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Controversial Sexuality Conference Canceled in London

By AT News Team, April 15, 2015: Seventh-day Adventist organizers have canceled the Holy Sexuality Conference, which was scheduled to take place in London at the end of April. Presenters from the United States were to speak on conversion therapy, a controversial counseling approach aimed at changing a person’s sexual orientation.

The event's website originally stated: “Those who attend the conference will be able to hear the powerful stories and journeys of individuals who have gained victory and healing from same-sex attraction and are now faithful Seventh-Day Adventist Christians,” according to Pink News. Adventist Today could not verify this description because it has been replaced with a statement describing why the gathering was canceled.

Speakers were to include Mike Carducci, Wayne Blakeley and Danielle Harrison, reported Mashable.

The event attracted significant negative attention, including a Change.org petition opposing the conference. More than 40,000 people signed the online petition, which argued that the event would “promote the dangerous view that homosexuality is something to be cured.”

Seventh-day Adventist church leaders in the United Kingdom released the following statement:

“A decision was taken on Monday, 13 April to cancel the ‘Holy Sexuality’ Conference originally planned for London, 21-25 April 2015.

“Seventh-day Adventists are a people of peace who believe in hope and dialogue. However, it appeared that rather than drawing people together the conference had the potential to divide. The Adventist Church recognises that the individuals invited to speak at the Holy Sexuality Conference have compelling life stories to share but equally appreciate that there are those who take a different point of view.

“We are disappointed that in a society that values freedom of speech and divergence of opinion that there are those whose wish it is to silence individuals who hold a different point of view to their own. We do not believe that the potential disruptions that were being planned for this event would have been beneficial either to the participants or to our friends in the LGBT community. As such a decision has been made to cancel the event which had been locally organised by a group of members in the South London area.

“The Adventist Church strongly subscribes to a belief in freedom of speech. This also includes the freedom to hold different views. The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus, recognising that every human being is valuable in the sight of God.

“As a Bible believing Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms the dignity of all human beings, and as a Church is well known for its commitment to community work both globally and locally in London.”

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Summit on Race and Justice Held at Andrews University

AT News Team, April 13, 2015: On Saturday evening (Apr 11), Andrews University concluded its fourth annual Summit on Social Consciousness. This year’s theme was race and justice in America. The four-day event included nightly meetings, each addressing different facets the theme.

Pastor Jose Bourget, associate chaplain at Andrews University and associate pastor at Pioneer Memorial church, told Adventist Today why he believes the topic of racial justice is important. “Christianity thrives when it follows in the steps of its namesake,” he said. “Engaging the conversation on race is at the heart of healing in an area where humanity has caused great and lasting injury. By beginning to listen for the sake of understanding, like we did this weekend, we are taking the first steps that promote restoring dignity to humanity that Christ modeled.”

On Saturday afternoon Paul Buckley, Ph.D., the keynote speaker for the summit, addressed questions of racial identity, the social meaning of racial attribution, and the white frame of racial discourse in the United States. By looking at eras of discourse on race—slavery, Jim Crow, desegregation, and others—Buckley demonstrated how racism has manifested differently throughout United States history. While some assert that U.S. society is now in a post-racial era, Buckley described how colorblindness has actually cut short important conversations about race. That is, people are not able to talk about something that they must publicly pretend not to see.

Buckley concluded with a consideration of the Sabbath commandment and its connection to justice. In the commandment itself, Buckley noted the call to community, where all have equal right to rest. Next, Buckley drew on Isaiah 58, noting that work for justice precedes finding delight in the seventh-day rest.

Given these two biblical passages, Buckley called Adventists to broaden “Sabbath discourse” in order to expand beyond only attempting to prove which day is the Sabbath. He argued that to fully enter and experience God’s spiritual and physical Sabbath rest, we must spend the prior six days working for a more just world. Because justice is central to the Sabbath and the Sabbath is central to Adventism, Buckley called church members to recognize that justice is central to Adventist faith.

Following Buckley’s far-reaching presentation, five topics were available for those who stayed for the break-out session. Karyle Barnes, who was raised near Ferguson, MO, shared what he learned from the killing of Michael Brown in August 2014. Wendorah Thompson spoke about the health outcomes among minorities. Robert Bailey addressed race consciousness. Nicholas Miller presented on emerging legislation relevant to racial issues. Finally, Twyla Smith and Shannon Trecartin taught about white privilege and microaggression.

White privilege was also the main topic on Friday night, where Alex Angellakis interviewed Steve Yeagley, assistant vice president of student life at Andrews University. Yeagley compared white privilege to a backpack that is invisible to the carrier but that is quite evident to other observers. To demonstrate that being on the receiving end of systemic imbalances is not a personal indictment, Yeagley shared an analogy used by Jeremy Dowsett—how roads in the United States favor cars over bicycles. He argued that cars should use their status to watch out for bicycle riders rather than ignoring them or feeling guilty for having greater access to the pavement.

In this context, Yeagley looked at troubling characteristics, both past and present, within American Adventism. First, he share the Adventist media of his youth, showing pictures of white children with a white Jesus in *Uncle Arthur’s Bedtime Stories* and other books. He also commented briefly on the racism that contributed to the formation of Regional Conferences in the 1940s. 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.

