NEWS

New Treasurer for the Denomination, Secretary Re-elected
On Friday before breaking for the Sabbath, delegates elected Juan Prestol as treasurer and re-elected Dr. G. T. Ng as executive secretary without any debate. Full report here.

Major New Study of Ordination Just Coming Off the Press
Is this something that really should be read by the delegates before they vote later this week? News here. Book review here.

COMMENTARY

The Acceptance Speech That Was Not Made
By Jack Hoehn
Read the speech of the candidate who promised to resign.

The Treasurer's Report: World Membership & Tithe Per Capita
By Dennis Hokama See tables and analysis.

Women's Ordination: Unity vs. Culture
By Jim Walters Observations, interviews of delegates from
around the world.

Would Changes in Creation Doctrine Have an Impact on Loma Linda University?
By Dennis Hokama  
An analysis of possibilities.

MISSION REPORTS ON TV

You can see the video reports, colorful parades and music from different parts of the world on the Hope Channel from the Internet.

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New Treasurer for the Denomination; Executive Secretary Re-elected

From ANN, July 4, 2015: A new treasurer was voted for the Adventist denomination while Dr. G. T. Ng, was re-appointed executive secretary. These recommendations from the nominating committee were quickly agreed to by the delegates on Friday afternoon (July 3) before the business meeting broke for the Sabbath.

With the retirement of Robert Lemon as the chief financial officer of the denomination announced well in advance, the nominating committee recommended Juan Prestol-Puesan, the undertreasurer for the past five years, as the new candidate. This was quickly voted and the delegates unanimously reelected Ng.

With perhaps the shortest acceptance speech in Adventist history, Prestol-Puesán said simply, “On behalf of my wife and myself, we’ll do our best, God helping us.” Born in the Dominican Republic, he has served as treasurer of various Adventist entities, including the Atlantic Union Conference, the Euro-Asia Division and the North American Division. Prestol-Puesán and his wife, Belkis, have two adult children.

In an interview, he said the biggest challenges of the church involve unity and the involvement of lay members. “I am pledging myself to communication, not only what we say to them, but how we listen to them, how we bring about a better working relationship,” he said. “We will do whatever we can to communicate with our people.”

The volatility of the world’s financial markets has made managing the church’s funds more challenging. Changes in interest rates in some parts of the world can mean a profit or loss of millions of dollars. “Changes in financial markets, changes in world economies, perhaps a few surprises—we will have to trust in the Lord,” Prestol-Puesán said. “But we also have to be careful and mindful managers of the Lord’s funds.”

Another challenge is changing demographics. “The new generation has questions about how the church operates,” Prestol-Puesán said. “Not only how the church uses its funds, but how the church involves them in ministry.” He pledged to focus on listening.

Ng, whose service for the denomination includes being a pastor, seminary professor, and administrator, was elected as GC secretary five years ago at the session in Atlanta. Since then, he has emphasized the need for audits of membership records around the world and has made membership retention a key focus of the denomination. His office also coordinates the Adventist missionary program. Ng and his wife, Ivy, have two adult children.

Ng thanked the delegates for their confidence following his election and, in a flash of his trademark humor, quipped, “I was hoping someone would refer this nomination back to committee.” His comment was a nod to the discussion that surrounded the nomination and election of the GC president earlier in the day.

Ng said the greatest challenge facing the church is changing the culture from members being spectators, while pastors do most of the work, to a culture where the priesthood of all believers is embraced and practiced. “Every member is an evangelist,” he said.

The challenges facing the denomination as it relates to membership revolve around the fact that membership growth in some parts of the world is flat or even declining. In general, membership growth is stagnant in parts of the world with high levels of education, affluence and secularism. And while the church in some parts of the world is experiencing unprecedented growth, the challenges in those parts of the world include keeping accurate records and maintaining high rates of retention. “We are leaders. Those numbers have to be believable. We have to have
credibility before our members," Ng said.

Pastor Myron Iseminger was re-elected to the position of undersecretary for the General Conference, a role he has filled since 2011. He was a church administrator in the northwest United States prior to that.

*The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.*
Major New Study of Ordination: Should It Be Read Before You Vote?

By AT News Team, July 5, 2015: A major new study of ordination, both from the Bible and from the Adventist heritage, is just now off the press and available. Some sources have told Adventist Today that it should be read before the vote on ordination is taken this week because it is a much more thorough and comprehensive study than any of the others.

