator’s wife knows that he has said many controversial things and there are people who hate him. She says she has quit looking at social media on the Internet. And she does not worry because “we are Christians and we have a lot of prayer.” But, “I feel there are sacrifices you make.”

The couple have an inter-religious marriage, which has become common in America today. Senator Ted Cruz is a Southern Baptist, the son of a Cuban refugee. “I come from a family that has been Roman Catholic for generations,” he told Nicholas Hahn, who writes for Real Clear Religion, “but my parents converted while living in Texas and raised me Southern Baptist.”

Mrs. Cruz has given the Senator connections with the Adventist faith. She introduced him to vegetarian cooking and he has participated with her family in things such as Thanksgiving Dinner last year. In May 2013 he was the commencement speaker at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. He “was presented with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree by Southwestern president Dr. Eric Anderson,” the Keene Star reported at the time.

“Those who know Mrs. Cruz say that she is less ideological than her husband,” wrote Ashley Parker in the New York Times (Oct, 23, 2013). “During the Bush administration, where she worked first in the United States trade representative’s office and later in the Treasury Department and on the National Security Council, she was known as more an analytical thinker than a partisan zealot.”

Senator Cruz is the first candidate in the run up to American elections next year to officially announce his campaign. The polls among voters in the Republican Party, which he belongs to, currently place other, not yet officially announced, candidates ahead of him, including Dr. Ben Carson, who is also an Adventist. News reports pointed out that Senator Cruz’s announcement was made during chapel services at Liberty University in southern Virginia, a “landmark” institution of conservative Protestants.

“Cruz’s speech had the feel of a sermon at a megachurch,” reported The Washington Post, “with the candidate wearing a wireless microphone and walking around a stage while delivering his remarks. He discussed the humble
background of his parents, how his wife is the daughter of missionaries and how he took out $100,000 in student loans that he only paid off a few years ago. He talked about the power of the American dream."

Senator Cruz has taken public positions in favor of repealing the law voted five years ago establishing a system designed to see that all Americans have access to health care, abolishing the tax collection agency of the U.S. government, taking a hard line against illegal immigration and bridging the traditional gap between church and state. His opinions on church and state appear to oppose at least some positions that have been advocated by the Adventist Church.

“It is the time for truth. It is the time for liberty. It is the time to reclaim the Constitution of the United States,” Senator Cruz stated in the assembly which was required attendance for the 10,000 students at the Christian university. These phrases have generated considerable debate this week as many speculate about what they mean.

Senator Cruz will undoubtedly be a provocative figure as the presidential election unfolds over the next 19 months. His story has a number of parallels to another first-term Senator who was elected president in 2008; US President Barack Obama. And if Senator Cruz makes it to the White House, the First Lady will be the first Adventist to preside in that high place.
Pope to Visit a Waldensian Church for the First Time

From APD, March 26, 2015: According to the agenda of a visit by Pope Francis to the Piedmont region of northern Italy scheduled for June 21-22, he will be the first pope to visit a church of the Waldenses. An information release for the news media states that first thing on Monday morning (June 22), the second day of his trip, Pope Francis will meet Waldensian dignitaries in the Protestant church in the city of Turin for 90 minutes.

The plan is that the pope and the Waldensian leaders will pray together the Lord’s Prayer. “This is a gesture of brotherhood in a new ecumenical season,” said Eugenio Bernardini, moderator of the Waldensian governing board.

This Protestant denomination is centered in what are called the Waldensian valleys west of Turin. It was founded by Peter Valdes (or Waldo, a common anglicized form of the name), a merchant from Lyon (France) who lived from 1140 to 1206 and advocated a simple lifestyle of voluntary poverty as well as other reforms. During the Middle Ages, the Waldensians were persecuted as heretics by the Roman Catholic Church.

Ellen G. White, the prolific co-founder of the Adventist denomination, wrote much about the Waldensians in her history of Christianity, *The Great Controversy*, especially in a section on pages 61-78. She saw them as defenders of the original Christian faith during a time when the established church made many unbiblical changes. She visited the region three times during the years that she lived in Europe (1885-1887).

According to the World Council of Churches, the Waldensian Church is present mainly in Italy as well as in Argentina and Uruguay, and about 25,000 members worldwide. About 21,000 of these are in Italy where the Waldensians merged with the Methodists in 1979. The denomination is known today as the Chiesa Evangelica Valdese (Union of the Methodist and Waldensian Churches).

It is likely that a number of Adventists may have comments on this historic development that has been announced. It is another of many steps that Pope Francis has taken which are understood to symbolize changes of attitude on the part of the Roman Catholic leadership.

*APD is the Adventist News Service in Europe. Adventist Today has added to the original bulletin from APD.*
ADRA Celebrates World Water Day

By AT News Team, March 22, 2015: The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, joined the United Nations (UN) and other nongovernmental organizations in celebrating World Water Day on Sunday, March 22. ADRA implements a range of projects that make water available to individuals and communities around the world.

Villages and communities around the world are trying to sustain life from contaminated water sources, because that’s the only water available,” explained Jason Brooks, Technical advisor for Water, Hygiene and Sanitation at ADRA International. The UN reported that approximately 750 million people, or more than 1 in 10 of the world’s population, remain without access to an improved water supply. “At ADRA, we recognize the importance of safe drinking water, and that’s why we celebrate World Water Day,” said Brooks.

ADRA’s water, hygiene and sanitation projects are designed to provide families with improved access to safe water sources, latrines, and education on hygiene practices that keep entire communities healthy and thriving.

In Sri Lanka, water quality is a major issue. Currently, ADRA is one of few nongovernmental organizations in the country with a high-powered drilling rig and a qualified to drill bore holes. In the last six years, ADRA has brought clean water to more than 400 communities around the island.

When communities receive access to clean water, they also receive two days of hygiene training. Facilities can only have real and long term impact on people’s lives when we also provide education and bring improved awareness,” said Brooks.

