NEWS

Jackson Condemns Charleston Shooting: The killing of nine worshipers, Wednesday, in an African Methodist Episcopal church building has elicited an impassioned condemnation by the president of the North American Division....

Adventist Health Care Receives CASA Justice Award: Extending health care to the Latino community in a proactive way has earned Adventist Health Care a coveted honor....

American Diabetes Association Names Adventist Father of the Year: A long-time Adventist health care executive has been named a Father of the Year for his balanced attention not only to his demanding work, but especially to his own family....

Adventist Young Adults Will Be Out Impacting the City While Delegates Sit in General Conference: While delegates ponder deep topics in air-
conditioned comfort, their children will be serving the Lord on the hot, busy streets of San Antonio....

**New Book: Comprehensive Statements on Adventist Views of Contemporary Social Issues Worldwide:** A new volume recently published by the department of world mission at Andrews University provides the most comprehensive set of material on social issues ever published by Adventists....

### OPINION

**Race, Guns and Delusions:** Early Adventists took extreme measures to battle slavery and apartheid in a nearly illiterate frontier culture built on the assumption of white dominance. Now, writes columnist Monte Sahlin, the Adventist Church must rise again in holy indignation, calling for equality and safe haven and confronting the culture of militancy that so roundly contradicts the sentiments inscribed on the Statue of Liberty....

**Vote for Jack?:** The eclectic Jack Hoehn of wide medical and entertainment fame is now running for president of the General Conference, and promises if elected to resign to allow younger people to run the Church, as in the old Levitical system where top leaders were retired out after reaching age 50....

**My Take: Time for an Upgrade:** Columnist Raj Attiken looks at the huge cost and encumbrance of holding General Conference Session in the old-fashioned way and lists a number of important ways to upgrade the system....
**When We Disagree:** In a changing world as new light and old battle for preeminence in the Church, the urge to take uncompromising positions can lead to dead-end disagreements. Guest columnist Bill Bossert gives us some guidelines from history and the life of Ellen White.....

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**The Friendship of Men (DEVOTIONAL):** Debbonnaire Kovacs looks closely at the friendship between David and Jonathan....

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**FEATURE & THE ARTS**

**Journey (FEATURE):** An Adventist teenager of the 1960s wraps her mind and spirit around a Christian faith that begins in ultra-conservative isolation, but blossoms through revival and art....

**Nothing In My Hands, Chapter Five (POETRY & PROSE):** The story of the troubled marriage of Del Starr (Chapter 5) continues in "Starting Over."...

**What to Do with Youth on Sabbath Afternoon (ARTS NEWS):** All the way from Great Britain come great ideas for helping young people keep the Sabbath more redemptively....
**After the Fall (POETRY & PROSE):** S M Chen ponders "Who is Greatest?" in the animal kingdom of God....

**Stormy Seas (VISUAL):** Dark and troubled times assail us, and sometimes it seems there is no escape from the gloom--but Christian photographer Debbonnaire Kovacs knows there is hope above the clouds, beyond the ken of human sight....

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**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**AT NEARS THE CUSP OF ITS GOAL**

Just a few more days remain before the AT team heads for San Antonio, and most of what we need to financially cover our reporting assignments with reporters young and old, from many perspectives and enlightened points of view, has been received. We still need $3,000 that we believe will reach us within the next few days. This is an opportunity for you, perhaps, to "put us over the top" this week, with that little extra help at this time. Meanwhile, as we surpass the 90% mark, we thank you all who have been so generous. This will be a GC Session that will set an important course for the future of the Church. It's essential that it be reported not just from one perspective, but from a cluster of informed points of view, as we set our GPS for the future.....

Click [Here](#) to help AT bring in those last dollars to carry us on our way, round trip, to San Antonio....

Edwin A. Schwisow
From News Release, June 18, 2015: Pastor Daniel Jackson, the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, issued the following statement today in response to the shooting death of nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is heartbroken by the senseless killing of the Reverend Clementa Pickney and eight other worshipers during Wednesday evening service in their church. We are saddened by the heartache it has caused their family, the members of the Emanuel AME Church, and the Charleston community. We extend our deepest condolences and continue to pray for the victims and their families.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church condemns not only the killing of any person, but also the hatred, based on a person’s race, that apparently motivated this shooting. We believe that God loves all of His children equally, regardless of race, gender, religion, or lifestyle, and we are called to do the same.

We again call for open, honest, and civil conversation about the realities of the racial divide that continues to plague this country. This conversation must focus on the rights and equality of every member of our communities.

We stand with the people of Charleston and indeed across North America that strive to be agents of peace, love, and grace in their communities.

To bring a lasting change we, as a church, must always treat all people with the love and compassion that Jesus modeled for us. While last night in Charleston, hate took the lives of nine innocent people, we know that in the end love will win.

“We once again pray for the day when all of God’s children will treat each other without suspicion, bias and hatred. As the Apostle Paul reminds us: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’” (Galatians 3:28, NKJV)
Adventist HealthCare Receives CASA Justice Award

From News Release, June 14, 2015: Adventist HealthCare (AHC) received the 2015 Justice Award from CASA for expanding access to vital healthcare services for the Latino and immigrant community. CASA's mission is to "create a more just society by building power and improving the quality of life in low-income immigrant communities."

Adventist HealthCare is a network of medical facilities, serving the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and northwestern New Jersey. The network includes five nationally accredited, acute-care and specialty hospitals, mental health services and home health agencies. According to the AHC website, the network has 2,279 physicians and medical staff and a total of 6,200 employees.

Six award winners were recognized at the June 11 ceremony in Washington, D.C. The event commemorated CASA's 30th anniversary by recognizing businesses and individuals who have shown significant commitment to the Latino and immigrant community.

At the ceremony, Washington Adventist Hospital, which is operated by Adventist HealthCare, was honored for being among the first supporters of CASA's Multicultural Center campaign in 2010, which allowed for a health clinic to open within the Center, expanding access to healthcare to the underserved communities of Langley Park and surrounding areas. The Adventist HealthCare Center for Health Equity & Wellness was also recognized as a pioneer of health equity issues through its ongoing efforts to improve health outcomes for underserved and high-risk populations.

"CASA and Adventist HealthCare have worked together to improve healthcare for the thousands of immigrant families in the region. We are proud to have a partner that believes and shares the core values that promote a dignified lifestyle for the hard-working, low-income communities. This award is recognition of the many years AHC has dedicated tirelessly to our community," said Gustavo Torres, CASA Executive Director.

Since 2012, Adventist HealthCare has been an annual supporter of CASA's Learning Together parent engagement program. As part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) roll out, Adventist HealthCare has continued to partner with CASA to improve healthcare for the immigrant and low-income communities of the region.

"We are honored to partner with local organizations like CASA who have an unwavering commitment to advocating for underserved and immigrant families in our community," said Terry Forde, President & CEO of Adventist HealthCare. "By working together, we aim to expand our impact and access to quality healthcare services for those who need it most."

Washington Adventist Hospital and Adventist HealthCare have collaborated with community organizations over the years, including CASA, Community Clinic, Inc., Mary's Center, MobileMed, Impact Silver Spring and others who share its commitment to bridging the healthcare access gap and building healthcare equity for minority and underserved populations in the region.
American Diabetes Association Names Adventist Father of the Year

From News Release, June 15, 2015: Adventist Health System executive Lars Houmann was honored as Father of the Year by the American Diabetes Association (ADA) on June 10, 2015. Houmann is the father of three grown children—Kirsten, Cameron and Peter.

The award was given during a special event in Orlando, Florida, designed to highlight the importance of fatherhood and raise funds for diabetes research, education and advocacy.

Adventist Health System (AHS) operates 44 hospitals in 10 states—Colorado, Wisconsin, Illinois, Kentucky, Texas, North Carolina, West Virginia, Kansas, Tennessee, Georgia and Florida. The organization’s 74,000 employees serve more than 4.5 million patients annually, according to the AHS website.