Ordination Reconsidered was written by Dr. Bertil Wiklander, who retired last fall as president of the Trans-European Division of the General Conference. He is a Bible scholar and served the denomination as a seminary professor and missionary, as well as a respected administrator. The book is published by the Newbold Academic Press and copies are available in the Adventist Book Center in the exhibit hall in San Antonio. It will also be available as an eBook soon on Amazon.

The book anchors its analysis in “the mission of God” and an examination of the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman. It focuses on understanding not only what the Bible says, but also, more deeply, what the Bible means.

Chapter 7 follows carefully the history of the priesthood in the Old Testament and the institution of ordination in that context. It discusses the absence of female priests and also points out numerous examples in the Old Testament of women serving as judges, Nazirites, prophetesses and spiritual leaders, as well as proclaiming God’s word.

The book does not advance a particular point of view in the current debate among Adventists, but stays faithful to a careful understanding of what God has taught us in Scripture. Chapter 9 focuses on the New Testament, tracing what is written about female disciples and eyewitnesses to the resurrection, a section on the role of women as seen in John’s writings as well as the Pauline passages on elders, overseers and deacons.

There are specific reviews of the origin of ordination in the New Testament and the practice of laying on of hands in both the Old and New Testament, as well as word studies of “head” and “submission” in the controversial passages of Ephesians 5, I Corinthians 11 and 14, and I Timothy 2. Chapter 10 looks at the fundamental notion of the Christian church as a “kingdom of priests.”

An appendix specifically addresses considerations for the Adventist denomination in its policies about ordination. These are the practical findings from the in-depth Bible study and address the decisions before the GC delegates this week. “Perhaps this study means that the entire decision should be put off another five years to provide time for the kind of careful attention to the Bible that is needed,” one reader told Adventist Today.

A review of the book by Dr. Reinder Bruinsma is available in the Opinion section here.
At Last: A Fresh Re-assessment of the Entire Issue of Ordination (Men and Women)


For many decades the Adventist theology of ordination has been in desperate need of a biblical revision and clarification. Dr. Wiklander’s book offers a comprehensive and innovative discussion and a thoughtful re-assessment of the current theology and practice of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The above quotation, taken from the back of the book cover, is a concise but fitting description of this interesting, thorough and well-structured study, that, in spite of its academic level, is very readable—also for readers without any advanced theological and linguistic background.

The book is based on a much lengthier document that was produced in the context of a study of the ordination of women (WO) in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and was submitted by the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists to the GC-initiated, international committee that studied the question of women's ordination (TOSC). However, it has been totally rewritten in a form that makes it easily accessible.

The special merit of this book is that it very successfully places the issue of WO in a wider context—more than many other studies have done thus far. The publication of this work is, therefore, an important contribution to the WO-discussion in the church. It will help the readers to see this wider context, which many may thus far have missed. The overall context is, according to the author, the mission of God.

Wiklander, who recently retired after serving nineteen years as the president of the Trans-European Division, has a scholarly background. His expertise is, in particular, in Old Testament studies and biblical languages. He earned his doctorate at the reputable Swedish Upsala University. He is therefore, without any doubt, well qualified to write a book such as this. In it he deals with the issue of Women’s Ordination by thoroughly exploring the general topic of ordination—biblically, theologically, linguistically and historically (general church history and SDA history). His conclusion, that ordination, as it is practiced in contemporary Adventism, has poor biblical credentials, is well argued. The aspect of the laying on of hands receives due attention in this study. Wiklander's conclusion, that the Bible emphasizes how God calls people, and that people, c.q. the church, can merely affirm this divine call, is very credible. His stress on the charismatic aspect of being assigned a special task in God’s mission, rather than through any ecclesial induction into a church office, is a thread that runs through the entire book.

Another thread is the Bible’s unambiguous support for gender equality as a principle that is basic for the fulfillment of God’s mission. This, together with the rejection of any dichotomy between clergy and laity, lays the basis for the conviction that God requires equal treatment of men and women—with equal status—in the church. The ‘problem’ texts that, in the opinion of many, suggest an unequal status (‘submission’ of the woman, ‘headship’ of the man, etc.) are dealt with thoroughly and convincingly.

Many details of Wiklander’s arguments hinge on linguistic choices. His explanations are quite easy to follow and are quite convincing. Although many readers may not be sufficiently competent in the area of biblical languages to arrive at a definitive judgment themselves, Bertil Wiklander’s expertise as a scholar in these areas is everywhere apparent and merits their trust.
Sketching the various cultural milieus in which the Bible originated (and similarities in other cultures) is very helpful. Wiklander argues that many aspects of these cultures ran contrary to God’s original missional plan. The divine principles of full gender equality were, however, never abandoned, but God temporarily ‘tolerated’ certain aberrations (such as patriarchy and other forms of male dominance). He refers to the parallel between historically conditioned gender relationships and other phenomena, such as polygamy and slavery.