In addition to hygiene training and drilling boreholes, ADRA performs hydro-geophysical investigation, forms water consumer committees in the communities, installs hand pumps, provides tool kits, and gives maintenance and repair trainings to local community members.

Last year alone, ADRA International funded water, hygiene and sanitation projects in Armenia, Bolivia, Chad, Kenya, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic or Congo and more.
Adventist Denominational Leaders Address Issues of Ethnicity & Structure

By AT News Team, March 26, 2015: The leadership of the Adventist denomination in North America has voted a statement addressing recent discussions on the topic of how the organization deals with ethnic minorities. The statement affirms “the historical establishment and current role and function of Regional Conferences [as] structurally essential, mission effective, and relevant in reaching the diverse populations and urban centers within our division.”

The statement is in response to a March 7 event at Andrews University which questioned organizational arrangements in which historically African American congregations east of the Rocky Mountains usually are affiliated with Regional Conferences instead of state conferences in the same area. Dr. Dwight Nelson, senior pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church on the university campus, had called for some form of reunification of historically “black” and “white” conferences in a January sermon, though he has since clarified that he did not mean for Regional Conferences to simply be disbanded, with all member congregations joining the respective state conferences.

Regional Conferences were first established in the mid-1940s in order to increase the effectiveness of outreach in African American communities, given the racist policies and practices within the denomination at the time. Most congregations in Regional Conferences are historically African American, though there are a number of Hispanic congregations and those of other ethnic composition as well.

Regional Conferences and state conferences cover overlapping territory, although Regional Conferences encompass larger areas. For example an African American congregation in Chicago would belong to the Lake Region Conference and a nearby congregation of a different ethnic majority might belong to the Illinois Conference. Both of these conferences are part of the same Union Conference.

The questions about the role of the Regional Conferences have increased as these conferences have become more diverse. Two of the Regional Conferences, the Northeastern Conference in the Atlantic Union Conference, and the Southeastern Conference in Florida, no longer have a majority of members who are native-born African Americans. In fact, the demographics of the Northeastern Conference is similar to the demographics of at least two of the conferences with which it shares geographic territory. This demographic change in both of these Regional Conferences has come largely from immigration.

The complete document voted by the officers of the North American Division (NAD) of the denomination on March 25, 2015: “Affirmation of the Mission Role of North American Division Regional Conferences

“Responding to requests, the North American Division Administration voted the following action concerning Regional Conferences:

“The North American Division has been given a mandate by both God and its constituency to serve one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world. Since a request has been formally made to clarify the history and present role of its Regional Conferences, which have been a valued and integral part of our North American Division governance structure since 1944, “We resolve that: “Whereas the North American Division is one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the World… “Whereas the North American Division is presently ministering in a racially-charged society… “Whereas, the effectiveness, challenges, and history of our Regional Conferences need to be better understood… “Whereas, there is a growing number of requests for the NAD leadership to clarify the history, mission effectiveness, and cultural relevance of Regional Conferences… “Voted, To affirm that the historical establishment and current role and function of Regional Conferences are structurally essential, mission effective,
and relevant in reaching the diverse populations and urban centers within our division. “The Administration of the North American Division and the Administrations of our Regional Conferences are deeply committed to continuing our mission focus and evangelistic unity as we seek to fulfill God’s commission within our territory. “Throughout our division we will continue to seek ways and means to further racial cooperation, understanding, and growth.

The NAD’s statement did not reveal how the division will seek to further racial cooperation, nor how it will promote an understanding of the effectiveness, challenges and history of the Regional Conferences.

Society of Adventist Biblical Scholars in Europe to Launch at Theology Conference

By AT News Team, March 25, 2015: The European Theology Teachers Conference began today at Newbold College, the Seventh-day Adventist school near London, England. “We aim at launching during this meeting the Society of Adventist Biblical Scholars in Europe, with the intent of being the voice of scholarly theological Adventism in Europe and beyond,” event coordinator Jean-Claude Verrecchia told Adventist Today. Verrecchia is a principal lecturer in New Testament, hermeneutics and Second Temple literature at Newbold College.

Sixty-three people from sixteen countries have gathered at the conference to wrestle with the role of theological education in shaping the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. “Since the last General Conference Session in 2010, ‘revival’ and ‘reformation’ have become crucial words in the church vocabulary, two leading principles which should sustain its thinking and mission at any level,” states the event’s website. “Revival and reformation cannot be a mere repetition of the past. The challenge of this conference is to explore and discuss new ways of teaching theology that would help the church in its specific European context, to develop and to grow.”

Given this context, the conference motto is “Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda,” which means “a reformed church always reforming,” a phrase used by Christian reformers, Verrecchia told Adventist Today.

The academic papers presented by attendees will be published by the end of 2015 by the Newbold Academic Press.
Mission Trip Aims to Prepare San Antonio for World Church Gathering

By AT News Team, March 26, 2015: For two weeks leading to the Adventist Global Youth Day on March 21, nearly 150 youth and their sponsors participated in service projects in San Antonio. The MOREcompassion Mission Trip was planned by the Texas Conference, which "has been working towards preparing San Antonio for the General Conference this summer," Armando Miranda told Adventist Today. Miranda is the associate youth director for the Texas conference. "We wanted to impact the community before the GC event," Miranda said.

The General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (GC) meets to decide church business and elect new officers every five years. The 60th GC session will be meet in San Antonio July 2 to 11, 2015. Thousands of Adventists will gather from around the world for the event.

Taking creative lead from San Antonio's slogan, "I want MORE," Miranda asked, "More what? More compassion." Miranda said he was introduced to the Compassion movement by pastor Jose Cortes, Jr., who first promoted compassion events on the east coast.

Miranda and other local pastors designed MOREcompassion as a way for youth to serve the community during their Spring Break. "We had four areas of service plus a march against human trafficking at the end of the trip on Global Youth Day," Miranda explained. Participants from church youth groups and a number of schools—Burton Adventist Academy, Valley Grande Academy, The Oaks Adventist Christian School, Adventist Christian Academy of Texas, Burleson Adventist School, and Scenic Hills Adventist School—were able to choose from activities relating to yard work, food distribution, shelter support and toiletry distribution.