Houmann, who serves as president and CEO of Florida Hospital and the Florida Division of Adventist Health System, was selected along with three other award recipients for “making family a priority while balancing demanding careers and community involvement,” ADA’s Father’s Day Council said.

Houmann has served at Florida Hospital since 1993, overseeing major expansion projects, mergers, and the development of facilities such as Florida Hospital Celebration Health. He is also actively involved in health care advocacy and economic development, serving on boards and volunteering at organizations such as the Florida Hospital Association, Shepherd’s Hope Clinics, Florida Chamber of Commerce CEO Roundtable, Heart of Florida United Way, and bioOrlando.

Kirsten Cutler, Houmann’s daughter, said the prize was well deserved. “My dad could not be more worthy of this honor,” she said. “He inspires and motivates his family with a commitment to integrity, optimism, faith and balance. His servant leadership is not just an approach used professionally, but as a father. We are grateful to the American Diabetes Association for a unique opportunity to demonstrate our appreciation to him.”
Adventist Young Adults Will Be Out Impacting the City While Delegates Sit in General Conference

From News Release, June 19, 2015: Hundreds of young adults will be involved in ministry projects with the homeless, visiting prisons and juvenile centers, doing makeovers of homes, planting community gardens, conducting community health ministries and creating street art while the denomination’s General Conference (GC) Session is underway in San Antonio, Texas, July 1 through 11. Impact San Antonio will be an action-oriented program as well as a serious time of Bible preaching, prayer and spiritual growth.

Speakers for the young adult evening meetings at the Marriott Rivercenter will include Jose Rojas, the noted evangelist who once served as youth director for the Adventist denomination in North America; Pastor Rebecca Davis, the young adult coordinator on the staff of Berean Church in Atlanta, Georgia; Pastor Eddie Hypolite, senior pastor of the Avondale College Church in Australia; David Asscherick, well-known conservative preacher from the Light Bearers independent ministry; Pastor Raewyn Hankins, senior pastor at the Victorville Adventist Church in California and one of the women ordained by the Pacific Union Conference; Stephan Sigg, youth ministries director for the denomination’s Inter-European Division; as well as Pastor Gilbert Cangy, GC youth director and Pastor James Black, youth director for the North American Division.

The discipleship experience will use the unique cosmopolitan, multicultural milieu of the San Antonio metropolitan area to help young adult develop skills for creative ministry and missional impact. In addition to the full-time community action projects throughout the ten days, there will be thousands who join the large rallies on the two Sabbaths at the Rivercenter, 101 Bowie Street. The full program will begin at 2 pm on Wednesday, July 1, and run through Saturday night, July 11.

“The active, visible ministries of kindness and demonstrations of God’s care that these young adults will be doing as the delegates debate and hear reports,” one veteran youth worker told Adventist Today, “may do more to shape the understanding that the local residents have of the Adventist message than anything else that happens in San Antonio.” It will also help to send young adults back to Adventist congregations around the globe with new energy and commitment, as well as new ideas about the mission of Christ and their part in it.

It has become a tradition during recent decades that instead of “youth meetings,” the young adults from the families gathered at the GC Session get involved in active community service and evangelism. All together, perhaps as many as 75,000 individuals will come to San Antonio for the event, while less than 3,000 are official delegates and staff.

Interested individuals 18 to 35 years of age can get more information and register to participate at: www.impactSA2015.com.
New Book: Comprehensive Statements on Adventist Views of Contemporary Social Issues Worldwide

By AT News Team, June 18, 2015: A new volume recently published by the department of world mission at Andrews University provides the most comprehensive set of material on social issues ever published by Adventists. It is 800 pages and addresses 30 different topics with contributions by 35 writers. This an essential tool for anyone who asks, “What is the Adventist position on ……… ?”

Fill in the blank: human rights, poverty, addictions, mental health, social change, prostitution, capital punishment, economics, immigration, race relations, polygamy, domestic violence, divorce and remarriage, aging, gay and lesbian believers, female genital cutting, urbanization, disabilities, obesity, natural disasters, end of life ethics, all of these and more. Many are topics that up to this point nothing definitive has been published.

These are all issues that Adventists can no longer ignore. They constitute the realities of life that many millions of people have to deal with, including many Adventists. They are not the traditional topics that Bible studies address, but they are the issues that people have to deal with and are part of the life of faith and the mission of the church in today’s world.

The 35 writers include social workers, Bible scholars, theologians, missionaries, lawyers, health professionals and counselors. They are all Adventists and many work for the denomination or an Adventist university or the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). Some teach in other universities, work for government agencies and Christian organizations, as well as independent groups. (Full disclosure: Adventist Today managing editor Jeff Boyd is the author of two chapters, although from a different role.) Simply the short biographies of the writers gives a panoramic view of the involvement of Adventists around the world in many areas of need that do not often make it into mission stories in denominational periodicals, but constitute the fabric of reality in the 21st century.

Each chapter is carefully developed with a Bible foundation and references to Adventist theology and history, as well as good data from current research. The book is entitled *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. It operates from a mission-driven and mission-focused mentality. The overall editor is Dr. Rudi Maier, long time professor of missions at the seminary at Andrews University, as well as a veteran missionary overseas who grew up in Europe.

This is an important text and a milestone in Adventist publishing. For the social sciences it is an historic marker in much the same way that the publication of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* was an achievement for Adventist Bible scholars.

*A special price has been arranged for readers of Adventist Today. You can order a copy at the special price by contacting Boubakar Sanou in the Department of World Mission at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He can be reached by Email at kologobo@gmail.com or by telephone at (269) 471-6505.*
The purpose of this book—written by 34 dedicated Christian scholars and community practitioners—is to help Christ’s church understand how this “world” and the people who live in it think, feel, and react to some of the issues they face in their daily lives, and how to bring peace, justice, and compassion to the society that surrounds our homes, churches, and communities. Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God (Matt 5:9).” Shalom, which we translate as peace means more than the absence of conflict. To live in shalom, as a peacemaker means we actively live our lives in a way that brings healing, wholeness, harmony and well-being to the lives of people we meet.

This is not a prescriptive book that will provide answers to all the social and missiological woes in society (though there will be some guidelines for how to start various ministries). Instead, the authors have attempted to describe some of the problems that exist in our societies and churches and have encouraged the readers as individuals, as well as groups, to find their own answers to many of the issues raised.

Some of the issues raised will not be comfortable to discuss in Church circles, but we all hope that they will be treated with the same respect and compassion that Jesus gives in response to each one of our needs.

The purpose of the book is to help students, pastors, social workers and concerned church members to understand some of the issues people are facing inside and outside the Church.

Coverage of important issues such as:

- Urbanization
- Non-violence
- Advocacy
- Human Rights
- Economic Exploitation
- Prostitution
- Death Penalty
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- Dowry, etc.

For information or to order:

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List price: $49.95 + S&H
Special price for Adventist Today readers: $40.00 + FREE Shipping!
Race, Guns and Delusions

By Monte Sahlin, June 19, 2015: Some issues seem to never really get solved. It seems like only yesterday Americans had elected the first black president and there was brave talk about a “post racial” society. And now it seems like the clock has been set back nearly 50 years.

A young white man walks into a prayer meeting in a church and announces to the group of older black women and men, “You are taking over our country; you must go.” And proceeds to shoot many of them, killing nine people.

What kind of an America lets a young adult use his birthday money to buy a semiautomatic pistol, go to a black church, walk in with the concealed weapon, sit in the back for an hour and then massacre a group of old people? What kind of an America allows a young white man to grow up thinking that because some equality and justice has finally been realized that it means other ethnic groups are “taking over” the country?

There is only one possible answer to these questions and I hope that this terrible event shakes enough white people to their core to get this lesson into their minds. This is the result of attempting to hold on to the privileges that members of the white majority had in America through centuries of slavery and “Jim Crow” (American Apartheid).