Within this wider context the author arrives at the logical conclusion that the ordination of women should not only be permitted in the Adventist Church, but is required, in view of the mission of the church, and in view of the fundamental, and eternal, biblical truth that all believers are ‘a kingdom and priests,’ regardless of gender. This leads Wiklander in an appendix to suggest a number of ways in which the current ordination practice in the Adventist Church might be revised, in order to make it more biblical.

The book, regrettably, comes a little late, just days before the General Conference session in San Antonio actually began. But it will be available in the GC Book Center and in various other places (the Newbold College booth and the Adventist Today booth) in the exhibition hall at the conference. In any case, it will, remain an important source in any further discussion on the ordination topic that will, no doubt, continue after the current GC session.

The newly founded Newbold Academic Press is to be congratulated for this superb publication. It can be seen at their booth in the exhibition hall, and copies are available for sale at the Adventist Book Center.

Dr. Reinder Bruinsma retired recently after serving the denomination as a pastor, theology professor, missionary and church administrator.
This is the Presidential Acceptance Speech You Didn’t Get to Hear

By Jack Hoehn:  This is the acceptance speech you didn’t get to hear …..

“I was thinking perhaps an Angel clothed in white raiment with a trumpet in his hand had blown the trumpet loudly in each man’s ear, and then said, ‘Hear ye, Hear ye, my people, Ted meant well, but God likes Dr. Hoehn a lot and Jack’s promise to resign as soon as elected, a lot more.”

Much to the overwhelming surprise of no one, I was not elected president of the General Conference on Friday July 3, 2015.  My congratulations to Elder Ted Wilson for such a hard fought and well financed campaign.  I can only admire the timing of his pre-election world tours, and the powerful well-orchestrated speech he offered to the delegates just as soon as the nominating committee had been chosen on Thursday evening July 2, before he was nominated by acclaim the next day.

This, added to the fact that I am only known to you, my faithful readers, and the 500 babies and their mothers I saved by emergency Cesarean sections at our Mwami Adventist Hospital during my 9 years serving in Zambia, sort of reduced the chances of my last minute “exploratory campaign” for the GC presidency.  Then there is the fact that although a Licensed Minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at that time, I was not any more ordained than if I had been a mere woman.

That technicality aside, I did think that if each and every one of the 218 men on the nominating committee (I wasn’t worried about the 34 women; either they already knew who not to vote for, or else they would just go along with the men if that was their view of their job) had had the identical vision the night before[1], I might have had an outside chance.  So I prepared a draft acceptance speech that sadly I will not be able to give, but I can at least share it with you my readers.

DEAR SISTERS OF THE ADVENTIST WORLD,

and the lesser number of men who have decided to participate in God’s service as Adventists, I would like to start by thanking Nancy Wilson for her kind and loving care of my predecessor, her husband Ted.  I realize that neither Nancy nor her husband, nor anyone else anticipated this outcome.  And as my own dear wife Deanne told me, “Are you crazy, Jack?”

But since all of the men on the nominating committee had the same Angelic trumpet blast in their ear, and the identical strange and puzzling message, I stand before you tonight, very proud that God loves me, and that He is not too upset over my plan to immediately resign and return leadership of our church to our children, to those younger, stronger, and brighter than all of us over 50 years of age.[2]

BUT BEFORE I RESIGN,
I want to tell you what Pastor Wilbur Alexander once told a graduating class at our Pacific Union College, and I paraphrase:

We are gathered here at great expense to feel good about ourselves and that we must now go from this place with renewed energy and zeal to conquer the world for Christ. But the truth is that the world is a mess, and you are a mess, and what we have been doing isn’t working and will not work in the future.

Hidden in the statistics presented to you this week is the fact that Seventh-day Adventists who once were a progressive and influential voice in the world, are now becoming inconsequential. We are losing members who are educated and thoughtful and gaining members who grasp at any glimmer of hope.

GOD LOVES THE WORLD AND WE ARE PLAYING CHURCH

Opening hymns, taking an offering, preaching a sermon, paying tithe, voting a list of doctrines, holding to past understandings while ignoring the facts staring us in the face, are irrelevant to the real needs of the world today. With the best of motives, but in ignorance, we have made the Bible look like a book for fools. When we refuse to treat it as the introduction to Truth, but not a limit on Truth.

We have likewise destroyed the usefulness of Ellen White as a messenger of Truth by the idolatry of considering her infallible.