MOREcommunity involved doing lawn care in local communities. "We went with lawnmowers and weed-eaters, and we mowed lawns in the community around the church," Miranda said. "We prayed with people. Some people said it was the first time they knew there was a church there. Some of the local pastors got interests for Bible studies. So this was a way to get to know the community just by mowing lawns and talking to others." When it rained, the group picked up garbage or went door-to-door, praying with residents.

MOREfood included working with food banks and food fairs. On Tuesdays and Thursdays during the two weeks, the Durango Spanish Church and the Three Angels Spanish Church hosted food fairs. Community members came to the churches to pick up food. "On those four days I think we served close to 800 families," Miranda told Adventist Today. On the other days of the week, the volunteers supported the San Antonio food bank.

Pastor Eric Louw of the Richardson Adventist Church in Dallas explained to Adventist Today how his youth group supported the food distribution efforts. "A food bank donated a truck of food," he said, "and people from the community would turn up, give their information, and share what they needed. Then we'd load their trunk as they drove through the parking lot. At another food fair, we packed and organized food."

MOREsupport aimed at benefiting local homeless shelters and women's shelters. "We spent a few days there,
meeting people and working in the kitchen,” Miranda reported.

The final project, MOREshoes, did not go as intended. The purpose of the project was to get donations of new shoes, fill them with toiletries, and give them to people in homeless and women’s shelters. When the shoes did not arrive as planned, the youth distributed the toiletries directly.

Participants volunteered more than 1,400 hours on these various projects, according to a report Miranda posted on the NAD Ministerial Department website.[1]

In addition to these four service areas, youth also participated in MOREoutreach. “On Sabbath afternoons we went around the churches to give invitations to Pathways to Health that’s coming up on April 8-10,” Mirada said. “The city of San Antonio has allowed us to use the Alamo Dome on those three days. Volunteer doctors and nurses will come help people for free. People can come for eye care, dental care, and surgeries for free.” MOREoutreach also included distributing print materials, praying with people, and inviting community members to an evangelism series by Jose Rojas.

The two-week event ended with a march against human slavery. “Texas is second in the nation for trafficking. And San Antonio is a hub on I-10 and I-35. I-10 runs east and west across the U.S. and I-35 runs north to Minnesota,” Miranda explained. “We had the privilege of working with local nonprofits who are already dealing with this,” he noted. “We worked with The Freedom Project and Ransomed Life. We marched even though it was raining. It was wet and muddy. But we had 800 or 900 people in the march. The drum corps from the Dallas City Temple, which is part of the Southwest Region Conference, led the march. Jose Rojas came and marched with us.”

At the end of the march, representatives of the nonprofit organizations and the Adventist church spoke against trafficking. A young person from a local church also gave a statement. “She did a great job,” Miranda reported. She declared, “It is time for us to do something. Let’s not just talk about it. Let’s put aside all differences and let’s start helping others.”

Louw told Adventist Today that the trip positively affected his youth group. “One of the kids in the morning gave a devotion. He shared how the experience had changed his view on things. He realized he’s been focusing on the wrong areas in his own life. He was seeing the needs of other people,” Louw said. He continued, “A lot of my youth say they’d love to do another mission trip, so they’ve really caught on fire from it.”

Miranda reported that plans are already underway to host a MOREcompassion mission trip in Dallas next year. “It was an amazing two weeks with kids from different backgrounds, but all united for the same purpose, which was serving the community in San Antonio and making an impact,” Miranda enthusiastically declared.

With the success of the event, Miranda reflected on the value of service. One pastor told Miranda that in twenty years of ministry, he had never seen the church make such an impact on the community. “In two weeks of mowing lawns, he got more connection with the community than he had ever had before,” said Miranda. “We think there’s no other way to reach people besides preaching, but I think we should do something else before preaching. We need to get out and serve our communities.”

Adventists in Nigeria Urged to Not Vote in Election on Sabbath

By AT News Team, March 27, 2015: Adventists in Nigeria have been urged by denominational leaders to refrain from voting tomorrow (March 28) on the Sabbath. Sources in the largest African nation have told Adventist Today that some will ignore the plea of leadership; in fact some are candidates for elected office. “But a large number will not sell their conscience.”

Elections have been scheduled on Saturdays for a number of years in Nigeria. “We have been putting our case before the government for the past seven years,” said Pastor Joseph Ola, president of the denomination in the country at the time, in a 2003 news bulletin from the Adventist News Network (ANN). For nearly two decades now this problem has been unresolved.

“There is no method for an Adventist to vote ahead of time such as what is called an ‘absentee ballot’ in the United States,” an Adventist professor in Nigeria told Adventist Today. “Although Adventists have been disenfranchised for long, there has been no judicial appeals to force a change of some kind.”

This election is notable both because of the violence between Christians and a Muslim sect engaged in armed rebellion and because the two main candidates have relatively equal chances at being elected president. President Goodluck Jonathan is seeking another four-year term as chief executive of the nation and retired General Muhammadu Buhari is the most formidable of his 13 opponents.

Jonathan is a Christian and Buhari is a Muslim. Tensions between the two religions are so high, that the election was delayed for six weeks. In addition to the presidential contest, state governors, members of the Federal parliament and state legislatures are also being elected.

Two prominent candidates for governor in Abia State are Adventists; Laz Otti and Dr. Okezie Ikpeazu. Other Adventists are candidates for the Federal parliament and state legislatures in some places.

The lack of Adventist votes is not likely to be consequential, sources in the country told Adventist Today. Out of a population of 170 million, less than half a million are Adventist adherents, although there are nearly 3,500 congregations and a major university and other institutions affiliated with the denomination.