Yeagley pointed out that some Adventists too often wish to set aside problems and wait for them to be fixed when
Jesus returns. “Focus on finishing the work so Jesus can return,” it is said. Yeagley asked the audience to consider what work it is that Adventists must finish? Does it not include overcoming prejudice and bigotry? He asked why Adventists so often “punt our problems to the Second Coming.”

Yolanda Clarke was recently noted in the *Adventist Review* as playing a musical role in the 1963 March on Washington. Yeagley pointed out that Adventist church leaders at the time actually discouraged members from getting involved with the civil rights movement. Furthermore, he argued that today many Adventist institutions with diverse memberships have predominantly white leaders.

Yeagley concluded with a call to action. Adventists, he argued, should *leave* their comfort zones by entering the social context of others, *listen* in conversation with those who are different even when it is uncomfortable, *learn* by educating themselves, and *love* “the other.”

While the weekend meetings focused on key speakers, the first two nights of the summit used other formats. On Wednesday evening, a panel of seven male university students shared their experience of race in the United States, with questions primarily addressing their experience with the police. Andrews University chaplain Michael Polite moderated the conversation.

The panel consisted of participants with backgrounds in South Africa, Canada, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and the United States (with both European and African descent). Summit coordinator and Andrews University social work professor Twyla Smith explained to Adventist Today why only men were selected for the panel: “We keep talking about the experience of young men, but we rarely hear from them.”

On Thursday, attendees watched a video of Michelle Alexander speaking about mass incarceration. Alexander’s speech was based on her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The skewed approach of the War on Drugs and the resulting imprisonment of Black men with the enduring label of “felon,” formed the basis of her argument about the separation and control of African American communities—the New Jim Crow.

The topic for next year’s Summit on Social Consciousness has not yet been announced.

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Sharing is caring!
Six Thousand Get Health Aid Last Week from Adventist Volunteers in San Antonio

From ANN, April 14, 2015:  A total of 6,192 people received services during a three-day event in a San Antonio (Texas) stadium last week. Torrential rain on Friday morning did not stop more than 1,700 doctors, dentists, and other volunteers from seeing hundreds more patients as they wrapped up three days of work in a “mega clinic.” Organizers estimated that the free services provided were worth more than $10 million.

“The event was a tremendous success,” Costin Jordache, spokesman for the event, told the Adventist Review.

“1,700 Seventh-day Adventist Christians from around North America have just saturated the city of San Antonio with the tangible love of Christ, and have brought hope and healing to over 6,000 of the city’s residents,” Jordache said. “We couldn’t be more thrilled.”

The clinic sought to introduce residents of the Texas city to the Adventist denomination in advance of the General Conference Session that will be held in the same stadium in July. It drew significant local media coverage and an outpouring of warm words from grateful patients and San Antonio Mayor Ivy Taylor.

“Great visit yesterday at Your Best Pathway to Health event currently being held at the Alamodome,” Taylor tweeted a couple hours before the clinic closed on Friday afternoon. During a tour Thursday, Taylor visited with volunteers and spoke with patients standing in a long line snaking around the building.

“I want to thank the Seventh-day Adventist Church for bringing this wonderful resource to our community,” she said in an interview videotaped by the North American Division, a co-organizer of the event. “You can see how many people are here to take advantage of the free healthcare.

Crunching the Numbers

People started lining up at noon Tuesday, well before the free clinic opened at 7 a.m. Wednesday, and hundreds waited outside the next two nights. The mayor had asked that the project see at least 6,000 people in exchange for waiving the usual fee for the use of the stadium.

The volunteer group exceeded expectations by seeing 2,617 people by the time the doors closed at 4 p.m. the first day. A total of 2,025 people went through the second day, and 1,550 the third day, when the clinic operated at 2 p.m. Friday. Surgeons performed a total of 360 surgeries, including 300 simpler ones at the Alamodome and 60 more at the Central Texas Medical Center, a part of Adventist Health System, a co-sponsor of the event.

Your Best Pathway to Health is now gearing up for its third major event in Spokane, Washington. The August 3-4 clinic will coincide with an annual ASI convention that will be held in the city of 200,000 people. Organizers have not determined yet how many people might be served in Spokane. The first free “mega clinic” that the group organized provided nearly 3,000 people with $5.2 million in health services in San Francisco and Oakland, California, in April 2014.

Frustration and Gratitude

Staging the enormous event in San Antonio passed without a hitch, although several people wrote to the Adventist Review to express frustration about the long lines and perceived lapses in communication. “The event was really unfair to people waiting at the dental line,” one person wrote Friday in response to advance coverage of the event. “People wait[ed] hours only to [be] told slots were take[n] up by the other line.”
The waiting lines were divided into two: one for dental and the other for medical care. The dental line was significantly longer on all three days. "Waited in line from 5 a.m. to 1 p.m.," another person wrote. "It took them a while to inform everyone that they weren't taking any more patients. … Maybe next year."

Jordache said volunteers did their best to coordinate the flow of thousands of people and alert those at the end of the lines well before closing time each day that they weren't likely to receive treatment. Volunteers told those unlikely to get their desired treatment about the services with shorter waiting lists and encouraged people to consider switching to a different line.

Many patients, however, were filled with gratitude, including a 60-year-old woman who wrote to the Adventist Review to offer "a huge thank you. … I needed health care and glasses, and am extremely happy and grateful with the care I received," said the woman, who gave only her first name, Celia. "I am age 60, have no health insurance & live on very low income now," she wrote. "I have searched in vain for low cost health care in the area but was unable to find any. Just want you to know your kindness and help is very much appreciated."