EACH GENERATION NEEDS GOD’S TRUTH REAPPLIED

Our teenage founders had it correct. They preached Present Truth, not past truth. Our church was known as the Great Advent Movement, and it did move, leaving behind partial or incomplete ideas about Truth, and following the Spirit of God into new understandings and applications to meet the minds and hearts of men in this age, not in past ages.

WHAT YOU CAN’T DO IS NOT GOD’S TRUTH

God’s Truth is what you can do. When we slip into what you can’t do we become accusers of the brethren. “Judge not that you be not judged” is not my opinion; it is God’s commandment.

Our message is not to tell gay people what they cannot do. Our message is not to tell geologists what they cannot see in nature. Our message is not to tell women what they are not permitted to do for God. Or what tattoos and piercings people may not have. It is not to apply 19th century health advice to 21st century health problems. And we do not please God when we tell others what kind of music, what kind of instruments, and what kind of rhythms they can use to worship God.

HERE IS WHAT WE NEED TO SAY

We believe the Bible is God’s rule for life, and presents the ideals for all behavior. But we also believe that all are sinners and the Bible strongly condemns idolatry of worshiping things (money, cars, clothes, food, success, pride, power) and it calls God’s enemy the accuser. When the church specializes in accusing people of their sins, ignoring their own wealth, education, prosperity, and excess, the Bible says that we are ignoring the log in our eye, while trying to remove the mote in others eyes.

Until a sinner asks us for advice, we should never point out other’s sins; our message is Christ Jesus came to forgive sinners, of whom I am chief.
The Adventist church should be the last people in the world to point out other’s sins. And the first people in the world to welcome and encourage, and love sinners—gay people, prostitutes, addicted people, fat people, rich people, divorced people, unmarried couples of any gender, Democrats and Republicans.

Judging drives people away, Jesus attracted people, even though he was the one sinless person on the planet. We should seek to increase the number of Gay people attending in our churches, and tell them God loves them, and God will teach them how to live. The rest of us should love them and shut up, until they learn to trust us and our love for them, and they personally ask us for advice.

WE SUPPORT TRUTH NOT OPINIONS

Adventists need to tell all that Jesus is coming, and say nothing about when and how.

Adventists need to tell all that Christ is the Creator, and keep personal ideas about the science of when and how.

Adventists need invite all to Sabbath, and encourage each person to have God tell them how to keep the Sabbath.

Adventists need to have all Worship, and not limit the type of worship or the music used.

Adventist need to have all Pray, and not tell people if they have to kneel, open or close their eyes, or meditate.

Adventist need to help people honor God with their bodies, and not enforce their personal opinion on mustard, cheese, pickles, tea and coffee. We can share information, not share conclusions. We should have smoking areas in all our churches, where addicts can go when learning of God’s love for them and his desire to purify their bodies of all pollution.

WE ARE SERVANTS OF THE WORLD, NOT ITS RULING PARTY

Finally we need to remember that Jesus has many sheep not of this fold. Our job as Seventh-day Adventists is to be servants of all. We are to serve Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Atheists. We are to serve Islam, Buddhists, Shintoists, and Animists.

We are to care for them in our hospitals, welcome them in our schools and churches, dialogue with them, and learn from them. Our job is not to baptize them, it is the Lord who will add to his church, those he wishes to have joint us. Our job is to serve them, to help them, to love them.

In no city, state, or nation should Adventists be known as those people who are against….anybody or anything. They should be known in every nation on earth as the most helpful, most friendly, most supporting, most kind, most loving people on earth. “If you need help, no matter what you believe, go to the Adventists and there you will find help, love, and encouragement.”

We must weed out of our publications any anti-Catholic, anti-Sunday keeper, anti-Islam, anti-Gay sentiments, and replace them with pro-Jesus, pro-Love, pro-Life messages.

Our course we must be ecumenical, not to lose our beliefs, but to help others wherever we can without compromising our faith. We should say yes, whenever we can, and be the first in cooperation with other Christians for common goals. And with governments and politicians and secular organizations in all their actions for the common good and welfare of their peoples.

This “holier than thou attitude” that has characterized some of our relationships in the past is to be repented of, not perpetuated.
LIFT HIM UP

"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all unto me," Jesus promises. You, if you be lifted up will drive all from him.

Not I, but Christ, be honored, loved, exalted; Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word.

Sisters and Brothers, I have no ideas for your, no goals for you, no money for you.

Except to urge you to ask the Lord to give you your orders, discuss it with sisters and brothers in your own area of the world, and then go forward to fulfill not my dream, but Christ's dream for his church.

But whatever you do, let it be different from what you have been doing before; we have a long ways to go back to the ideal God would have for his church.