“Please pray for Nigeria,” one source told Adventist Today. “I am not concerned about voting. We need God’s hand to keep the peace.”
Adventist Church in Europe: Condolences to Families of Those Lost in Airline Tragedy

From APD, March 25, 2015: Pastor Bruno Vertallier, president of the Adventist denomination in southern Europe, immediately gave his condolences to the families of the 150 people killed yesterday in the crash of a Germanwings Airbus A320 plane in the foothills near Digne-les-Bains, in the Alpes de Haute Provence of France. “We mourn with the families of the victims of this tragic event,” he stated on behalf of the Adventist faith community. “I trust that you will find the necessary support to go through this terrible reality of being cut off from your loved ones. I grieve with you.”

International news services are reporting this morning that on the flight from Barcelona (Spain), to Düsseldorf (Germany) were two babies, two opera singers and sixteen secondary school students on a spring field trip. Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said there was a “high number of Spaniards, Germans and Turks” on the flight.

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South and West of Europe expresses its deepest sympathy and extends its heartfelt condolences to the families of all victims,” said Vertallier’s statement from the denomination’s Intereuropean Division (EUD). “We share their pain and pray that the Lord may comfort and relieve their hearts.” The Adventist Church is ready to provide assistance and support to each person affected by the terrible plane crash through its local churches and institutions in Germany, France and Spain, according to the statement.

APD is the Adventist News Service in Europe. It is based in Bern, Switzerland.
God on a Leash?

by Lawrence G. Downing, March 23, 2015: A few days ago a friend sent me the link to the video “What Might Have Been Can Be.” I watched it from start to finish. The film, without introduction or explanation, takes the viewer to a time and place removed from our era. Without some knowledge of Adventist church history, much that develops will not be understood. The video itself depicts intense and moving human experiences and response. At times, the emotions shown between the mostly men who were present at the meeting are more associated with a stereotyped perception of Pentecostalism than with the staid Adventist behavior.

The first few minutes of the video made one point clear: Had the Seventh-day Adventist believers followed God’s will, Jesus would have ere long returned. There is a logical extension of this belief: When the Adventist church does what it is called to do. The justification for this dramatic and self-condemnatory belief is a letter Ellen White wrote in which she chastised church leadership to humble themselves, seek forgiveness for disregarding God’s messages and evidence a unity of spirit and purpose. Their refusal to act in these matters hindered the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and thus delayed Christ’s return.

Consider that when Ellen White wrote the letter in the early 1900s that was the catalyst for the video, the Adventist church had fewer than 70,000 members. In 1898, as recorded in the GC Archives, the church counted 59,447 members. In 1901 the membership was 69,356. And this emerging church, thinly spread about earth, held God hostage? This struggling group, many of whom believed in and promoted the Shut Door doctrine, had the ability to inform the millions around the world that Adventist have the “Truth”? Agreed. Nothing is beyond God’s power. However, is it not arrogant, in the extreme, to promote the belief that a human organization, of whatever size and of whatever kind, holds God on a leash? No doubt, the film’s producers, and the church administrators who promote it, take strong and vigorous exception to the suggestion that they, or the church, control God. They are correct; they do not! However, the message that the viewer takes away is that when the Adventist church shapes up, and does what it is called to do, Jesus will return. Ergo, if we don’t, Jesus will stay put. That is power! And guilt? Adventists, according to this scenario that the video promotes, are guilty of thwarting Jesus Christ’s intention to return to this earth. Adventists, as atonement for our failed mission, might well don a sandwich board, one side to read “SHAME ON US,” the other side, “FORGIVE US OUR SIN.” And this is little enough penalty for the group that is responsible for the wars and travesties associated with conflict, along with the countless plagues and diseases that have afflicted humankind since the late 1800s. What group has more evil on its shoulders than the one that rejected the opportunity to save the world and its people?

For a more in-depth look at the “WMHBCB” video, read Bonnie Dwyer’s Spectrum article, “Is It Our Fault That Jesus Has Not Come?” posted on the current Spectrum web site. Dwyer consults respected Adventist historians and others as she seeks answers to the question in the article’s title. Her findings lead to the possibility that the video production placed higher priority on getting out the message than on historical accuracy. Granted, the film-maker’s role is to tell a story. Facts are incidental to the message. This is the Hollywood way. So be it. Let those who are so inclined continue to inform Adventists that God is in their control. Perhaps they had a revelation that passed us by. Our role may be to wait, and watch. We can also now and again remind people: God alone calls the shots.

The video ends with “contemporary” remarks from General Conference officials. Some credibility might have been restored to the production had the spokespeople, including the General Conference president and his wife, modeled forgiveness. Lord knows there are sufficient actions that warrant such. Care to talk about how the GC president has treated the duly and officially elected president of Southeastern California Conference? Think of the little matter of the international group that was brought together to study the women’s ordination conundrum. How does one justify the sums of money spent to reach no conclusion? No need to seek forgiveness for how GC administration spent our money with no tangible outcome? Or is it that forgiveness and humility are for the common folk? And as for the
others, the “knowing ones”? Their task is to prod others to do the difficult and ease the way for those who lead. “Lead to where?” is the question at large.

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Sharing is caring!
Psalm 118, Chanted

By Debbonaire Kovacs, March 25, 2015    The final week of the season of Lent has arrived. Palm Sunday is upon us—a time to consider the wrenching reversals in our own lives, from triumph to despair and back again. God wins! To listen to this week’s psalm, click here.
God Creates an Artist—Not without Opposition

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, March 26, 205  When Virginia Davidson’s dad retired he became interested in woodworking. He had built a beautiful table for his home, and now wanted to build one for Virginia’s home. The problem was, Virginia lived in a small house with her husband and children. There was only room for one table, and it needed to be one you could play on, sew on, make a mess on, and not ruin it. “I didn’t know what to do! Of course I wanted something Daddy had built, but I didn’t want to ruin it. And I didn’t want to hurt his feelings. I didn’t know how to tell him I didn’t want a table.”