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.
Voice of Prophecy Opens New Headquarters in Colorado

By AT News Team, April 15, 2015: The Voice of Prophecy radio ministry has opened a new headquarters facility in Loveland, Colorado, with a grand opening that brought together civic and denominational leaders. It now leases offices for its staff of 32 in a Chase Manhattan Bank building at 255 East Sixth Street in this outer suburb north of Denver.

Started in Los Angeles in 1929 by Pastor H. M. S. Richards, who became one of the most well-known Adventists of all time, the organization conducts a Bible school that provides studies via the Internet and by correspondence as well as producing several radio and television broadcasts. It moved out of the Adventist Media Center in Simi Valley, California, after the denomination’s North American Division decided to disband the center which housed several ministries.

The decision to put the offices of the ministry in Loveland was, in part, a practical decision about the lower cost of doing business in Colorado as compared to southern California. It was also in part because Richards was a Loveland resident a century ago, graduating from nearby Campion Academy, an Adventist secondary school, in 1914. An Adventist elementary school in Loveland is named after Richards.

The Voice of Prophecy is regarded as the forerunner of broadcasting by Adventists. Richards has been honored by the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) for helping to start Christian broadcasting in the United States.

Pastor Shawn Boonstra, current director of the Voice of Prophecy, said, “We brought this ministry back home,” during the ribbon-cutting ceremony late last week. The event brought together a crowd of about 300 local civic leaders, members of the Loveland Chamber of Commerce, and local Adventist believers.

“For our church in this region, the Voice of Prophecy is more than a place on the map,” said Pastor Ed Barnett, president of the denomination's Rocky Mountain Conference. “We are excited to officially welcome them as partners in mission.”

From a news release by Rajmund Dabrowski, communication director for the Rocky Mountain Conference.

Sharing is caring!
From The Visitor, April 16, 2015: New standards for audits of the finances of local congregations in the Adventist denomination are being implemented for the first time in the Columbia Union Conference. Local conference treasurers and auditors got the first training in the new requirements and procedures last week at the denomination’s office for the eight conferences that stretch from the coastal states of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia across Pennsylvania and West Virginia to Ohio.

“The new standards we are using meet national standards for financial reviews,” said Seth Bardu, treasurer of the union conference. “They meet the professional standards for what is called a ‘review.’ We have enhanced the review with some audit procedures to make sure the work done at the local church level is strong and reliable. The wealth of the Adventist Church originates at the local church so we wanted to put more resources into making sure all funds are accounted for.”

The Adventist denomination has a more centralized financial system than any other Protestant body in North America. Members are asked to give ten percent of their income into a Tithe Fund that is the primary source of operating income. It is shared between the local conference that uses about 85 percent of the total fund, paying the salaries and benefits of pastors, faculty in church schools and conference office staff. Another 15 percent goes to the union conference, the world divisions and the General Conference and about half of this pays the salaries and support of international missionaries.

Because so many ministries and institutions depend on tithe and offerings turned in through local congregations, the auditing process is essential to assuring the integrity of the system. In the Adventist denominations the congregations are not incorporated and have no legal standing, so any legal repercussions from financial misconduct come back on the denomination.

Bardu told The Visitor that the union conference executive committee approved the new standards in November. He stated that the Columbia Union Conference is the first organizational unit of the denomination worldwide to create standards for audits of local congregations.

Rodney Brown, an auditor for the Pennsylvania Conference who participated in the training last week, said the standards show increased professionalism in the denomination’s auditing process. “It shows accountability and that we’re all together on one page,” he stated. “It will also show that the [volunteer, local church] treasurers are doing a good job, and they’ll be able to show donors that their money is going where it should go, according to church guidelines.”

The session last week was the first of two training events. The second training session will take place in the fall. The eight local conferences will each be required to be in compliance with the new standards by January 2016.

Similar training and a process for implementing the new auditing requirements will be scheduled in all of the union conferences around the world over the next few years. The international denomination has 125 union conferences in total including those technically classified as “union missions” and “unions of churches” in the bureaucratic nomenclature of the organization.

This story is based on a news bulletin from Beth Michaels, editor of The Visitor newsletter published by the Columbia Union Conference of the Adventist denomination.
New Standards for Auditing Congregational Finances Implemented First ...
http://atoday.org/new-standards-for-auditing-congregational-finances-im...

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Sharing is caring!
Why Bother with Church?

by Mark Gutman, April 16, 2015: In 1958, Lawrence Kohlberg proposed a theory of six stages of moral development, with stages divided by how people dealt with moral dilemmas that he proposed. His six stages are evenly spread through three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional autonomous (or principled).

In 1981, John Fowler, in *Stages of Faith*, also described six stages of a developmental process in “human faith” that people pass through. For example, stage three: (synthetic-conventional) individuals tend to have conformist acceptance of a belief with little self-reflection on examination of these beliefs. Most people remain at this level. Those individuals who move to the fourth stage of faith (individuative-reflective) begin a radical shift from dependence on others’ spiritual beliefs to development of their own.

You get the idea. We start out as infants doing (mostly) what we are told to do and what we see others do. As we get older, we start to think more for ourselves and follow some of our own rules. But, according to Fowler and Kohlberg, we quit our development too early, as they place most adults in levels 3 and 4.