And of course you should all pay tithe, some of you should triple tithe! But mostly for the work God gives you to do in your area, with occasional sharing with needs in impoverished fields of those second and third tithers. And no, I would not advise you to pay tithe to any organization that does not practice racial, social, and gender equality in their policies. That is so obvious to the world, I don’t understand why it is not yet obvious in the church.

AND NOW TO MY GENERAL CONFERENCE OFFICERS

The church under the direction of God, has asked me to direct you.

- My first direction is to make the General Conference and its Divisions a facilitating, coordinating organization, and stop acting to try and control Adventist thought and practice. Your job is to say Yes, we will help you accomplish what God is asking you to do. We must openly admit we have no doctrinal function except to assist Adventists in communicating and discussing questions of belief and practice.

- My next direction is that all over 50 years of age, need to offer me a letter of resignation, and a plan to turning over leadership of your department to someone between the ages of 25 and 50 years of age. Please submit me a list of possible candidates you have met in this age group, remembering to suggest women and men, and proportional suggestions from countries of origin for our world membership.

- Our legal counsel are to be directed to draft a new constitution and working policy making it clear that the local church is the fundamental authoritative unit of the church, and the local Conference is the highest authority. The Unions and Divisions of the General Conference are to function as coordinators and facilitators. These offices are not to have any title like Director or President. Chief Servant would be suitable title for my job.

- Control of Adventist publications is to be removed from the General Conference and returned to Divisions and Conferences for their areas of the world.

- Auditing and Risk Management is to be removed from the General Conference and returned to professional corporations meeting national standards in every area of the world.

- All denominational treasurers beyond the local church level must be CPA or equivalent degree qualified in their country of service.

- I would turn over the function of the Biblical Research Committee to our Universities and Colleges and our Seminary.

- I would turn over the function of the Geo-Science Institute to our Universities and Colleges and Medical Institutions

And I now turn over my resignation from this Job, based on the understanding that I will be replaced by an Adventist man or woman over age 25 and under age 50 of the Nominating Committee’s choice, affirmed by secret ballot of this convention, to be chief facilitator of our forward movements.
Failed Candidate Hoehn, now devotes his time to nurturing Adventist church leadership for tomorrow.

Thank you for the kindness of listening to READING this speech.

Your Brother in Christ,

Jack

FOOTNOTES:

[1] I was thinking perhaps an Angel clothed in white raiment with a trumpet in his hand had blown the trumpet loudly in each man's ear, and then said "Hear ye, Hear ye, my people, Ted meant well, but God likes Dr. Hoehn a lot and Jack's plan to resign as soon as elected, a lot more."

[2] (If any of you have questions about this, please go back to that little website scattered like the leaves of Autumn at www.Atoday.org or on Facebook at Adventist Today, all written by Adventists who are not paid to tell you what I want you to hear. There you can read my campaign piece, "Vote for Jack" where my platform is clearly explained along with supporting Bible texts.)

COMMENTS:

Positive Comments are welcome. All Critical and Negative comments I will delete due to my Executive Authority as the President of the GC for One Day, so don't bother writing them!

( Don't worry, I'll let you complain again next time.)
The Treasurer’s Report I: Adventist World Membership, Tithing Per Capita

By Dennis Hokama, July 5, 2015: I would like to make some observations regarding the Treasurer’s Report at the General Conference Session (GC) in San Antonio. We often see world membership data broken down by region as well as gross regional tithing data at General Conferences, but seldom, if ever, do the twain appear to meet. The present analysis represents a synthesis of data from “Delegate Information” which contains world membership data used to justify delegate representation and the “Treasurer’s Report.” I entered the relevant numbers from both reports into a spreadsheet. Here are two tables of these figures: one ranks the regions by membership. The other ranks them by per capita tithing. Some observations will then be made.