Then she had a vivid dream. “I was back home in Mississippi, standing in the kitchen, and Dad said, ‘I’m ready to make you that table.’ I said, ‘I’d love to have something you built, but I’d rather have a desk.’ I immediately woke up, and immediately, I’m telling you immediately, the phone rang. It was Dad, and I knew what to say. Dad said, ‘Okay, you design it, and I’ll build it.’ “

The desk became a drop-front secretary with leaded glass doors. Her father asked her, “Do you know how to do that?” Make leaded glass for the doors, that is. Virginia had been making art with Plexiglas for a while, and had now begun to do sandblasting on windows, but her dream was to work with glass. “No,” she told him, “but someday I will!”

Her father offered to put in plain glass in the meantime, but she said no, what is intended to be temporary usually becomes permanent. Virginia, a true artist, could see just how it would look in her mind’s eye, but her mathematician husband hated looking at that unfinished desk. So when she had a chance to take a beginning course in stained glass for only $75, he was eager to pay for that. “I made my first student piece for my mom (she still has it), and then I did the doors for my hutch.”

Here’s the result:

And a closeup of the doors:

That was the beginning of a stained glass business for Virginia Davidson, but it was a long way from being the beginning of her art. Growing up in a very conservative, very loving Adventist family, Virginia says she’s been an artist since her early days of eating crayons. However, going to a self-supporting school in Wildwood, GA at 14 years old, she was firmly taught that only what is practical has value. If it can’t be eaten, worn, or lived in, we don’t have time for it. We must spend our lives working only for the gospel. She makes it plain that she is sure not all the leaders at the school believed that precisely, but it was what she came to believe. She gave up her art.

She could not, however, stamp out the artistry God had built into her. She began redirecting her impulses for beauty into the clothes the girls were taught to make for themselves. Later, after she finished the three-year Wildwood program, when she worked in the print shop, she was able to do a little with graphic design and attempt to make posters look appealing.

It was during this time that she knew “I had to do more with my art.” She began to take a weekly art class from nearby Southern University. Prior to that time, she says, the individual details in her art were as perfect as she could
make them, but that class taught her to see art with new eyes—to see the whole picture. She began doing abstract and impressionist art. Her Wildwood housemother “labored with her”, saying that her art was too complicated.

It was Ellen White who, in Virginia’s words, “came to my rescue.” The chapter on “Talents,” in the book, Christ’s Object Lessons, spoke powerfully to her. Two quotes in particular, from pages 328 and 329, were the core of her awakening and reassurance:

“The special gifts of the Spirit are not the only talents represented in the parable. It includes all gifts and endowments, whether original or acquired, natural or spiritual. All are to be employed in Christ’s service. In becoming His disciples, we surrender ourselves to Him with all that we are and have. These gifts He returns to us purified and ennobled, to be used for His glory in blessing our fellow men.... The development of all our powers is the first duty we owe to God and to our fellow men.”

Virginia was overjoyed. “All MY powers! And that included art! Doing something with it was my duty—my FIRST duty, no less. So by God’s grace and for His glory, that’s what I tried to do,” she wrote to me.

Virginia still had a long road to travel. From her 20s in a print shop at Wildwood, or teaching at Stone cave Academy, an affiliate of Wildwood (where she met her husband), through her years as a mother, doing sewing and alterations, she continued to learn and grow, not only artistically, but spiritually.

One of the things she credits with serious spiritual influence on her is Graham Maxwell’s audio series, Conversations about God. She says that series “helped me value not only my own self ([it’s the only thing I truly have!–the only gift I can give to Him], but also understand the freedom which is the foundation of His government in the universe. That, strange as it may seem, gave me the permission I needed to develop my art into the stained glass business....and the exhilaration of having written “Proverbs to Live By.” [Adult Sabbath School Quarterly in the 90s] Why would “Proverbs” have made any difference? It’s practical. It’s about cause and consequence, it’s about choice and freedom and responsibility. In that context, the line from Desire of Ages on p. 446 gains even more significance: ‘Subjection to God is restoration to one’s self,—to the true glory and dignity of [humanity].’ It wasn’t GOD who wanted to take away my art! It was my own misunderstanding of Him, due to the misrepresentation of Him by well-meaning people who, though honest-hearted, were still wrong.”

The owner of the largest independent realty in western Colorado, for whom Virginia did regular sewing and alterations gave her her first stained glass commission. From there, things began to take off. You can see some of Virginia’s art this week here and of course, much more on her website.

Recently, she has become known for her lapel pins and brooches of the ampersand, representing “he power of “and”—men & women serving together in ministry, created equal, called & gifted as equals, ordained as equals.” Spectrum recently did a story about her and the ampersand at http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2014/12/17/how-humble-ampersand-became-powerful-symbol-womens-ordination “Women,” says Virginia, “are not like men, and the church will suffer until both are working together.”

From being a Wildwood student who, she says, was taught to obey unquestioningly, not think for herself, to being a woman who is known for her support of such issues as women’s ordination is a long journey indeed. But Virginia Davidson’s journey is far from over. She is eager to see what next adventure God has in mind for her.

She quotes another passage from Ellen White: “Before the student there is opened a path of continual progress. He
has an object to achieve, a standard to attain, that includes everything good, and pure, and noble. He will advance as fast and as far as possible in every branch of true knowledge" (*Education*, p. 18). She said *everything* good and pure and noble! And that includes *art*! Hallelujah!–God wants me to do art!!! So I do."

Amen to that!
Interview with Kevin Kuehmichel, Pastor Committed to Community Service

Viewpoints Interview #19
Kevin Kuehmichel Interview by Jeff Boyd
Submitted March 25, 2015

Welcome to Viewpoints: Adventist Perspectives on Peace, Justice and Righteousness. Kevin Kuehmichel is the founding pastor of Walk of Faith Fellowship in Cleveland, OH. He is now pastoring the Palo Cedro Seventh-day Adventist Church in Palo Cedro, California. Kuehmichel is committed to helping congregations serve their local communities in practical ways.

AToday: How did Walk of Faith Fellowship begin?