As you can imagine, those of us who have reached level 6 in Fowler’s and Kohlberg’s stages struggle trying to deal with the quitters, who, of course, make up the majority of the community and the church. We’ve been through the lower levels ourselves at one time, so we understand why people can be down there.

But when it comes to going to a church filled with members of inferior, er, lower levels, we level sixes often have a hard time. Preachers’ primitive reasoning and Sabbath School classes’ illogical and irrelevant observations can be hard to put up with. You might remember hearing that “It’s hard to soar like an eagle when you’re surrounded with turkeys.” That’s what it feels like to mix with people who haven’t read the deep theological and philosophical works I have. Imagine asking Novak Djokovic, currently the world’s number one tennis player, to spend his time practicing with high school tennis players! It would weaken his game. Don’t expect me to lower my standards!

There’s another kind of level six. Not a brain kind, but a morals kind. You know – doctrinally and lifestyle-wise, they dwarf their peers. When it comes to the sanctuary doctrine, how to dress, what to eat, how to keep the Sabbath, they “have it all together.” They are able to detect when the preacher or elder is slightly heretical (which leads the congregation downhill), when the potluck or social doesn’t comply with *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, and how the church’s toleration for sin is increasing.

Level sixes of the intellectual or moral kind often separate themselves from lower-level people. Why taint themselves or waste time (to quote Jesus) throwing their pearls before swine? Besides, they can get a much better church service by watching certain TV channels. Better music. Higher quality of sermon. Less contamination.

But before you toss church because the members aren’t up to your level, keep in mind that churches (congregations) offer friendships that may be hard to find elsewhere. The world is full of lonely people. “Loneliness is a serious health risk. Studies of elderly people and social isolation concluded that those without adequate social interaction were twice as likely to die prematurely. The increased mortality risk is comparable to that from smoking. And loneliness is about twice as dangerous as obesity.” Having social ties is the single best predictor of a longer, healthier, more satisfying life.

Church members work together in social events and sharing events. Churches where I have held membership feed the homeless, provide a free medical clinic, and take Sabbath afternoon walks together. Many who feel lonesome or unwanted would feel better if they spent more time with a church group.
It's hard to improve spiritually in isolation. In a chapter titled “Religion Is a Team Sport,” Jonathan Haidt reports that research by Putnam and Campbell found that “[t]he only thing that was reliably and powerfully associated with the moral benefits of religion was how enmeshed people were in relationships with their co-religionists. It’s the friendships and group activities, carried out within a moral matrix that emphasizes selflessness. That’s what brings out the best in people.”

Then there’s the record of Jesus. Luke 4:16, Message, tells us, “As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place.” If Christianity is a matter of believing the right doctrines, I can stay at home and build my ivory tower even bigger. If Christianity is a matter of following the teachings and actions of Jesus, meeting with other less devout or less informed human beings seems to be part of the program. In fact, the people that he met with in Luke 4 tried to kill him! OK, so he needed to start meeting with a different group. I doubt if he stopped his practice of going to a meeting place on Sabbath.

If Jesus, who must have ranked as (at least) level 7, could meet with others who were scattered through the lower levels, who am I modeling when I keep my distance? Jesus told one of his parables specifically for “some who were complacently pleased with their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people” (Luke 18:9, Message). Alternate “moral performance” with “intellectual level” and you’ll get a picture of self-ranked level 6’s.

Ellen White describes how Jesus mixed. “Our Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’” You might say that his focus was (with apologies to John F. Kennedy), “Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church.” The least you can do is help those poor folks.

When I go to church and meet with human beings who aren’t as smart, logical, or devout as I am, I’m following in the footsteps of Jesus. Isn’t that what Christianity is all about? Only I, unlike Jesus, might discover that my smartness is pretty narrow. That my logic has some holes in it. That some members are more loving or sympathetic than I am. That my braininess or spiritual eliteness can benefit from my mingling with others.

Paul urged liberals and conservatives (or the “weak” and the “strong”) to work together “for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19). Getting together with others to help a family recover from a fire or a flood can help more than just that family. As I work together with Level 3 and 4 people, I may discover that they have some traits that I wish I had, some experience in life that has taught them lessons I’ve never thought of. By the way, levels 3 and 4 can look askance at Level 6, so Paul’s counsel applies to them just as much as it does to the Level 6’s.

In short, attending church and mingling with others often provides an antidote to loneliness, more opportunities for service, and growth from being around others different from us. The advantages of keeping away will probably be outweighed by the advantages of associating with others who can help us even as they challenge us.

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1See, for example, http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO_TEXT/Chapter%208%20Ethics/Reading-Barger-on-Kohlberg.htm For an example of a moral dilemma used by Kohlberg, see http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm


4I have no idea what level I am. I am writing, tongue-in-cheek, from the standpoint of a Level 6er to make a point. Most of us probably rank ourselves as Level 6 in one way or another.
5http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2013/08/dangers_of_loneliness_social_isolation_is_deadlier_than_obesity.html;

http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316


8*The Ministry of Healing*, page 127

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We hang out in the back corner of the room, we women. The men are quickly reverting to the way they were before Jesus ever came—ignoring us. Even when I told them what I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears at the empty tomb, they didn’t believe me.

Jesus always listened to us. We mattered to him.

We whisper together, comparing notes, while the men argue in the center of the room. Some think we should all leave Jerusalem and go back to our homes. Others insist it’s too dangerous.