We didn’t give the freed slaves “40 acres and a mule” in the late 1860s to provide them with a little capital to get started in a new life. We lost interest after a few years of Reconstruction and left widespread poverty among whites and blacks in the South. We never paid reparations for generations of unpaid labor. We tolerated the Civil Rights Movement for a period of time and then began to grumble about “playing the race card” and “PC” and a lot of other stupid things that simply show that down deep we still resent any kind of level playing field.

The common idea among whites of a “color blind” society really means, “I don’t want to think about ethnicity.” And it is to the benefit of whatever remains of majority privilege to claim that it is not necessary or good to be observant of the culture of others that we interact with.

American society has regressed in recent decades. Political machinations have forced a situation where guns are simply too easy to get. In many places there are no restrictions on someone suffering from the worst kind of mental illness obtaining a gun. It is generally less difficult to purchase a gun than it is purchase a car.

Politicians make coded references to ethnic tensions and dislike of immigrants for the sole purpose of manipulating the masses into voting for them. The policy proposals of many in Congress would mean removing the Statue of Liberty and returning it to France if those politicians were honest.

The criminal justice system in many places appears to be simply a tool to oppress non-white citizens. As has been shown by the investigation after the police killing and resultant riots in Ferguson, Missouri, fines and policies are contrived to make money off the backs of poor people of color and give those on probation no real opportunity to turn their lives around.

All of this is simply delusional. It is a kind of mass hysteria. It is no wonder that some simple-minded 21-year-old took things into his own hands, bought a gun with his birthday money and walked into a black church on Wednesday night during prayer meeting to murder as many people as he could. He simply “drank the kool-aid” that is floating around in our society.

Is This Important to the Gospel?

For both practical and theological reasons it is absolutely essential for Adventists in America (and around the world) to address these issues. The Adventist denomination in America has already crossed over the threshold into a
minorities majority church. White people make up only about 45 percent of the membership. We cannot survive as a faith community if the delusional ideas around us are allowed any space whatsoever.

It is really a matter of our heritage and the core of what it means to be authentically Adventist. James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates and the others in the founding group of Adventists were all antislavery activists. John Byington, the first president of the General Conference, defied Federal law and hid runaway slaves on his farm in upstate New York. Edson White, son of James and Ellen, built a boat and sailed it down to the South when Reconstruction was running out of gas to educate former slaves. The reason for the boat was so he could leave town quickly when mobs of angry whites came after his mixed-race team of teachers and Bible workers.

Revelation 14:6-12 says that the Remnant is made up of “every ethnic group, tribe, culture and people group.” The multicultural nature of our faith is part of its God-given identity. It is one of the prophetic marks of the people of God in these times. God’s tribe is made up of all kinds of people. It is inclusive, accepting, open and grace-filled. That is the mark of authentic Christian community. If it is not tangible in your local church, small group Bible study or Sabbath School class; that group lacks the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Real Adventists will take a decided stand against the delusional stuff floating around in American society. They will do what they can to prevent tragedies like the one this week by speaking up when they hear whining about loss of white privilege, by voting against politicians who promise unfettered access to guns and by reaching out to neighbors and fellow church members of other ethnic groups than their own to make friends and accomplish useful projects in the community.

We must all ask God to forgive us for narrowing the Adventist message, seeking to make it only about “spiritual” things, disconnected from the realities of life. Authentic Adventist faith connects with the pain and suffering of women and men, and especially children, buffeted by the turmoil of contemporary society and preyed upon by the unscrupulous, the violent and the delusional.

“Whatever you did for one of the least of these … you did for me.” And, “whatever you did not do for the least of these, you did not do for me.” (The words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40, 45 after He was asked by the apostles, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”)

Monte Sahlin has served as a Seventh-day Adventist minister for more than 45 years at all levels of the denomination. He retired from denominational employment last year and is executive director of the Adventist Today Foundation and executive editor of Adventist Today.
Vote for Jack?

If you vote for Jack he promises to resign…

by Jack Hoehn, June 17, 2015: “Hello, I was thinking of running for the office of President of the General Conference next month in San Antonio, and was wondering if I could count on your support?”

Motivated by the excitement in American political parties for the office of President of the United States, including a Seventh-day Adventist (retired neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson) as one candidate, and another candidate with an Adventist wife (US Senator Ted Cruz’s wife, Heidi), at least 6 announced or likely candidates are going to ask for the Democratic party nomination, and 20 Republicans have or will thrown their hats into the ring. Ben Carson is African-American, Hillary Clinton is a woman, and Lindsay Graham has never married. Some, such as Senator Cruz, are Hispanic, Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana has east-Indian parents and there are lots of married white guys running for the job, so Americans can’t say they don’t have any choices.

But in addition to these 26 prominent souls from the dominant parties, there are literally hundreds of other candidates for the presidency of the USA from smaller third parties like the American Freedom Party, the Constitution Party, the Green Party, the Justice Party, the Libertarian Party, the Objectivist Party, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Reform Party USA, the Socialist Party USA, and then my personal favorites, the Independents of no party who number in the scores, usually as write-in candidates, but who have filed in one or more states to be on the ballot.

So after I form an exploratory committee of “Jack for President of the GC,” and set up an advisory board of senior politicians (whoops, I mean senior church administrators), and most important of all, when I start getting enough large cash donations from all of you to fund a major TV campaign promoting my virtues to be president of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church, I think it only wise that we have more than one candidate for this office.

If the mere presidency of only one of the 196 nations on the face of this earth (admittedly, one of the larger ones) is important enough to generate this much interest and so many choices, surely the administrative head of God’s work on earth deserves a little more interest than just a chance to live in the White House and fly around on Air Force One.

So why, dear fellow Adventists, should you vote for me?

Well, modesty and an unfortunate lack of necessary qualifications keep me from filling too many pages with the reasons to consider me as your next General Conference President, but here are a few things to consider as you decide who should lead God’s church on earth. I can think of a few minor virtues that might make you consider me, or perhaps another of the hundreds of other qualified candidates that I am sure could be worthy of the GC presidency:

1. Firstly I am not a Bush, or a Kennedy, or a Clinton, or a Wilson. My father was not a President, so I don’t have to stand in my dad’s shadow and prove myself just as good a man as he.

2. Second I don’t have any obligations to anyone in our church; I haven’t worked for anyone else; I haven’t even supported anyone else. No one owes me anything, and I don’t owe anyone anything.
3. Thirdly I’m financially independent (family physicians don’t roll in the dough like other specialties, but I earn enough to pay taxes). So I am not overly impressed when people with lots of money from making and selling junk-food, cement mixers, mixed nuts, or garbage trucks try to tell me that things in the church have to be done their way or they will stop sending me their tithe. I’d point out to them that since I am self-supporting I don’t need their tithe. And if God does they’d better discuss this with Him and not me.

4. I am not an American, although I live here. I am Canadian-born. I have lived in Austria and learned how to speak German. I lived in Lesotho and learned how to speak a little Sesotho, and also lived in Zambia for 9 years. I have lived in London, England. I love Americans, and married one, but I realize other points of view exist in this world than the American point of view. I consider this a virtue for the president of the General Conference.

5. Sadly, although I lived in Africa for 13 years, I am not black or a woman; otherwise, I think I should be a shoo-in for the job in a church founded by a woman whose members are largely females of color.

6. I am quite sure that God has not called me as His personal champion to defend truth, or to protect His doctrines from you. I am very willing to let all God-fearing Seventh-day Adventist people of good will have differences of interpretation, and would function as a facilitator and peace maker among different factions. I would let you decide if you want to drink Postum or coffee to keep awake during my sermons, and not drive all the coffee sellers out of the stadium to deprive you of your freedom of choice.

7. I would get a large rubber stamp for my desk, and to all suggestions from different parts of the world, I would apply this stamp to your suggestion. The stamp would say:

YES, GREAT IDEA. NOW YOU FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE IT WORK!

8. Finally, if elected, as my first executive action, I would immediately request the resignation of everyone over 50 from any top office, to step down into a service or pastoral ministry. I’d let the young and vigorous take God’s work forward for the 21st century and the advancement of truth. And I’d free up the older to care for children, visit the slums, help build houses for the homeless. I’d ask our children and their friends, to lead us forward into God’s will for today, instead of dragging Adventism backwards to the weakness and partial truths of our past.