Kuehmichel: We actually planted the church when I came out of seminary. I graduated in December 1996, and by February of 1997 I was sent to Cleveland to plant a church from scratch. There was no core group. It was my wife and me and our two children.

That was at the time when NADEI and Russell Burrill were pushing church planting. I had gone through that focus in NADEI and had been sent out to Oregon for church planting assessment. I know they’re still doing SEEDS, but Russell Burrill was the main proponent along with Don Schneider at the time.

Ohio had a church plant on the board with money, so they sent me there. That was my first assignment as an Adventist pastor. I ended up spending 17 years in the city. The stress level had gotten to the point where I needed to take a break, needed to move out of the city. I didn’t live in the suburbs. We lived in the very neighborhood where we were ministering. We bought a house within blocks of where we ended up with the church. This was kind of frontier missions in a North American large city.

We started the church primarily with young adults, many in their twenties or late teens. I was one of the oldest people in the church. We tried to start a cell church, and that worked for a little bit. We grew the church from 10 or 12 young adults to 100 within two years.

But it was very much a me-centered church. One of my struggles with the cell church concept is it became very inward focused. The young people liked the people in their cells, and there was no mission, no sense of serving their community.

We started off in a house and ended up renting a Presbyterian church. After about two years of that, I was frustrated that we weren’t doing what I consider real ministry. By that I mean serving others instead of just showing up at church, wanting to hang with your friends.

I was getting frustrated by 2001 or 2002. My wife suggested that I start doing my own community outreach irrespective of what the church was willing to do. So I did. I started to coach baseball and football. Inner city rec-league. We’re not talking about middle-class America; we’re talking about kids who primarily don’t have dads and who don’t know how to even hold a bat or a ball.

So I started doing that at the local community rec center. I did that for about a year. The other thing I did: There was
city ice rink, so I would go skate with the kids and teach them how to skate. I’m a skater. I grew up in Wisconsin. I was trying to integrate myself into the lives of the children.

Out of that I proposed to the conference and the church that we start a teen drop-in center. We rented a store front, and we put games in there—a pool table, ping-pong table, Foosball, air hockey, board games. We eventually added a popcorn machine. We found out soon that a lot of these kids weren’t getting fed well, so we started feeding them.

I got some money from the conference and some money from the union, and got some church support. This became a real outreach center. We started to have 20 to 25 youth from the community—none of these were church kids. We did that for a couple of years.

**AToday:** Did church members get involved?

**Kuehmichel:** It took awhile, but I got a number of church members to engage the youth. I tried to convince some of the men to start getting involved in these young people’s lives. A lot of them struggled to see what it could become.

When we had a regular group of 12 or 14 kids coming every night, and I kept telling church members stories about these kids and encouraging people, I did get some people to start coming. They said, “Hey, this isn’t that hard. We just have to care about people.”

We were running it five nights a week. We were open four nights a week for games, but on Friday nights we shut the games down and we did what we called Teen Talk. We talked to the kids about their lives, about gangs, the streets, school, violence, sex. We’d feed them, and just talk. And occasionally we’d introduce Bible stories or talk to them about biblical concepts.

This went on for 3 or 4 years, and then the Presbyterian church that we were renting was closing down. We had to either buy it or leave. I didn’t want the church. It wasn’t conducive to ministry. We had hardly gotten anyone from the community to come to the church. We were getting all kinds of people to come to the store front, the drop-in center.

I encouraged the church to think about moving into the store front as a place of worship and ministry. It was at that point that I lost half my congregation. Many of them wanted to move to the suburbs. They were tired of doing city work. Basically, I said, “No, I was sent here to plant a church. This is the area we’ve been working. I’m not moving the church.”

We were in that store front for about a year or year and a half. Ultimately, we found another building, which is the building Walk of Faith is in now. This is another store front that’s 6,000 square feet. This gave us enough room to have a community center, service outreach and worship.

We took the teen center with us. And we started to do community services with clothing and food distribution. We had done a little bit of that before because of the networks and the families that we started to meet. We didn’t have a lot of space in the first building, so it was rather primitive.

So we moved into the new larger store front, which is the present location. What we found was that we lost all of our kids. We moved far enough that we moved across gang lines. We had only moved 12 blocks on the same street, but we moved into a territory that kids wouldn’t cross over, so now we’d lost all of our kids. We had all of our equipment and games set up, and no kids.

But we had a lot more space now. We had to do a lot of clean up and restoration of the building. It has a full basement that we cleaned and painted and made attractive. We put our community center clothing distribution there.

We engaged with the Northeast Ohio Food Bank. We became one of their partners, and we set up a food bank. Since we were new, we went to their training and set it up according to what they wanted. A lot of food banks give a
bag of food, but we set up a “choice pantry” where people shop. Through research the food bank had determined
that it is far less wasteful to let people take what they’re going to eat rather than just give them something that
they’re going to throw half of away.

The food bank showed us what to do; we just did it. We became the poster child of northeast Ohio. In 2011 we won
the Innovative Food Pantry of the Year award. We were the first to use a computer in-take system. When the FDA
came to inspect the regional food bank, the food bank brought the FDA to our site because we were their showcase.

We started small and ended up serving over 1,000 families a month, either through our clothing or food distribution.
Then we started a hot meal program. We affiliated with the food bank, and we started serving breakfast five days a
week.

Monday through Friday we got a crew in there. I started doing it myself, slowly. As it built, I got more volunteers.
Pretty soon we hired a cook. When I started we were serving about 20 to 25 people, many of whom were homeless
or looking for work. When I left last year, they were serving around 75 people a day.

The breakfast worked out well because nobody else in the area served breakfast. Everyone else was doing evening
meals. There were some churches that were doing sandwiches for lunch, but nobody was doing a hot breakfast. We
were trying to have a varied menu every day. We would get pastries from Panera Bread. Then in the summer kids
would come to us because when school was out they weren’t getting breakfast. Cleveland public schools feed the
kids two meals a day, and for a lot of kids, that’s the only food they get.