All of us are scared. I know what I saw this morning, but…even I have to admit it doesn’t seem true! Maybe they’re right—I’m hysterical, I’m imagining it. Certainly I have been hysterical this weekend. I’ve seen a lot of violence in my life, but that was the worst. And then, when it was finally over…

…seeing his mother cradling his broken body…

My eyes fill with tears, still, just thinking about it.

“Tell me again,” Mary whispers to me, “What did he say?”

But the second I open my mouth to tell it again (for her or to convince myself?) there’s a sudden collective gasp in the room

He’s here!! I hold my breath in shock. Actually, I don’t think anyone is breathing.

He smiles, his same old, familiar, dear smile and just says, “Shalom!” As if it were any ordinary day and he’d just arrived for lunch…except…the door was locked…

“It’s a ghost!” whispers one of the men, and I can’t hold back a small laugh. Maybe from now on they’ll believe me.

“Why are you afraid?” Jesus asks gently. He holds out his hands, reaches out one foot, and we all see the jagged holes, healed already. “It’s me, children. Touch me. See for yourselves.”

Some of us surge forward, some hang back. His mother throws her arms around him. Some are exclaiming, some are praying.

“What have you anything to eat?” Jesus asks.

I hand him a piece of broiled fish and he eats it, grinning as if he thinks it’s funny that we have to be convinced he’s not a ghost. By now, we’re all grinning back, beginning to feel giddy.

He’s alive! Maybe from now on I’ll believe me! I really wasn’t imagining it. It’s not over. His conquest of the Romans could be greatly enhanced by this story!

But then he becomes solemn, and gazes around at each individual one of us. We grow quiet, waiting.

“These are my words,” he says, “the ones I spoke to you while I was still with you.”

But…wait…he’s with us now! He’s back, right? We can go on together…?
“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled. Remember when I told you that?"

He proceeds to give us a Bible study. And this time, we start to get it. The suffering, the death, the rising on the third day…I can almost understand…

He looks at each of us again, but when his eyes reach mine, it’s as if there's no one else in the room. “You are my witnesses of these things,” he says, and I feel something shift in my heart.

I—I am his witness. Whether anyone listens to me or not.

I am.
From the Subtropics to the Subarctics, Serving God

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, April 15, 2015

It’s a long way from Mississippi steam to Alaskan ice—a lifetime, for Viola Kaiser. She could never have guessed the ways that God would lead her, step by step, through a varied life of experiences to her newest endeavor, working with the Siberian Yupik natives on St. Lawrence Island, which is actually closer to Russia (58 km, 36 mi) than it is to the Alaskan coast.

Kaiser had been doing counseling at the Weimar Institute for eight years when one day, out of the blue, a woman who came to one of their programs asked, “Have you ever thought about going to Alaska?”

Well, it just so happened that Kaiser had begun to feel that it was time to leave. “I always know when I’m supposed to move on. I get very restless, and I start asking God, what do you want me to do?”

She ought to know—she was on Career #4 already at that point. But she never would have thought she’d be living and ministering near the Arctic Circle, using all-terrain vehicles as her daily transportation, taking care of the Gambell, AK Seventh-day Adventist church and all its people, both adults and children.

“What it all means,” Kaiser says, “I’m still trying to find out. It’s a mixed bag. They are telling people this is the new pastor; I’m not a pastor, I’m a chaplain. I maintain the church, I speak every Sabbath unless there’s another speaker, I take care of issues, budgets, interpersonal issues, and so on.”

Most people, this writer included, would call that being a pastor. But Kaiser goes on to explain, “It is evolving and I presume it will continue to evolve. I have been ordained of God as a chaplain and I don’t want to get embroiled in all this ordination stuff. It was not my idea to go into chaplaincy, and I feel I was ordained of God to do it. I am committed to do his work, whatever he specifies. Arguing and playing politics over ordination… I didn’t want the church to get caught up in that.”

It has been a long road so far for Viola Kaiser. After spending the first sixteen years of her life on a subsistence farm in Mississippi, Kaiser went to college in St. Louis, MO, graduating with a degree in biology. She had already decided by tenth grade that she wanted to “study life—I still love it; it’s fascinating!” She then headed for California, with high hopes of working with Jacques Cousteau, famous marine biologist. That didn’t happen, but she did get a job in her field, working for an international chemical corporation. (That’s Career #1—you might want to keep track.)

When the company bought a lab in Portland, Kaiser took the transfer along with others. Here, she first met Seventh-day Adventists. A friend gave her Steps to Christ. Kaiser says, as a biologist, she was struck by the very first line: “Nature and revelation alike testify of God’s love.” Kaiser had always felt closer to the spiritual world through nature. Here was an author who talked a lot about God’s presence in creation. Kaiser devoured Steps to Christ and then The Great Controversy.

She became convicted about the Sabbath, but she worked seven days a week maintaining cultures used to produce medical antigens. She told God, “If you want me to keep Sabbath, you have to take care of my critters.” Her personal test was to simply skip Saturday care and see what happened. The cultures seemed fine, so she began quietly keeping Sabbath, though without telling her employer at the time. She later learned that the company said that particular batch of antigens was the best they’d ever had.