So there you have my 8 point platform, dear fellow Adventists. Vote for me, and I will as my first executive action resign myself and take with me all the officers under my control who are older than God said should serve him. You do believe the Bible is inspired truth, don’t you? Then how could you be opposed to the implementation of Numbers 8:24-26:

“This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the tent of meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites.”

God regulated the priestly office and limited the age of His church leaders to 25 to 50 years. Anyone younger or older was not eligible to have a leadership position, male headship or no. So why don’t we follow this plan? God said it, I believe it, that settles it, as far as my “exploratory candidacy” is concerned.

(By the way, shouldn’t all delegates to the General Conference adhere to that Biblical age requirement? The rest of
us younger and older than that can go to work for them as support staff, but not as voting delegates or leaders.)

What’s that you say? You want to vote for me, but you can’t, since we don’t vote for our church president? You say this is all handled by a small group of delegates behind closed doors? Sounds like old-fashioned party politics to me.

Well, if you are on the GC Nominating Committee could you just nominate me as a surprise write-in-candidate? Or at least consider the five, twenty, or hundreds of other people who just might make an excellent president of the General Conference, given the chance? And please remember the age for leadership the Bible advises. No one under 25, no one over 50.

Well, couldn’t you at least send me a cash contribution for my “exploratory campaign”? Or better yet, perhaps you should send a donation to Adventist Today. http://atoday.org/product/gc-coverage-donation

That way, if I am ever elected, or perhaps someone is elected who is even more qualified for the job than me, you’d be the first to know....
My Take: Time for an Upgrade

by Raj Attiken, June 18, 2015: I remember the conversation vividly. It was in the summer of 2010. The four ladies had just arrived in the United States, and were on their way from the Atlanta airport to their hotel. They had come a long way to experience a General Conference Session of their church. They were not delegates. They had saved up money for years for this trip. They were visibly excited with anticipation. As I listened to them it seemed to me that for them this was a religious pilgrimage of sorts, with deep spiritual significance. Although I was heading to the same event as a delegate, my anticipation of the Church’s “business meeting” was far less exuberant!

The sixtieth General Conference Session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will convene in a couple of weeks. The “look-and-feel” of the gathering will be very similar to recent Sessions, except perhaps for electronic voting capabilities and the Texas heat. The elements that typically make up a General Conference Session will again be present in San Antonio. Some of these will contribute to a sense of familiarity and continuity to the event. Most of those attending the Session will again be non-delegates, with no voice or vote in the formal deliberations and decisions. They will be there to observe and to enjoy the various features of the gathering.

Despite the value that the different elements of a General Conference Session hold for different people, perhaps it is time to assess how many of these features merit preservation and perpetuation for the advancement of the Church’s mission in today’s global context. At a minimum, efforts should be undertaken to nudge this 150-year old quinquennial extravaganza into the information and digital age.

At least four elements of a General Conference Session can be redesigned for greater effectiveness and efficiency:

1. Content. A typical General Conference Session is part shareholders’ meeting, part elections, part camp meeting, part global family reunion, part marketing/sales convention, part “show-and-tell” Division and departmental reports, part food-court, part music festival, part pep-rally, part bazaar for products and materials, and more. The mix of these many elements contributes to a rather distinctive and complex atmosphere. But the luxury of combining all of these into one event also comes with a heavy price tag.

Several elements related to the content of a General Conference Session merit review. For instance, do all the items on the business agenda really belong there? Do items get placed on a Session agenda that can and should be addressed elsewhere? Are all the tangential features that embellish the event, but also add to the time, personnel, and expended resources, really necessary? Which of the elements of a Session are central to its purpose and which are peripheral? Should we dispense with the many “bells and whistles” that are unrelated to the primary purpose of a Session? Can we not get the church’s business done more effectively, efficiently, and resourcefully with a substantially streamlined General Conference Session?

2. Design. Technology has made available to us the ability to hold virtual meetings with participants scattered across the globe. Some of what is done at a General Conference Session can now be done remotely. (It is estimated that over 3 billion people in the world now have access to the Internet, and that there are approximately 6.8 billion subscribers to cell phone accounts!) There are scores of methods now available to us to market and inform our global constituency about our mission, ministry, products and services, without having to gather people into a large arena or convention center. Utilizing available technologies for this purpose will both enhance efficiency and lower the costs of getting the essential tasks done.

3. Representation: It should be obvious to all by now that serious attention needs to be given to constituting the delegate pool to more closely reflect the make-up of our global membership. As reported by the Adventist News...
Network, 83% of the 2,566 delegates to the 2015 General Conference Session are males. This is way out of proportion to the gender distribution of our global membership. Steps need to be implemented to increase the percentage of women delegates.

In a representative form of governance, the people’s wishes are – theoretically, at least– mediated to decision-making assemblies through their representatives. There is, however, a threshold to the number of representatives beyond which the organization’s ability to make effective decisions is diminished. The number of persons involved in making the decision impacts the quality of the decisions made. A strong case can be made, therefore, for drastically reducing the number of delegates to the business sessions of the General Conference.

4. Nominating Committee process: The nominating committee is tasked with recommending candidates for leadership positions in the General Conference, including its senior officers, departmental leaders and the presidents of the world Divisions. Currently, the nominating committee is constituted on the opening day of the session. Representatives from each Division caucus and determine who, from among them, will serve on the nominating committee. The committee is expected to complete its work within a few days. In fact, the nominations for the office of president and other senior officers are often completed by the first Friday of the ten-day session. Committee members, picked just hours before from across the globe, are expected to make decisions regarding candidates with little or no time to review their qualifications, backgrounds, performance history, skills, etc., especially if consideration is to be given to someone other than the incumbent in those positions.

The Nominating Committee process could be made more effective by having the Divisions caucus and pick their appointees to the nominating committee at the time of each Division’s year-end meetings the year previous to the General Conference Session. The nominating committee can thus be constituted about nine months prior to the session. The committee can then meet, in person and virtually, a number of times to do its work. Although there will be additional costs for committee members to travel to any in-person meetings prior to a General Conference Session, this cost will be minimal in comparison to the overall cost of holding a Session. The benefits of such a process, however, will be immense and will far outweigh the potential costs. It will also add credibility to the entire process.

It may be disconcerting to realize that even if there is a desire to embrace and pursue changes such as those identified above, some of the needed changes cannot happen for another ten years! Although some “upgrades” to General Conference Sessions can be made through administrative action, others require amendments to the constitution and bylaws. Because these amendments can only be made by vote at a General Conference Session, the earliest they can be done would be at the 2020 Session. Thus, it won’t be until the 2025 Session that implementation can occur. And this in a world of speed, flux, and agility, in which large global corporations are making major decisions and implementing them in a matter of days or weeks!

The notion of holding a General Conference Session was conceived at a time when the Church and the world were vastly different from what they are now. The first General Conference Session reportedly had a total of twenty delegates, and they were all from the Midwest of the United States. We’ve come a long way since those days, and today’s General Conference Session looks and feels very different – as it should –from the early years of our existence. Today’s global context, however, begs for even further upgrades in design, content, processes, and objectives. Thriving and robust organizations are constantly reinventing and redesigning themselves and their work processes. The Church must, too. That’s my take!
When We Disagree

By Bill Bossert, June 16, 2015: As humans – there will be times we disagree. At times our disagreements are of little consequence. But at other times, close relationships can be seriously damaged. Disputes arise between husbands and wives, parents and their children, bosses and their employees, and even between next-door neighbors. Although most disagreements don’t rise to the level of the Hatfields & McCoys, such moments can end poorly or not at all.

Sometimes when an impasse stops any further development of our discussion, we smile and say, “We’ve agreed to disagree.” That seems fair or at least courteous to our opponent who obviously is an idiot – who is just too ignorant to see the purity of our flawless argument.