**SDA World Membership and Tithing**

*(Ranked by Membership)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>04-09</th>
<th>00-14</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Tithing (millions of $)</th>
<th>Per capita</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>EAD</td>
<td>Inter-America D.</td>
<td>3,586,255</td>
<td>20.32%</td>
<td>185.3</td>
<td>235.6</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean D.</td>
<td>3,167,259</td>
<td>17.46%</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>East-Central Africa D.</td>
<td>2,935,706</td>
<td>15.74%</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>$ 13.79</td>
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<td>SAD</td>
<td>South America D.</td>
<td>2,263,194</td>
<td>12.47%</td>
<td>302.4</td>
<td>568.8</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>$ 251.32</td>
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<td>SUD</td>
<td>Southern Asia D.</td>
<td>1,730,526</td>
<td>8.38%</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>$ 3.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>Southern Asia-Pacific D.</td>
<td>1,222,546</td>
<td>6.74%</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<td>North American D.</td>
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<td>968.5</td>
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<td>4.39%</td>
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<td>24.4</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>$ 30.63</td>
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<td>NSD</td>
<td>Northern Asia-Pacific D.</td>
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<td>60.8</td>
<td>76.3</td>
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<td>Pacific D.</td>
<td>420,916</td>
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<td>72.2</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<td>Inter-European D.</td>
<td>178,199</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
<td>129.8</td>
<td>135.5</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>$ 766.00</td>
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<td>333</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<td>TED</td>
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<td>68.7</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>$ 813.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa Union, Includes Israel</td>
<td>3,046</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>$ 861.63</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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**Undercount:** 18,186,721

* From “Delegate Information”
** From “Treasurer’s Report”
*** Middle East and North Africa Union, includes Israel

**SDA World Membership and Tithing**

*(Ranked by Per Capita Tithing)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>04-09</th>
<th>09-14</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Tithing (millions of $)</th>
<th>Per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa Union, Includes Israel</td>
<td>3,046</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>$ 861.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>North American D.</td>
<td>1,184,395</td>
<td>6.33%</td>
<td>877.9</td>
<td>968.5</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>$ 815.27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>TED</td>
<td>Trans-European D.</td>
<td>84,428</td>
<td>0.47%</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>$ 813.71</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>Inter-European D.</td>
<td>178,199</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
<td>129.8</td>
<td>135.5</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>$ 766.00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Euro-Asia D.</td>
<td>116,013</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>$ 304.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Pacific D.</td>
<td>420,916</td>
<td>2.32%</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>$ 253.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>South America D.</td>
<td>2,263,194</td>
<td>12.47%</td>
<td>302.4</td>
<td>568.8</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>$ 251.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>Northern Asia-Pacific D.</td>
<td>679,807</td>
<td>3.73%</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>$ 112.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>Inter-America D.</td>
<td>3,586,255</td>
<td>20.32%</td>
<td>185.3</td>
<td>235.6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>$ 63.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>Southern Asia-Pacific D.</td>
<td>1,222,546</td>
<td>6.74%</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>$ 53.09</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>SID</td>
<td>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean D.</td>
<td>3,167,259</td>
<td>17.46%</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$ 32.52</td>
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1 of 2 7/6/2015 11:16 AM
Some Observations

- The North American Division (NAD) is not even the top region when it comes to per capita annual tithing. That honor technically goes to the seldom mentioned MENA region that includes Israel, though it amounts to a nearly insignificant drop in the bucket from the perspective of world membership.

- There seems to be an inverse relationship between regional membership totals and per capita tithing. The top three per capita tithing regions (MENA, NAD, TED and EUD) have a weighted mean of $809.25 in per capita annual tithing and pay 48% of world tithing, despite making up only 8% of world church membership.

- The bottom six regions (SUD, ECD, WAD, SID, SSD, and IAD) have a weighted mean of $35.72 per capita tithing, pay 19% of world tithe, but make up 73.03% of SDA membership. This is highly unlikely to be a mere coincidence. We seem to intuitively know that being desperately poor and in need of outside help apparently makes people open to evangelism, but nobody seems willing to admit this. The unwelcome parsimonious implication is that evangelistic success depends more on poverty and misery, rather than on mystical causes.

- One has to wonder how a division such as the SUD whose annual per capita tithing is only $3.95 per year could ever escape mission status, since division status supposedly means financial independence.

- The world membership totals in the Delegate Information report do not add up. Total world membership is given as 18,143,719. Excel tells us that it is 18,180,721, making the former number an under-count by 37,002. (In the Secretary’s report, a figure of 18.5 million was reported. That makes sense because it is presumably a more recent figure than that used in the Delegate Information report.)
Women’s Ordination in Adventism: Unity vs. Culture

By Jim Walters, July 5, 2015: As I was flying from Los Angeles to San Antonio in order to attend the General Conference (GC) Session, I thought it inconceivable that women’s ordination could be voted down. But having spent less than a day talking to delegates and laypersons, particularly from Latin American countries, I can’t conceive of women’s ordination being passed. The issue is that of contrasting bubbles: think of two soap bubbles with minimal connection.

The first bubble is the one I live in. It’s filled with the light air of theological unity and is inhabited by church people who are characterized by an abundance of education, theological reflection and a living connection with the broader world.