When we moved into the first smaller storefront, the church had dropped down to about 40 members. It had gone
from close to 120 down to 40 in attendance. When I left last year there were 80 in attendance. It was truly a
community-based outreach ministry. Everybody knew we were Seventh-day Adventists. We had a literature rack
with all kinds of Adventist materials that people took left and right. We never had an issue with anybody questioning
our denomination or our theology.

One of the things that I was really pushing was trying to change the concept people have of Adventism. They see us
for the things we don’t do rather than what we are—compassionate servers of our community. In 2013 we received
a $25,000 grant from the city of Cleveland. They recognized us and our community impact. We received an award
from the mayor for community involvement.

Here’s the sad thing. When I decided to leave, I selected and trained a person to take over for me, but the
conference said they were going in a different direction. They did not put that person in there; in fact, they have not
replaced me or put a pastor in there. Ohio got a new conference president and a new secretary, and they didn’t see
what we were doing as real ministry. I do know there are four or five strong leaders still at the community center who
are doing their best to keep it going at the level we had it before I left.

I wrestled with leaving. I knew there was potential that this could take a step backward. But I have to trust that God
is in control. If this is from God, He’s going to have to sustain it. That doesn’t mean there won’t be some set-backs,
but I have to trust He’s going to take care of His work.

This happened because of a vision and someone who was pushing it. Somebody who wasn’t going to accept
anything less. The congregation wasn’t always in tune with what I was doing and why I was doing it. Eventually, I
built enough trust that they let me do things, but I didn’t have a congregation that was out pushing in the front to get
this done.

I pushed because I saw this as necessary. I’m a little discouraged with my denomination and it’s attitude toward
compassion ministries. Too often we think that if we just give people a good Bible study they should get it. If not, oh
well. There are so many people out there who are so broken and hurting that they can’t hear our message. They
don’t trust us, and they don’t know who we are. We’re not doing a very good job of introducing ourselves to them.
I have to give credit to Raj Attiken who supported me for the whole time. In fact, Raj was elected conference president the year I was sent to Cleveland. And Raj retired a couple of months before I left. He supported that ministry, did everything possible to help keep it running.

In some ways I'm an outlier as far as Adventist pastors are concerned. I'm an adult convert. I wasn't raised in the Adventist bubble with Adventist cultural expectations, so I have always been free to try different things, not feeling constrained by the cultural context of Adventism. Raj Attiken saw that and was willing to give me freedom to try some things.

I gave you the high points. We made mistakes along the way. There were times I screwed up, where there were failures. But I was encouraged to keep going, to keep trying until we found a recipe that worked. I was really discouraged when we lost all the kids, and I thought we'd failed. But we segued into a different ministry based on what we had learned with the kids and moved forward to a greater impact.

There were times I was wondering if we were doing the right thing, but it seemed that constantly we saw growth and improvement. We got baptisms. They were not quick baptisms. They usually took a long time. But those people didn’t leave out the back door because they felt connected to the church and they had a purpose. They weren’t just baptized; they were given jobs to do. They understood the ministry and why we were there.

Much of what I’ve learned about community ministry and activism came through participating in the lives of the people who I was sent to serve. I realized that I can’t teach them about the “2,300 days” if they don’t trust me and don’t know we do this because we love Jesus and we love them.

**AToday:** To clarify, in the second storefront, the larger one, you met there for church and did community ministry in the same space?

**Kuehmichel:** Yes, there were 3,000 square feet on the main floor in which we had our eating area, which eventually became where we served our hot meals, and we had our worship area. There were 3,000 square feet in the basement that people originally thought was unusable. But after we cleaned it, painted it, put lighting in, fixed some water leaks—half of that is the food pantry and half is for clothing, kind of a traditional Dorcas clothing distribution.

The other thing we did was change the schedule. People in the city weren’t coming to church, so I started asking questions why, and a lot of them don’t get up until noon. So I said, we’re going to start church later. We’re going to have a meal every Sabbath, and we’re going to feed the community, and we’re going to have Sabbath School after the meal. We had a Sabbath potluck every week, and we invited the community. After the potluck we invited them to stay for Bible study. So we flipped some things around. It seems so simple, but eyebrows were raised.

I wanted to make it meaningful for the people we were trying to reach. In effect, we were feeding the community six days a week if you count Sabbath potluck. We routinely had between 25 and 40 people show up for Sabbath potluck. Invariably, people would sit around and talk, and we’d start the Bible study in the adjacent area. They could hear everything, and they’d come over and sit in and listen. We’d give a Bible to them.

Now when you do this kind of ministry, you can’t use the *Quarterly*. The people who visit are not going to read ahead, are not going to study their *Quarterly*. So we would just open a passage of the Bible and talk about it. Anybody could come in anytime and still get something out of the lesson. We changed everything, including how we do Sabbath School so it would be relevant to the people who were coming in.

**AToday:** So was the main church service before the potluck?

**Kuehmichel:** The worship service would start about 11:30 or 11:45, and potluck started at 1:30pm. People would start coming in at noon or 12:30, and they’d sit in the eating area, listening to the sermon. We still had worship before the meal, but we moved it closer to their schedule than or own.
AToday: Even small changes like that can be very difficult in some congregations.

Kuehmichel: That is because church is for them; it’s not for others. Until we understand that what we do is for the lost and not for our own personal needs, you won’t see any changes.

My son’s generation is ripe for this kind of ministry. They want social interaction. They don’t want cookie-cutter approaches. But it’s the very thing that’s the most difficult to do in our church right now. I really believe if we would allow people to do this, I think we’d see more young people getting engaged in church and feeling a part of it.

AToday: What would you like to say to pastors or laypeople who are interested in pursuing community service ministry like this?

Kuehmichel: I’m learning right now with this change of venue how difficult it is to do this kind of work in traditional churches. I have already tried to move them to this and have received a lot of push-back because of the comfort issue. I’m moving them out of their comfort zone. When they interviewed me, I told them I was going to be out of the box. They were excited, but I don’t think they really understood what this meant. I have made a number of people very uncomfortable.