But when the subject manner is in the religious arena – well, the inner dynamics of the disagreement can be huge and complex. What do we do when we disagree about what God says to us through His Word or what He wants from us as we practice our lives as His followers? If one looks hard enough it’s easy to find something heretical in even our closest Christian friends. Right?

Martin Luther got caught up in the fury over doctrinal purity by simply nailing a few of his thoughts to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in 1517. Many Anabaptists paid dearly with their lives for rejecting the church’s practice of infant baptism, choosing instead a “believer’s baptism” as adults. Rachel Delight Oakes, a Seventh Day Baptist, confronted Frederick Wheeler about why he was not keeping the seventh-day Sabbath if he felt so strongly that Christians should be ready to obey God and keep His commandments.

Without looking too far, religious disagreements can have serious consequences. You can simply cast your gaze towards the Middle East to see religious disagreements playing out on a major scale.

This July, Adventists from all over the world will gather for their General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas. The normal business of the church will happen just as it has at every previous GC session. There will be budgets voted, officers elected, and proposed new policies considered for implementation. But this year’s session may be shaping up to be as controversial as the GC Session of 1888 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The repercussions of that session still reverberate with different individuals even today, in 2015.

Two issues are on the agenda that potentially could bring even greater division to our denomination. The first concerns whether to ordain women to the Gospel ministry, while the second deals with the relationship of modern science to the six-day creation story in Genesis 1. I don’t wish to overstate the potential for church-wide division – but a vote either way on either issue may bring serious restlessness among our fellow believers everywhere.

As a pastor, I’ve been reading the different views shared by various people concerning both issues. It’s not my purpose here to weigh in on either issue. You can find the discussion in many different places on the Internet. Yet, as a pastor it is my purpose to perhaps be like a “watchman on the wall” (Isaiah 62:6a), and try to prepare for possible coming conflict over potential ruptures among us.

We should always be watchful for “wolves” from outside wishing to attack and destroy “the flock.” We also need to be aware of “wolves in sheep’s clothing” within who wish to destroy. Jesus warned us of such when He was here on earth. He even spoke about the wheat and the tares growing together until the harvest.

In recent years I’ve witnessed critical comments and vicious verbal attacks made at pastors who have gone to
school at our own Theological Seminary at Andrews. Early in my ministry, I had one local elder on my very first Sabbath at my new church assignment ask me if I had graduated from our Seminary. Innocently I responded that I had. Strike one! In his mind, all of the Seminary teachers were actively corrupting their students, introducing them to false teachings. Although he had never set foot inside our Seminary, he knew no one could really trust what was being taught there.

At that same church, a very sincere woman was phoning others in my church, telling them that I was teaching Desmond Ford “doctrine.” When I heard about it, I paid her a pastoral visit. I asked her specifically which of Ford’s doctrinal positions she thought I was teaching. She didn’t know. But she asserted I definitely was because I had been one of his students at Pacific Union College. I asked her if it would any make a difference to her if she knew I had never even met Dr. Ford. I shared with her that I had never taken even one class from him, and that I was already through the Seminary before Dr. Ford ever taught at PUC. She seemed somewhat relieved to hear that. Yet I sensed she was not really convinced of my doctrinal purity.

I’d like to briefly touch on a few more current examples. I do so only to suggest that a similar negative attitude towards trained pastors might be present this summer in San Antonio.

One of my colleagues and good friends is Joe Kidder, DMin. Joe teaches at our Seminary at Andrews. The Seminary offered a class called Spiritual Formation.[1] Dr. Kidder teaches this class. It is my understanding that the purpose of the class is to assist pastors in developing a deep spiritual and devotional life in Christ. The textbooks used are – the Bible, Steps to Christ and The Desire of Ages. Following the process of full disclosure, I admit to having all three of these in my library and having read from each extensively.

A short time ago, an Academy classmate, who was very upset, confronted me concerning this class. She insisted that the class was evil and deceptive to the core. She was really angry that it was being taught at our Seminary. She believed that such a class was teaching mystic philosophy and Buddhist-type meditation. She seemed to want me to affirm for her that his class was now corrupting our pastors and our church. I was surprised by her vehement insistence that this was happening “right under our noses.”

As of the writing of this article, I know that no one has bothered to pick up the phone and call the Seminary to ask about this specific class and what its purpose is. I know my classmate has never bothered to call Dr. Kidder and ask for clarification. It seems to me that simply contacting the Seminary Church Ministries Department or the teacher would be the appropriate Christian procedure. But perhaps any explanation from the teacher would not be accepted for it would be dismissed as all part of a larger evil conspiracy. And perhaps for some, it’s better for their argument to not know the facts.

Another example might be the relationship between diet and the normal Christian life. Some around me choose to live their lives with a vegan lifestyle and diet. I have no quibble with them if they chose to do so. If they can live a healthier life doing so, enjoy.

But when someone insists that one must be vegan in order to be a true Adventist or to really have a sanctified spiritual life, then I have a question. I believe Jesus’ life here on earth is to be our example. (Doesn’t the Bible mention that somewhere?) It’s clear to me that He showed us how to live following His Father’s will. Therefore, if Jesus’ example here on earth could not have met the requirement of being vegan, is it really a true standard of salvation or deeper spirituality? If Jesus Himself could not meet the diet standard suggested by some, then I don’t think it’s a requirement for all others who wish to follow Him. After all, we don’t teach salvation by diet.
Suzanna Ocsai’s recent book, *Something’s Happening: The Behind the Scenes Story of the GYC*, was a most interesting read to me. I didn’t sense that her book was a critic of the *Generation of Youth for Christ* (GYC) but simply sharing the history of its development and growth. The stated goals of the GYC of helping youth study their Bibles, be devoted followers of Christ, and evangelize those around them – I applaud.

The GYC, however, hasn’t been without controversy with the church of North America – particularly within the youth departments of many different conferences. Although I haven’t attended any GYC session, I have heard the discussion. I thought Ms. Ocsai’s book was enlightening. It appears to me that sincere people on both sides of the controversy might be “talking past” the other. It happens. But I also understand that those in the NAD youth department have sat down with GYC leaders and developed a mutual respect for each other as fellow workers for Him.

Over the last few years, I have listened to presentations (sermons, if you will) from a few of the GYC speakers. Almost all were young adults with no formal theological training. As I listened to some of the teaching from these eager young people, I knew that a few bits of what they were saying weren’t really what the passage they were using said at all. I could see that they were injecting onto the passage what they already assumed was truth.

I had to smile to myself as I listened, because as a new young pastor fresh out of college I had done the same thing – yes, more than once. Standing up boldly in the pulpit I had given some impassioned sermons that at the time I thought were spot on. They were not. Upon later review and hopefully greater maturity, I knew they clearly were off the mark. I actually have saved them in my sermon file with bold letters written across them – DON’T PREACH AGAIN. Fortunately those sermons weren’t videotaped and aren’t available online.

So, as I have listened to some speakers at the GYC, I have given them in my heart space to grow. I know they’re trying to reach the same goals I am as a pastor for our youth and young adults. I choose to give them the space to be wrong, as I was when I first began. It seems to me that the Spirit of God is more than capable to overcome our well-intended, “low-information” conclusions.

But could all of us who stand and preach remember to be students still growing in our knowledge of His Word? I certainly want to remain open to being taught.

Perhaps the most serious issue would then focus on the use of Scripture. This summer, I am sure that each side will insist that Scripture in on “their side.” What troubles me is how some seek to apply various verses to support their cause when it appears the passage isn’t addressing the topic they are promoting at all.

A few summers ago I was talking with a couple of young adults who were insisting that the King James Version was the only version of the Bible that was truly accurate for the church to use. I was told it was the Bible that Ellen White endorsed. Passionately, one young man told me that the New International Version was corrupt and we shouldn’t read it. After all, he concluded his argument with me, Ellen White never used or endorsed the NIV.