“So,” said Kaiser, “I was convinced that if I obeyed him, he would take care of me.” She joined the church, and was overjoyed when a friend that had left the Adventist church surprised her by being baptized on the same day. From that point, Kaiser believed that her job, though it wasn’t religious, was a ministry. She felt that she was doing something for humankind.
When she married, she left work and stayed home with her children (Career #2), but by the time her children were six and eight years old, she separated from her husband. She was now in eastern Oregon, and had to go back to the workforce. “But while I was playing blocks with my kids, biology was moving forward!” She knew it would be difficult if not impossible to get back into her field after having been out for ten years.

She found employment with the state of Washington (Career #3), working in the Employment Security Department. When the state created a new program called the Family Independence Program, she and another worker took it on. “I tend to be like that; I like to take on a challenge.” The goal was to get families off welfare into non-subsistence employment; that is, employment that is well-paid. Kaiser said she “wore quite a few hats,” but her main job was to bring together employers with prospective employees.

“Welfare,” Kaiser states categorically, “is not a good place to be. People get used to mere subsistence. They lose self-worth. That program is a good one; I heartily endorse it. I threw my heart into it. I was able to see over 100 people get into jobs, and most never returned to welfare, and that thrilled my heart!” Once again, Kaiser’s job was ministering—“doing something for humankind.”

Kaiser worked for the state for 19 years. [Note: In a recent story about her in the Gleaner, where you can learn more, there is a statement Kaiser felt could be misunderstood: “After working for more than 18 years on Washington’s Yakama reservation…”. During this time, one of her responsibilities was to go onto reservations to personnel departments and work on employment issues with the Yakima and Warm Springs Native tribes, but she did not work on the reservation itself.]

Eventually, she relates, “the politics started getting really thick, and I couldn’t handle it.” She left her job in June 2006, and was officially separated from the state in July. By this time, many people would be thinking about retirement. Not Viola Kaiser. Wanting to be back in the field of biology, she considered training for sonography. However, God had a different idea.

She was driving, asking God (as she often did) “What do you want me to do?” and God impressed her to go into chaplaincy. “I put up a fence. I said to God, ‘I am not a minister, and I have no intention of being a minister!’ But when she mentioned it to a friend she was startled when the friend excitedly affirmed that chaplaincy would be the very thing for her. It seemed everyone else agreed…except Kaiser.

She wanted to follow God’s leading, though, so she agreed to apply for training. All programs were full. All but one—Loma Linda University was just starting up their program again, and Kaiser didn’t realize a friend had sent a letter of recommendation for her already.

At this point, the story takes some complicated twists which, for the sake of space, will be glossed over here. Kaiser spent some time at Weimar Institute, doing some temporary work there, and then went on to her chaplaincy training, where she spent one day per week in class and the rest of her time in the hospital. She says that was a high trauma time; in fact, she was put on call at the hospital before she’d had one class. Assuming it was a mistake, she spoke to her supervisor and was told that was correct, she was on call from 8 p.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Monday. Her supervisor later told her she was baptized by fire, because that weekend was overwhelmed with traumas, including a heart-rending story of a mother with three children, whose car had broken down and flipped. One child was killed outright. One was brain dead. The third child as well as the mother were injured…and the mother was charged with vehicular homicide on top of everything else. Kaiser was there for her, listening to her as she poured out her whole life story, praying with her, and later speaking up at the children’s funeral.

And that was only one story—Kaiser says, “With the exception of one on-call period, it was always like that for me—trauma after trauma.”

So she was soon prepared for Career #4 and her eight years counseling at Weimar. And then…

“Have you ever thought about going to Alaska?”
No, Kaiser hadn’t. But when the woman told her about the high suicide rates among the young Native people, her heart was stirred. The woman had no way of knowing that suicide prevention was one of the ways Kaiser had dealt with a lot already. “I tucked that away, but then when I was talking to some friends about what I wanted to do, somebody suggested calling Monte Church.” To her surprise, when she called he said he’d come by that summer to talk to her, but she had been away. She had never received the notice.

Pastor Church, North Pacific Union Conference Native Ministries Director, told her, “This is what I’ve got. We need somebody in Gambell.” Not without a few more glitches and delays, Kaiser ended up telling God, “If you have Pastor Crawford call and ask me to come to Alaska, I’ll go.”

He called. The rest is history. Well, it’s history being written now, that is. Career #5…

So she preaches, and she teaches, and she runs a Children’s Day every Wednesday that includes food, games, perhaps a story, but mostly love. “They’d come every day, but I’m only one person. I don’t have a spouse like they do over at Savoonga [the other Adventist church on St. Lawrence Island]. I asked if they were interested in having prayer meeting. I didn’t want to do it if nobody comes. They were silent. I’ve learned that with Natives, that means No. So, Wednesday became Children’s Day.”

It’s worth noting that Kaiser herself contains blood from at least three of the divisions of humans that we have falsely delineated as “races”—Caucasian, African, and Native American. She says she feels most at home among Native Americans, at least in part because God speaks to her through nature.

Kaiser has learned that one of the concerns when she was called was her age. But she says in her family age is immaterial, and people are active well into their 80s. (She didn’t say how close she might be, but…Career #5…)

God bless your work at the top of the world, Chaplain/Pastor Viola Kaiser! May more of us follow your example, and your God.
Stained Glass What??