The opposite side is we’re seeing people coming out of the woodwork who are starting to come back to church. They’re being drawn to these very real ministry concepts about how we serve people. I did get the church to start a Celebrate Recovery outreach.

So this is not an easy thing to do, especially in an established, more traditional Adventist context. I think that this kind of thing really works well with church planting—we need to start planting some unique congregations.

I would suggest that nobody should have to go into a city alone like I did in Cleveland. I think that’s too stressful. There should be at least two ministers sent to start a church. I know that raises the dollar level, but it definitely will help with the stress level of the people building it.

I don’t want anyone to think that this kind of ministry is easy. It’s not easy from the context of the people you serve, nor is it easy trying to change attitudes of people who are already in the church. You’re going to get pushed from both sides. But I think it’s necessary.

And what I did in Cleveland with Walk of Faith is not totally reproducible in other areas. You have to find your niche in your context. We found a need, and we tried to figure out the best way to meet that need. Some of the things I did in Cleveland are not going to relate to the people in the community where I am now. The basic concepts will—caring about people, finding a place to serve them—but you have to find out what the needs are.

The other thing I learned in the city was collaborative ministry—working with other agencies. One of the reasons that we became so successful is that we partnered with other people. We partnered with the food bank, the city of Cleveland, the Salvation Army. We didn’t see them as adversaries or competitors; we tried to find a way to fill in the gaps that the other agencies weren’t doing. In order to do that, you have to network with them. In doing that, we gained a lot of respect because they didn’t see us as competitors trying to take away their clients or their ministry context.

For instance, my church here in California wants to start a Vacation Bible School. We haven’t had one in quite a while. The first thing I said was to go around and check the other churches and make sure we’re not doing it when they are. We are not going to compete with them. So the VBS leaders called all the churches, and we found a time for ours. Now those churches can support us instead of thinking we’re trying to take their kids away. This isn’t something we’ve traditionally done because we tend to operate in isolation. That was a valuable lesson I learned in the city—you’re not alone. If you’re doing ministry and someone else is doing ministry, they’re not your enemy. Figure out how to work with them.
I know there are a lot of pastors who feel frustrated. Some of it is frustration because they don’t know what to do or how to do it. And some feel frustrated because of the push-back from some of the stronger personalities who refuse to give permission.

I’ve had pastors ask me how I did it. I just did it. I didn’t ask permission. I don’t need the congregation’s permission to do ministry. Sometimes you need permission to get the money, but I don’t need the congregation’s permission to go and do coaching. It didn’t cost the congregation anything. It took my time. They’ll get over it.

A pastor recently asked me how I get away with doing creative ministry. He said his church board won’t approve of anything. I said, I don’t let my board hold me back. With money I have no choice; I ask them for the money. But you have to stop the board from controlling what the church does.

Again, that’s an issue with young people. The control lies with the oldest generation. And the oldest generation is comfortable. They want their kids to come to church, but they don’t want to give them any freedom, and they don’t want to give them any money or responsibility—just come to church. Young people want to be actively engaged, and if the church leadership keeps saying no, it’s no wonder why our kids are walking out the back door.
Stained Glass to the Glory of God

Photos by Virginia Davidson; words by Debbonnaire Kovacs, March 26, 2015

Virginia Davidson says one of the best things about her life as an artist is the answered prayers. When she had the idea for this dragonfly portrait, she knew just which piece of glass she wanted for the background. She was hunting and hunting through her scraps, and finally said, “Please, God, you have to help me find this!” She says she immediately felt God saying, “What do you have in your hand?” She looked down, and recognized the piece in her hand was even more perfect than the one she’d had in mind—it even had ripples, like water!

This is also the first piece where she began to engrave under her name, “Soli Deo Gloria,” which she now puts on all her pieces. It is, of course, Latin for Solely to the Glory of God, and of it Davidson says, “It’s my ‘quality control.’ Anything that has His name on it has to be my best work!”

Another answer to prayer came with her second commission. She was asked to create a set which included lights over a door and down both sides. The sidelights were so tall that they would require the leading to be stabilized by zinc, which is stronger. So, for the first time, Virginia bought a spool of zinc. It looked a little funny, so she asked the sellers if it was all right. “Oh, yes,” they assured her, “it’s fine!”

Well, it wasn’t fine. It was oxidized, which would make it unusable. Virginia tried cleaning it with several different things, but was in despair when she asked God what to do. The instant idea in her mind was “Whink,” a serious rust and iron stain remover she had in her cleaning supplies. It worked in seconds, and her commission came out beautiful, as you can see from this square transom that is part of the set.

When Virginia was a girl, the school’s idea of art was to have the kids print memory verses on 3 x 5 cards in different colors of colored pencil. They would tack these up on the walls. One day, Virginia had an epiphany. “I realized I knew they were there but they were ugly to my senses, so I subconsciously tried not to see them. So the difficult lesson for me was, if something is ugly, I’m going to try not to see it. If I want something to be significant in my life, then I should put it into a piece of art that I’m going to enjoy, that my eyes will be drawn to. So way back then, as a freshman, a phrase from Ellen White gripped me: “Real greatness can dispense with outward show.”

“As a kid, I was very show-offy, without the inhibitions other kids had, and not at all like the demure girl I was supposed to be. This quote gripped me and made me realize, I don’t need to be a show-off. I want to be great—really great, but I don’t have to be a show-off in order for people to see it. Jesus said let your light shine, he didn’t say make it shine. So for years, I asked myself, what medium did I want to use, to make this so I could have it on my wall and it would really keep my attention.”
Years later, after learning to do sandblasting on Plexiglas, she began to use sandblasting on mirrors, which she says was an important transition to becoming comfortable with glass for the works she creates today. She made this quote for her own house—and for her own heart.
To see more of Virginia’s work, to order any, or to order your ampersand (Women & Men Serving Together) lapel pin or brooch, visit her [website](http://atoday.org/stained-glass-to-the-glory-of-god.html).