When I pointed out that the New International Version wasn’t first published until 1978, and that Ellen White died in 1915, he seemed unpersuaded. When questioned further about his dismissal of the use of the NIV, he didn’t know really why the NIV was so corrupt, but was very sure it was. After all, he argued, the NIV uses words that the KJV doesn’t use.

During the current debate about women’s ordination, some insist that when God passed judgment on Eve in Genesis 3, that God established “headship” of the man over the woman. Indeed, in Genesis 3:16, the KJV reads: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and they desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”
I will leave the exegesis of the passage to others. But search as I may within the whole chapter, I fail to see even an implied reference to women’s ordination or how the New Testament church is to organize itself. Isn’t it a passage dealing with the relationship between husbands and wives, as spoken of in other places in the Bible, having nothing at all to do with whether women can be ordained to the Gospel ministry?

I saw a video clip on Facebook about using this passage to say that God was placing men over women in all relationships by this command in Genesis 3. The voice over spoke fast and seemed so authoritative. Yet, it appeared to me that great leaps in logic and questionable Biblical interpretations were everywhere.

Ellen White attended portions of the 1888 GC in Minneapolis. It was a most contentious session and afterward she shared her thoughts and made an appeal. In Manuscript Release #961, I would like to share just a bit of her comments. They seem so relevant for this upcoming session in San Antonio.

I felt very much pained at heart over the condition of things. I made most earnest appeals to my brethren and sisters when assembled in the morning meetings, and entreated that we should make this occasion a season of profit, searching the Scriptures together with humility of heart. I am entreated that there should not be such freedom in talking in regard to things of which they knew but little. All needed to learn lessons in the school of Christ. Jesus has invited, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). If we daily learn the lessons of humility and lowliness of heart, there will not be the feelings which exist at this meeting.

There are some differences of views on some subjects, but is this a reason for sharp, hard feelings? Shall envy and evil surmisings and imaginings, evil suspicion, hatred and jealousies become enthroned on the heart? All these things are evil and only evil. Our help is in God alone. Let us spend much time in prayer and searching the Scriptures with a right spirit—anx ious to learn and willing to be corrected or undeceived on any point where we may be in error. If Jesus is in our midst and our hearts are melted into tenderness by His love we shall have one of the best conferences we have ever attended. (Manuscript Release #961, pages 6-7)

Therefore, I would suggest the following as we go through the upcoming GC Session in July:

1. **Let’s be loving towards the one with whom we disagree.** No matter what side of an issue we find ourselves, we have a brother or sister in Christ who wishes to follow Him as we do. They desire our love and respect. Somehow that sounds like the Golden Rule, doesn’t it?

2. **Be careful not to “jump to conclusions.”** Not all the facts may be seen at first glance. Some may take time, study, discussion, and prayer to be revealed to the mind and heart.

3. **Be open to be taught.** You never know from whom the Spirit of God will send to teach you. He may have a learning moment in your future that will surprise you. Being teachable is just what Ellen White was asking for in the Manuscript listed above.

4. **Do you or the person speaking really know what they’re talking about?** Frequently, hearsay is just that. And often the person speaking certainly may be passionate and loud. But passion and volume don’t make truth. Truth isn’t found in insisting I’m right and you’re wrong. Be careful to make sure the person has done their homework in good Bible interpretation.
5. **Be open to accepting you might be wrong.** It’s a tough pill to swallow – admitting you were wrong. But doing so can open up for you greater truth and understanding of what God is revealing to you. I have had such life-changing moments of swallowing my pride and admitting I was wrong. Each time, it’s been a God-sent blessing to me.

6. **Be gracious to your brother or sister even if you think they are wrong.** All of us are to continue to grow in our understanding of Scripture, truth and God’s will for us. Jesus has been patient with me and I have grown. I would guess that He’s been gracious towards you as well. Let’s be gracious and patient with others.

This summer, after the votes are all taken and the delegates head home, I pray that we not lose our true focus that we are to uplift the risen Savior and His matchless grace towards all of us. We have a movement that is to alert the world to our returning Savior. We long for them to join us as we greet that Savior. Oh, by the way, blest be the tie that binds.

[1] Because of the criticism, the name of the class has been changed to *Foundations of Biblical Spirituality.*

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*Bill has been serving as Sr. Pastor at the Riverview Adventist Church in Reno, NV. He is married to Michele, and he has just retired after 41 years of pastoral ministry. He & Michele have a home in Naples, FL.*
A Modest Proposal

by Andy Hanson, June 19, 2015: Wilson's keynote—“The Truth as It Is in Jesus” At sexuality summit, Adventist Church president reflects on ‘human brokenness’ March 18, 2014 | Cape Town, South Africa

Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson reflects on “human brokenness” during his keynote at the church’s summit on sexuality. The summit, “In God’s Name: Scripture. Sexuality. Society,” meets March 17 to 20 in Cape Town, South Africa. [photo: Ansel Oliver]

Wilson called it both “inconsistent and morally wrong for the Adventist Church to isolate practicing members of the LGBT community for discipline” while it ignores those engaged in heterosexual pre-marital sex or adultery (boldface mine).

http://news.adventist.org/fileadmin/_processed_/csm_ted-keynote-web_418db12e0f.jpg

It seems that even our GC President finds it “inconsistent and morally wrong” for the church to “isolate and discipline” members of the LGBT community. This doesn’t seem to be just his opinion.* If not, shouldn’t our Church Policy statement reflect Ted Wilson’s more enlightened church position on “homosexual practice?” **

*Statement from the Communication Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Church leadership noted with concern some statements reportedly made by the Uganda Union Mission Executive Director in connection with the Anti-Homosexuality Bill under consideration in Uganda. These views do not reflect the values of the Church as expressed in published statements on same sex conduct.

Seventh-day Adventists continue to affirm the equal dignity and rights of every person as articulated in the relevant
international human rights declarations and Covenants. –Rajmund Dabrowski, Communication Director


**CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

1. Denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church or teaching doctrines contrary to the same.

2. Violation of the law of God, such as worship of idols, murder, stealing, profanity, gambling, Sabbath breaking, and willful and habitual falsehood.

3. Violation of the seventh commandment of the law of God as it relates to the marriage institution, the Christian home, and biblical standards of moral conduct.

4. Such violations as fornication, promiscuity, incest, homosexual practice, sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults, and other sexual perversions, and the remarriage of a divorced person, except of the spouse who has remained faithful to the marriage vow in a divorce for adultery or for sexual perversions.

5. Physical violence, including violence within the family.

6. Fraud or willful misrepresentation in business.

7. Disorderly conduct which brings reproach upon the church.

8. Adhering to or taking part in a divisive or disloyal movement or organization.

(See p. 190.)

9. Persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted church authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church.

10. The use, manufacture, or sale of alcoholic beverages.

11. The use, manufacture, or sale of tobacco in any of its forms for human consumption.

12. The misuse of, or trafficking in, narcotics or other drugs.

The church cannot afford to deal lightly with such sins nor permit personal considerations to affect its actions. It must register its decisive and emphatic disapproval of the sins of fornication, adultery, all acts of moral indiscretion, and other grievous sins (Boldface mine).
The Friendship of Men

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, submitted June 17, 2015.

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father’s house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul’s servants. 1 Sam. 18:1-5, NASB

What would it have been like to be King Saul’s son? Some modern writers have postulated Saul’s illness to be anything from epileptic seizures to PTSD to bipolar disorder. Many agree that he seemed to suffer from fits of depression. The Bible simply describes it as “an evil spirit,” but adds troublingly, “sent by God.”

I, for one, don’t believe God sends evil spirits. Or diseases, for that matter. Or that he abandoned Saul in the sense that he stopped loving him or caring what became of him. It’s possible Saul reached the point where he could no longer respond (at least outwardly) to God, but I also reject the notion that humans can judge such a troubled soul, then or now.

Jonathan was the crown prince, and by all accounts might have been one of the best kings Israel had. Yet this “new kid,” David, fresh from the hill country and the privations of life with sheep, even fresher from a sensational victory over an apparently invincible “giant,” seems to have no more than entered on the scene when Jonathan “loved him as himself.”