Author's note: This article—“Stained Glass What??”–is the first chapter of a book I'm writing—“Adorn the Doctrine: An Artist’s Perspective on Teachings of the Bible.” Watch for it…oh, sometime in the next hundred years, or maybe even before Jesus comes. Two other chapters—“The Great Spectrum” and “Love In Living Color”—have already been published in “Servant God,” published by Loma Linda University Press. Virginia Davidson

Stained glass is exciting! The glories of the light shining through the colors makes it seem alive! But no stained glass window is made up of only glass, no matter how beautiful the colors and textures are. There must be lead to hold the pieces of glass in place. The lead came follows specified lines, forming the design and structure of the window. Those lead lines also prescribe the shape of each individual piece of glass.

Doctrine seems to me a lot like lead lines. The teachings of Scripture form the structure of our Christianity, becoming the framework into which other issues fit. What I believe makes a difference in how I work, how I treat others, how I take care of myself. Even as the lead lines tell me where to cut each piece of glass, so doctrine informs my character development.

But some people have a quarrel with doctrine. “Just love God and be a good person,” they say, “and be kind to everybody. Doctrine is divisive; we don’t need doctrine!” But who is God? And what is “good”? And how can I get that way? What is the remedy when I don’t want to be kind? It is doctrine that answers those questions, in addition to addressing issues like what happens when we die and how to worship God. Even as lead came is what holds the pieces of glass in place, doctrine is what keeps our Christianity accountable and sensible.

Lead as a metal, though, is very soft. The lead came that I use comes rolled onto spools like a stiff rope and has to be stretched in order to straighten it enough to use. Stretching also hardens the lead so that it won’t relax and loosen under the weight of the glass, dropping out the pieces. Stretching the lead also adds length to it—I have been surprised, sometimes, at how much “extra” there was after stretching. So it seems that doctrine is not a static, firm entity. It grows, deepening and broadening under our continual study, becoming ever more meaningful as the Holy Spirit quickens our minds.

Even with all that stretching and hardening, lead is still too soft to hold its shape under pressure. It needs the rigidity of the glass to support it and provide stability. The two work together. Indeed, it is by living the truths of the Bible in our daily lives that we learn what they really mean. Intellectual understanding is important, but nothing takes the place of experiencing truth. So the glass itself, in all its beauty, can be compared to the glories of character development, even the “Fruit of the Spirit.”

A stained glass panel takes time to build, piece by piece by piece: A piece of lead, a piece of glass; another piece of glass, a corresponding piece of lead. Each new piece must fit into its specific place, which is formed by all the other pieces of glass and lead that surround it. The artisan must make sure it fits all the pieces that have gone before, and shape is only one factor. (Color is a totally different topic, more than can be addressed here.) It is a rare piece of glass that fits the first time, as it is gently eased into its slot. Usually it must be eased back out again—often several times—and re-shaped the tiniest bit on the diamond grinder until it fits well enough to leave in place.

Then a piece of lead is cut to the approximate length, bent to the shape of the glass, and trimmed to fit. In fact, all the lead pieces need to be touching or nearly touching another piece of lead—on each end—in order to make a tight
framework when they are all soldered together. And no real lead line strays off into a piece of glass, stopping in the middle somewhere—the glass would crack. It *has* to connect to another lead line. Could that fact correspond to the need of doctrine to make sense, to the need for each point to work in harmony with every other point? It should be a unit of logical, coherent, intersecting ideas.

As we continue to build the stained glass panel, piece by tedious piece, it can be surprising that there is actually space for a little bit of inaccuracy in the fit. This is because the edges of the glass are hidden in the channel of the lead came. But each glass edge needs to fit as close as possible to the “heart” of the came, which is the vertical part in the center. Could that vertical center indicate the need for our doctrines to direct us vertically to God, to increase both our understanding of Him and our becoming like Him, not just our being “right”? 

Even still, in spite of that tiny bit of slack, it is the fitting process itself that constitutes the most time-consuming and tedious part of building stained glass. Each individual piece of glass and lead is placed and re-placed and re-shaped and re-placed again until it works with the whole structure.

Many times I have thought, It would be so much easier just to skip the glass! It would be both easier and faster to build the design out of lead came, all by itself, just laying the bent strips on top of the pattern and holding them in place with horseshoe nails as usual, until they could be soldered. That method of construction would be virtually injury-free.

No glass cuts, no Band-Aids. *Hurrah*! But what would be the result? A pretty design, sure, but such a panel would offer no protection from wind and weather. There would be no glorious colors, no textures in the glass diffusing and painting and refracting the light. It would not be a stained glass window.

In fact, I did make a small “panel” out of lead, just for illustration. I had already built the same design out of lead and glass. It took about six hours to cut and fit the pieces for a panel measuring 7¼ x 8 inches, besides time for design and the selection of glass colors. For comparison, then, I created the same design out of lead came only—no glass at all. I wasn’t surprised to be finished in forty-five minutes. There was very little to fit. No glass to cut, no fingers cut. But it was also *no stained glass*.

Even more startling, because lead is still relatively soft even after all that stretching, it didn’t take much to twist and crumple that little piece of lead art in my bare hands. Could it be that if the teaching we promote is merely theoretical, if it has little or no application to life, when the pressures of reality war against our very souls, requiring difficult decisions, could it be that our theories will let us down? That they will not be able to hold their structure, their identity in our lives? But truth that is lived and loved will have power to shape our characters. It may not take very long to learn basic Bible teachings, but it takes a lifetime of living in order to transform those teachings into Christianity!