The second bubble is the one in which 90% of Adventists live, and it’s filled with a palpable air breathed by church people who are largely content with the traditional culture on gender roles that continues to exist in their own lands. These second-bubble, equally bright folk, are characterized by concrete thinking and lives minimally informed by the larger world.

The Theological Unity Bubble

In preparation for coming to this GC Session, I read David Trim’s article of a couple of months ago in the Adventist Review on the first General Conference held in 1863—some 20 delegates from a half dozen newly formed associations of Adventist congregations, mostly in the Midwestern United States. It’s a fascinating historical account of 20 men gathering for a weekend and putting aside self-interest for the good of the fledgling Advent movement (although James White was unanimously voted to be the first GC president, he declined for the greater good).

A central lesson for the current GC Session, argues Trim, is our own need today to pursue policies that put church unity ahead of partisan advantage. Although I don’t recall that he specifically named the women’s ordination debate, surely he had the issue in mind—called the “800-lb. gorilla” at this GC Session by one attendee I spoke with today. Trim typifies those committed to theological unity in Christ; he is an academic (formerly a professor at Newbold College), who thinks in nuanced terms across cultures in the name of the greater good for his church.

I also recently read excerpts from the 130+ page GC Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report sent to all current GC Session delegates. Leading church thinkers from around the (mostly western) world—left, right and middle—comprised the committee, and even those in the most conservative block of committee members dealt with the theme of church unity, arguing that only ordained men could realistically serve in Adventist churches across the world—and they are right! But it was the most progressive block of committee members who were most adamant about church unity: “In the setting of difference of opinions on a subject that is not part of the message and mission of the church [WO], we reaffirm our constant unity in Christ….” (p. 94). My point: the more academic Adventists—both leftists and rightists on women’s ordination—are particularly concerned about church unity.

A third example of church leaders being concerned about church unity comes from the invocation offered at the Session reconvened in the Astrodome. The gentleman, obviously not a native English speaker, included a plea for unity in his short prayer.

All three illustrations indicate diverse persons of considerable education, on a world stage, sharing one theological worldview: that unity of the church is of overriding importance—superseding smaller points of difference.

The Biblical Culture Bubble
This afternoon I sat in the bleachers, probably 300 feet from the podium and just behind a whole line of leading laypersons and pastors in bright orange T-shirts (emblazoned with a church logo) from Trinidad. I discovered that the woman immediately ahead of me was a dentist at the local Adventist hospital, and I introduced myself and said I was trying to get a good sense of where she and her accompanying church members were on the ordination issue. Dr. Delphina Ovid, DDS, was happy to talk and introduced me to leading members of a 500-member delegation that had traveled from the South Caribbean Conference (of some 60,000 members, she said), and we spent over an hour in congenial conversation—them asking me questions about ordination at LLU, and me probing to get a genuine feel for how the church membership in this large conference of West Indian members is thinking about this issue.

Four take-home points:

1. Caribbean Adventists largely oppose women’s ordination. Elder Michael Phillips, the evangelism director for the conference, who indicated that he had a good feel for where the membership stands, suggested that a quarter are strongly opposed to ordaining women, a quarter are mildly opposed, a quarter softly opposed, and a quarter are to some degree in favor. Phillips particularly stressed the deep cultural roots of the issue, but he added a theological component, indicating that there isn’t a New Testament example of women leading out in church as did men, and Ellen White was not ordained as were men.

2. The Caribbean has very active church women. Of the group of 15 that I spoke with, over two-thirds were women, one of whom, Pamela Stephen, introduced herself as a “pastor.” Pastor Stephen is one of five Commissioned Ministers who work as a conference-paid religious educator serving multiple congregations (and three more women serve as assistant pastors). Interestingly, although Pastor Stephen is a positive, self-confident woman of ability who is commissioned, she volunteered that she opposes WO. She views women’s ordination as against Biblical practice.

3. Women’s ordination could initiate “the shaking” in Adventism. The senior churchman of the group, Emmanuel Peters, director of ADRA in the region, unhesitatingly gave me this quotation for attribution (and this after he’d given me pro-women’s ordination arguments I’ve long heard in Southern California): “Women’s ordination may begin the shaking of our world church. If sincere church members will allow God to do his work in bringing gender equality to the ministry, they will not be shaken.” However, upon hearing Peters say this, Phillips the evangelist quipped that the shaking may well go the opposite direction.

4. Caribbean youth are evenly divided. A young and articulate woman attorney, a Pathfinder badge on her shirt, was introduced to me as being knowledgeable about where the Caribbean youth stand on women’s ordination. The attorney confidently declared that the young church members, overall more progressive than their elders, are evenly divided—strongly opposed and strongly in favor.