We don’t know how soon Jonathan knew that David was slated by God to be the next king rather than himself. We don’t know what inner feelings this may have caused (good, bad, or indifferent! Who would want to be king over this troublesome people?)

What we do know is that the two of them give a picture of close friendship that is rarely, if ever, surpassed in the biblical stories. Their souls were “knit together,” and they stayed that way for life. When Jonathan died tragically in battle, David grieved as only the psalmist of Israel could, by writing a song that is still noted for its beauty today, found in 2 Sam. 1:19-27. Later, in a specific attempt to find members of Jonathan’s family to whom he could show honor, David took Mephibosheth into his household and cared for him for life.

Who is your dearest friend? What have you done lately to show your love?
Journey

By Virginia Davidson, submitted June 18, 2015

[Note from editor: I believe this is intended to form part of a longer work Ms. Davidson is working on, so if you like it, you may get a chance for more! We featured Davidson before, both in Features and in Poetry & Arts, (also here), but this piece gives a different side to her story.]

My spiritual journey began long before I was born on January 10, 1954, in the experience of my godly parents. They met and married at Madison College in Tennessee. The devout, conservative Adventism of that place went with them out to the College of Medical Evangelists at Loma Linda, where Daddy graduated in the first class of dentistry—and where I joined the family as the second daughter. It followed them back home to south-central Mississippi where we girls, eventually four of us, grew up.

The spring after my eighth birthday, I was baptized. I understood the teachings of the church and wanted to be part of God's people, so my parents allowed me to take that important step. I'm glad they did. However, another seven years would pass before I began to understand something of the lordship of Christ—that belonging to Him would make a difference in the choices one made.

A year and a half later, at age 16, I was re-baptized—thoroughly committed to God, whatever it took. I was a student then with two of my sisters at Stonecave Academy, a tiny self-supporting boarding school in rural Tennessee—a metaphorical "grandchild" of old Madison College, and very, very conservative.

Also about that time, I began to understand more about the unchanging nature of God's love—that nothing I could do would make Him love me less. It must be, then, that nothing I could do would make Him love me more. It took only another second to assess all the things I did differently from most girls my age: no short skirts, no jeans, no meat, no makeup or jewelry, no boyfriend (it was against the rules), no "bad music," no TV, and the list went on. I thought of all those things in one instant and asked, "THEN WHY AM I DOING THEM?!!" If God doesn't love me any more for all these things I'm doing ["not doing" would have been more accurate], then what's the point?

Eventually I realized the intrinsic benefits of a good lifestyle—righteousness is its own reward!—and that issues of witnessing are also involved, if one is interested in being a tool in God's hands. Even today, while I don't espouse exactly the same list (there is such a thing as balance!), I still endeavor to be healthy and glorify God. But at that time, in my mind it was righteousness that was somehow all tied together with behavior. In fact, when I was a senior in academy, I actually made out a list of about a dozen items—like, don't complain and don't flirt and don't gossip—and I thought if I could just do all those things, I would be a Christian. Every night I would go over my list and write in my diary and become even more depressed. It seemed I could never be victorious! I suffered from quite an over-active conscience.

The following summer, someone lent me a set of tapes—"The Vertical Life" by Morris Venden. The gist of the series was that if I focus on my sins and problems and faults and weaknesses and short-comings, as though looking horizontally into a metaphysical mirror, I will only become more like them. I knew already that our minds, our characters, are affected by what we think about, but I hadn't applied it to issues of faith. I had experienced the reality that a negative, self-critical, inward-turning stance, far from changing me into Christ's likeness, robbed me of joy in the Lord and made me a more difficult person. But when I began consciously to think about Jesus (a "vertical look") and learn about Him and desire to become like Him and ask for His power to live in me—it actually happened! I realized He does work in me to make me like Him! He honors my choice and makes it my reality, and He will finish the job He started!
At about that same time, I also went through an identity crisis. The self-supporting system where I had lived had steep expectations of women—they should be demure and quiet and proper, and so on, all of which I was not. I struggled with myself and prayed for God to make me like one of the other girls on campus who, it seemed to me, had conquered all those lively personality traits that were such an integral part of who I was. It is true that we should “cultivate purity and simplicity, the quiet graces of the flowers,” as I was told (see Steps to Christ, p. 85); but all flowers are not violets and hepaticas…or wild ginger blooming under last year’s dead leaves. In fact, the State Flower of Mississippi, my own home state, was the Southern Magnolia—big as a plate and fragrant as ripe lemons! When I realized God had already made me who He wanted me to be, and that as I trusted Him, He would make me into the best “me” I could possibly be—and that I would even like it—I found yet another level of peace. I was learning to trust.

After I had completed the three-year program at Wildwood Medical Missionary Institute in North Georgia and worked at the print shop there for another year, I was asked to return to Stonecave Academy to teach—among other subjects, freshman Bible. The class alternated from year to year between “Life of Christ” with The Desire of Ages as the text, and “Old Testament History” using Patriarchs and Prophets and Prophets and Kings. I had studied those same books on the same campus years before as a student, but studying to teach was another story. I found an even richer storehouse of truth! I began to think more deeply, more independently, and to see underlying issues rather than mere rules and regulations. I read, “God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence” (DA 458) and cross-referenced that thought with the statement that trued faith is based on “evidence, not demonstration” (SC 105).

Years later when my mother-in-law lent me “Conversations about God,” by Graham Maxwell, I recognized the inspired emphasis on evidence. The deep, underlying issues of the universe-wide great controversy rang true with what I had read for myself, and made sense particularly as I saw my father-in-law transformed through the truths involved. I had experienced my own frustration in trying to make two rambunctious little girls “be good,” and the message of freedom in God’s government and the way He works to win our loyalty, which is the essence of righteousness (Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 97), began to bear fruit in my own life in the way I raised our strong-willed daughters.

Then came the opportunity to write the adult Sabbath School lessons on Proverbs. Actually, that story had begun about five years earlier when our Becky was a newborn and Carol a toddler, and I had neither time to write nor a computer to write on. But when the time was right and I was ready, after I had begun to see the bigger picture and grasp the significance of the great controversy in theology, God brought the opportunity around again. Proverbs to Live By was essentially different due to the deeper, broader perspective. Nine years later it would be “recycled” and studied again, after an opportunity to rewrite and strengthen it once more in the larger, great controversy viewpoint.

Back when I was a student at Wildwood, I had a roommate who told me point-blank, “I’m glad I didn’t grow up in the church like you did. You will never know what it’s like to grope in the dark for truth, and trace down a ray of light until it opens into the full brilliance of day. You will never experience how that feels.” She was right…I won’t, not in the same way. But I wouldn’t trade places with her for the world!

It seems that people who have been out in the wild wicked world and lived dangerously and finally have come to God—those are the ones who “have a testimony,” we say. And they do. They grip us with their stories of dramatic collisions in dead-end alleys, of God finally getting their attention so they can turn around—which is the essence of repentance: turning around, turning toward God.

It is also true that we all need a deeper experience with God ourselves, and hearing the story of someone else who is on fire could possibly rekindle our own light. But I wish there were some way to help our young people see the treasure of growing up in the church! We don’t need to go out and get ourselves battle wounds so that we can “have a testimony” or be able to minister to the needy. Scar tissue is stronger, true; but it is also less supple, less sensitive.

I treasure my background in the Seventh-day Adventist church, and our strong, devout family. Oh, we heard “by the
grapevine” the expectations of some people that we girls would “go wild” as soon as we got out from “under the thumb” of our parents. Those people made themselves false prophets. We all have stayed true to the faith. In fact, I believe it was the “faith of my fathers”—while it did need to become my own—that freed me from the wandering quest for truth which takes so many through the vast, thirsty wasteland of the world.