Of course, if we try to make our doctrine so flexible that it can encompass virtually any behavior, we need to beware lest the “glass” of character is broken in the process. In a stained glass panel, glass supports the lead in the lead lines, but it doesn’t create strength. Particularly in large panels or windows—in any piece with a perimeter of 12 feet or more, lead came must be reinforced or supplemented with a harder, more rigid metal. Came that is made out of brass and zinc can’t be cut with hand nippers; it needs a saw. Bending it to shape is much more tedious and requires more energy and skill—sometimes even a machine. But the resulting strength is worth all the effort.

Just so, there are major doctrines that shouldn’t vary much with time. They are solid. Other issues go and come, levels of understanding wax and wane. But these several lines remain firm.

However, it is possible to look at all ideas of truth as being in the same category—that is, unchanging, as though that comprises all there is or ever will be to truth. Our understanding thus becomes rigid and stale rather than dynamic, alive, and growing. In that state of mind, it is easy to consider any viewpoint that differs from ours as heresy. There is such a thing as knowing truth and being confident that we know it. At the same time, there is also...
the danger of becoming closed-minded and caustic. God help us! Real truth never leads us to deny the honor of God in the way we treat each other!

In considering a disproportionate emphasis on doctrine, it helps me to remember that lead is poisonous. And lead poisoning is serious. In the studio, to protect myself from the lead, I neither eat nor drink nor allow anything to come within those walls that will at any time be eaten or drunk by humans. And always, before leaving my work area, I wash my hands thoroughly—first with GoJo, which cuts the greasiness of lead, then with soap. I have to take lead seriously.

Doctrine also is serious business, and a wrong use of it has been known to cause “toxicity” of the soul. If it becomes the focus in itself or a club to browbeat people into changing their beliefs, what might have begun as truth could become warped and dangerous, poisonous to attitudes, relationships, and choices—for those around me and for myself. If doctrine hasn’t made me more like God, might it be that I don’t understand it right? Could it be a good idea to examine myself to make sure I really am in the faith? In this context, Paul’s instruction in Titus 2:10 has become particularly meaningful to me, that we “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

Doctrine is important; it is vital. But it isn’t enough. It can be pretty stark and cold by itself. Doctrine needs to be adorned—with life, with character! It needs to be lived in order to be understood. True theology is experiential, rather than purely theoretical. What we believe does make a difference in how we live, one way or another. It should make us more like Christ for having espoused it! If it hasn’t, wouldn’t it make sense to re-examine our belief system to make sure it is truth?

Yet, has anyone figured out all of truth, in every detail? I doubt it. Truth echoes the very being of God Himself, who is infinite. Yet I do believe we can know truth, even here and now.

So, come join me in a quest for what I have come to call “Stained Glass Christianity.” It is, if you will, a “philosophical marriage” of Biblical doctrine and character traits, including but not restricted to the list called “The Fruit of the Spirit.” Some of the questions I have asked are:

- “What can I learn from the doctrine of Creation that helps me be a better person now, six thousand years later?”
- “How can the Bible-teaching about holy time help me deal with today—even if it’s Tuesday?”
- “How does what happens when a person dies make a difference to me, in how I live this day?”

Sometimes I turn the question around and ask, “What doctrine helps me better to understand and live out the self-control that is listed last in the Fruit?” After all, not every stained glass project starts from the same point. Sometimes the client wants a specific pattern or a particular set of colors, while another trusts me to “make it look good” with the house. One lady had a favorite Scripture for a starting place. But after the design phase, there’s always the cutting!

When it comes to the Bible, I certainly don’t have all the answers! And very likely, someone with a different perspective could ask the same questions I do and arrange a totally different set of answers. So, rather than a definitive treatise, I like to think of this study as a jumping-off-place for further exploration. What I’m looking for is a system of truth where each doctrine and each character issue work together with all the others to form a logical, beautiful “window” for transmitting the glory of God to the world—in other words, “Stained Glass Christianity!”

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1 *Came* sounds just like you would think it should, rhyming with “tame” and “same” and that other “came,” the verb which is the past tense of “come.” “Came” applies not only to lead, but also in modern times to other metals which have been wrapped or folded to achieve the correct shape. Basic lead came can be bought in pre-cut, pre-stretched six-foot strips, or in a 25-pound length of extruded lead which is rolled onto a large spool.
It is the shape of the cross-section of came that makes it distinctive and provides its place in the stained glass craft. Visualize a capital H lying on its side, like so:

The upper and lower horizontal parts are called the “crown.” This is what we see as lead lines on each side of a finished stained glass window. The center vertical part is the “heart” and the spaces that the glass fits into, on either side of the “heart,” are “channels.”

2 “It is a fact that we have the truth, and we must hold with tenacity to the positions that cannot be shaken; but we must not look with suspicion upon any new light which God may send, and say, Really, we cannot see that we need any more light than the old truth which we have hitherto received, and in which we are settled.” “We must not think, ‘Well, we have all the truth, we understand the main pillars of our faith, and we may rest on this knowledge.’ The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light.”—Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 33.

3 “Many give the words of Scripture a meaning that suits their own opinions, and they mislead themselves and deceive others by their misinterpretations of God’s word.
“As we take up the study of God’s word, we should do so with humble hearts. All selfishness, all love of originality, should be laid aside. Long-cherished opinions must not be regarded as infallible. It was the unwillingness of the Jews to give up their long-established traditions that proved their ruin….
“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed.”—Counsels to Writers and Editors, pp. 36, 37.

4 II Corinthians 13:5 “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”

By Virginia Davidson

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