Upon reflection, the striking thing that emerges from the prolonged dialogue with articulate church leaders from Trinidad is the immediacy of a vibrant church life: God working through his people to build up the church. The great majority of women don’t mind a supporting role to ordained male pastors, particularly if the latter are doing a good conscientious job. The more abstract and distant concepts of “church unity” and “equality” did not naturally arise, and were only addressed when I raised the issues. Biblical zeal exercised through biblical cultural roles that continue in more traditional areas of the world, if the Caribbean islands are any indication, is the life and blood of Adventism—and that’s why the world church, come next Wednesday, will almost surely vote against women’s ordination. And the fact that the issue is nuanced, allowing divisions to make individual judgment, is beside the larger biblical/cultural precedent.

The one development that could upend the above predication would be for President Ted Wilson to forthrightly make a biblical/missional case for women’s ordination. Given his unchallenged orthodoxy and his considerable moral authority in developing-world Adventism, Wilson is uniquely qualified to make the case for Yes on women’s ordination. But given Wilson’s well-known opposition to women’s ordination, it seems more likely that he’d make the opposite speech.
However, miracles do happen. And just as performers can make one big soap bubble out of two, so Wilson could be a unifying churchman.

This pop analysis is admittedly unscientific, and even though the points about the Caribbean church were confirmed by other conversations with churchmen from the Philippines and Latin America, it is very speculative. Further, these first-day reflections are just that and based on a very limited survey, and because unknown factors could emerge, the above prediction, if it is valuable at all, should be viewed as an indication of what is more likely—not what is sure. I sincerely hope that what I think is the likely outcome of a vote on women’s ordination is wrong, and I say this as a churchman for nearly 50 years who has worked untiringly for progressive causes in the denomination.

Dr. Jim Walters is a professor in the School of Religion at Loma Linda University. He is a contributing editor for Adventist Today and vice chairman of the board for the Adventist Today Foundation.
Would Changes to Creation Fundamental Belief Affect Loma Linda University?

By Dennis Hokama, July 5, 2015: How serious a problem would be the passage of the amendment to Fundamental Belief 6/Creation (FB #6) as currently worded, to the unity of the world church, and specifically Loma Linda University (LLU)?

Just for the record, here is the recommended amendment, with the added words in bold:

“God is the Creator of all things. He has revealed in scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. In a recent six-day creation the Lord made “the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His creative work, performed and completed during six literal days that we call a week today. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished, it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God...."

Although the proposed changes in wording are less flamboyant than the initial proposed wording in 2010, the proposed changes still seem quite significant. For example, the phrases “and historical” and “performed and completed during six literal days that we call a week today” seem designed to prevent a metaphorical interpretation of creation week that theistic evolutionists need to accept the Genesis 1 account. The word recent, however, can be rationalized away as billions of years in relation to eternity, as has been pointed out by others.

LLU has an ongoing graduate school program in Earth and Biological Sciences (EBS) that teaches geology, paleontology, conservation and evolutionary biology, and has produced biologists such as Lee Greer III, who earned his Ph.D. with a concentration in evolutionary biology at LLU. Wouldn’t such an amendment then necessarily affect LLU? At least that was my impression. It so happened that my wife and I took the same flight out of LAX as Dr. Ron Carter, the provost of LLU. We had a few minutes to chat about this potential problem before we boarded.

Much to my surprise, Carter thought that problems could be finessed with no effect on their academic program even with the passage of modifications to FB#6 because he believes the statement remains the same in concept. While there has always been tension on campus with the presence of the Geoscience Research Institute (GRI), says Carter, they have always managed to coexist peacefully, and this could be no different. Carter believes that the tensions have primarily been as a result of differences in approaches. GRI has focused on creation apologetics while most researchers at the university are trained in the health sciences, not in the earth and historical sciences, and conduct translational research in medicine.

Trouble would come, says Carter, only if the Adventist denomination would attempt to require scholars and administrators to sign statements of belief that restrict appropriate academic freedom that encourages open academic discussion or implements other enforcement tactics that would affect the actual operational decisions of the University. Carter emphasized that LLU is committed to God as creator and redeemer and being cooperative and supportive of the world church so long as it does not compromise their ability to perform their medical work faithfully with integrity and credibility.

While I hope he is right, I can’t help but think that is like arguing that even though the passage of FB#6 may hang the sword of Damocles over their heads by a string, certainly nobody would be foolish enough to cut that string.
Would Changes to Creation Fundamental Belief Affect Loma Linda Univ... http://atoday.org/would-the-passage-of-the-fb6-amendment-be-a-problem...