Instead, the heritage of faith has formed the basis for a deeper understanding of the familiar truths. I'm thankful for what I have been given. It has been a solid foundation on which to build. Of course, God is infinite; truth is exhaustless. We can never know truth fully, but we can know truth truly. Throughout eternity, we will continually learn more and more and more, and never encompass the whole and never get tired of the exploration. Eternity blows my mind—never-ending. Infinite! It follows, then, that the only way to make eternity longer is to begin it sooner—like, now. “As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here” (DA 331). That sounds good! Will you come with me?
Nothing In My Hands, Chapter Five

By Del Starr, a pseudonym, all rights reserved. Submitted June 18, 2015

Starting Over

Dianne’s ego and her security were totally deflated by this time and when she arrived in Crescent City, she would not share anything with her aunt as to why she was in the condition she was or what had taken place.

Dianne obtained a job as a waitress in a local diner and her life consisted of going to work and coming home. On the weekends she would suggest to her aunt and uncle that they go out and take some time for themselves. She would, she told them, babysit the kids. Her aunt insisted that Dianne take some time for herself and be young and free, but Dianne didn’t have any desire to leave the house at all except to go to work.

One day when Dianne entered her place of employment, she was called to the back office where she was told that she was being fired. When she asked why, she was told that she had been observed kissing a man behind the coffee machine for a period of four minutes.

Again Dianne was devastated. She knew it was untrue but there was no way to prove it and she was losing her livelihood as well as any pride she had left. When she returned to her aunt's home, her aunt was livid! Her aunt also knew it was untrue. She couldn’t get Dianne to leave the house, much less to date or have anything to do with the male species. Dianne’s aunt went to the diner where she faced the owner, but it was to no avail. Dianne was fired and that was that.

Once more Dianne began to look for employment. This time she held very little hope of finding anything, for now her application would read “FIRED.” George and Ruth had instilled the principle of honesty in Dianne and never once did it enter her mind to be dishonest regarding her former employment. So she struggled through trying to find a job.

She applied at a local retirement home where she was promptly hired. Dianne stumbled a bit over her words and said, “But didn’t you realize? I’ve been fired.”

“Yes, we realize that,” Dianne was told, “we’ve been around here long enough to know that if you haven’t been fired from that diner, we don’t want you to work for us.”

Relief flooded Dianne’s heart as she realized that it was nothing against her personally and that her new employer had just told her that this was a normal happening for this diner.

In time, Dianne was able to move into her own place and have her longed-for privacy. Her aunt and uncle were totally supportive of her and for the first time in nearly ten years, Dianne was able to feel a bit of security.

Eventually also, she accepted a date with a young man from her hometown in the valley of Oregon. But Dianne, longing for the love and acceptance she had once enjoyed, was not wise, and became pregnant with her first child.

Once again fear struck at her heart as she realized that she would be unable to support and care for a baby in her present condition. She told the baby’s father about the baby but, though he offered marriage, Dianne was not comfortable with the thought. She had experienced too much marriage and now had no desire to ever marry again.

Dianne moved back in with George and Ruth but this time, rather than trying to find employment, she determined to
get some sort of education, and enrolled at the local business college.

Since she was now pregnant with no income, Dianne applied for and received public assistance, and she was able to move into a duplex where she again had some privacy.

Life now consisted of going to school and coming home.

Early one January morning, Dianne called George and told him it was time to go to the hospital. As he had for Grace, George now took Dianne to the hospital. With headlights flashing and horn blowing, Dianne experienced a bit of what her own Mother had upon her birth. But the baby, as had Dianne, decided to take her time. She was not born until late that evening, another precious little girl.

Dianne named her Janetta Ruth and at 6 lbs. 13 oz., she was a doll of a baby. Dianne now had someone who depended upon her and upon whom she could expend all her pent-up love. She doted on Janetta.

When Dianne had flown to California from Germany, there had been a soldier from Alex’s company on the same plane. He was headed for Viet Nam and gave Dianne a copy of his orders and asked her to write to him while he was in “Nam”. This was the only constant in Dianne’s life, other than her new baby, and she enjoyed writing to Gary and hearing back from him. When Gary left Viet Nam though, she lost contact with him and the letters ceased. Another empty spot in Dianne’s heart and life.

A few times Dianne accompanied some of the girls from school to an evening on the town but not often, and she did not meet or find a boyfriend. She was now living near her father, Donald, his third wife, her five children, and their three children. She became close to Donald as she never had been in her life and she found that she actually enjoyed his company as well as that of his wife, Dianne’s step-mother.

When Janetta was about six months old, George had a long, serious talk with Dianne. He expressed his concern for Janetta growing up without a father and told her that he felt it would be better for Janetta if Dianne would give her up for adoption. He suggested that it should be soon, for people prefer to adopt tiny babies rather than older children.

Dianne was terrified once more. She needed Janetta to give her something stable and more than that, she dearly loved her. She could no longer imagine life without Janetta. However, she had always been an obedient child to George and would not, even at this time, defy him. She knew in her heart he was right. Though she also knew that she would not be able to continue living if she gave up her baby for adoption, she knew that Janetta had little hope of a real life with her. She finally came to an agreement with George that if she was not remarried by the time Janetta was two… she would, indeed, give the baby up for adoption in hopes of providing her with a more secure life.

Dianne’s focus now turned to marriage. She was not quite twenty-two years old.
What to Do with Youth on Sabbath Afternoon

Posted by Debbonaire Kovacs, June 18, 2015.

A teen group in Great Britain has a unique idea, and it pretty much stops traffic…learn more below.

After the Fall

By S M Chen, Submitted June 18, 2015

And it came to pass that the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the air gathered together, but the Spirit of the Lord was upon them not.

A question was put by one as to who was greatest.

The lion spake first. “Am not I the king of beasts?” And he gave a mighty roar. The ground shook, trees swayed, and animals shuddered.

But an elephant stepped forth, and the lion stepped back. The elephant trumpeted loudly and stamped the earth with such force that the ground shook, trees swayed, and animals shuddered.

“Who is king?” asked the elephant, as he picked up a large tree trunk and tossed it to one side.

No animal dared answer.

Then a giraffe stepped forth, with awkwardness, and spake, “Am I not the tallest?” The other animals looked up at him and acknowledged none was taller.

“Am I not the fleetest?” asked the cheetah, slinking forward. None could gainsay her.

A chimpanzee waved a peeled banana. “I’m probably the smartest.” Animal boos all around.

A hippopotamus waddled out of the water. “None can stay underwater longer than I,” saith she. “Unless they be a fish.”

A python uncoiled itself and slithered into view. “At over thirty feet long, I think I’m the longest,” it hissed.

“I live the longest,” lumbered the giant tortoise. “Doth that count?”

“No other animal cometh near me,” squeaked the porcupine, preening itself, “because of my quills.”

“Same here,” saith the skunk, “because of my spray.” As he turned around the others shrank back.

A swift chirped, “I fly the fastest.”

An eagle said, “I have the keenest vision,” but the vulture protested.

The albatross said, “I have the greatest wingspan,” and unfolded its long wings in demonstration.

And the animals contended among themselves, who was greatest. The bickering went on for some time. It sounded like a zoo at mealtime.

Finally, they were about to concede that the elephant, because of his enormous size and strength, was the greatest, when a small gray mouse ran up inside the trunk of the elephant.

The elephant trumpeted and tried to dislodge the mouse by exhaling through his trunk with force and thrashing it.
about.

To no avail; all for naught.

Finally, frustrated and a little fearful, the elephant lay down, defeated.

The mouse emerged from his trunk and scampered into the brush.

Whereupon an owl, which had hitherto been quiet, hooted, “The first shall be last, and the last first.”

All the animals fell silent.

A light rain began to fall, a rainbow appeared in the sky, and, in the midst of the rainbow, a white dove hovered.

*

Ever thereafter, the animals agreed that none was greatest, but that each of God’s creatures was fine the way he or she was created. And God looked down and saw that it was good.
Stormy Seas

Photo by Debbonnaire Kovacs, taken in the Inside Passage on the northwest Pacific Coast of North America, Submitted June 18, 2015

“Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” Mark 4:41, NASB.