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Shelton Returns as President of Three Angels Broadcasting

By AT News Team, August 6, 2015: With the retirement of Pastor Jim Gilley on July 20, Danny Shelton was again appointed president of Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN). He was the founder of the independent ministry and served as president for 24 years until he stepped aside in 2008 due to a number of problems in his personal life and with the organization.

Gilley is 74 and has served as president for more than seven years after retiring as a vice president of the Adventist denomination’s North American Division (NAD). He was a pastor, evangelist and conference president during his long career.

Shelton promptly announced in an interview with the Adventist Review that evangelism campaigns in large cities will be a priority for the broadcasting ministry, starting with a project in London next year. “I believe the best way to receive God’s blessing on our ministry is to cut costs anywhere we can except evangelism,” the leading Adventist journal quoted Shelton. It has been ten years since 3ABN conducted a major evangelism campaign outside the United States, the report said.

Bruce Fjarli, a business executive from Medford, Oregon, was voted chairman of the board for 3ABN. His father, Merlin Fjarli, had been a board member and major donor with the organization until his death last year. Fjarli is a partner in Southern Oregon Builders, a construction firm, and a board member for Light Bearers, another independent ministry supported largely by Adventists.

3ABN started in 1984 with the goal of providing a more hard-hitting alternative to the denomination’s established media ministries. Shelton was employed in construction and did gospel singing as well as serving as a lay preacher on occasion. The organization has grown to a 24-hour-a-day television and radio network carried by satellite to 120 local stations around the world with production centers in Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Russia, as well as at its headquarters near a small town in southern Illinois. Official reports show that it has about $68 million in assets and received $13.6 million in donations during the most recent year on record (2011).

Shelton told the Adventist Review “that he intended to keep 3ABN focused on its core mission of sharing the three angels’ message about Jesus’ soon coming from Revelation 14.” When he relinquished the chief executive position in 2008 and became co-chairman of the board with Gilley, donations had slowed due to concern on the part of some supporters that the organization was operating two executive jets and rumors of Shelton’s micromanagement leadership style. In June, 2004, he had divorced his wife of 20 years, Linda Shelton, who was a popular host of shows on the network.

There were concerns about the way Linda was fired from 3ABN and whether there were real Biblical grounds for the divorce. Shelton married Brandy, his third wife, and she filed for divorce on March 1, 2010, before a financial settlement had been finalized in court with Linda. His annual income for 2009 was reported through legal documents as $155,688 or more than three times that of an ordained minister in the Adventist denomination.

Shelton hired his older brother Tommy, a Church of God pastor, to take Linda’s job as production manager at 3ABN despite the fact that the elder Shelton brother had been repeatedly accused of sexual misconduct with men and boys. The same kind of charges were later made by at least one employee at 3ABN and Tommy was eventually jailed in Virginia over similar problems.

Two supporters published a large archive of the legal documentation related to these problems on a web site which 3ABN took control of through litigation. It has recently been released again at www.save-3ABN.com and www.save-3ABN.info. Adventist Today published stories on these issues as well as the positive impact of 3ABN in some local...

The current board of 3ABN includes Pastor Kenneth Denslow, assistant to the president of the NAD; Ellsworth McKee, chairman of the board for McKee Foods, Inc., the manufacturer of Little Debbie brand cookies; Pastor James Stevens, president of the denomination’s Texico Conference (which includes west Texas and New Mexico); Dr. Walter Thompson, a retired physician and former board chairman; Pastor Max Trevino, retired former president of the denomination’s Southwestern Union Conference; Carmelita Troy, a professor in the School of Business at Andrews University; and five employees of the organization, including Shelton. It is one of the largest independent ministries to be a member of Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI), the association of businesses and nonprofits not directly affiliated with the denomination but controlled by members of the Adventist denomination.

It is unclear what the actual impact of 3ABN is. There are reports of perhaps thousands of converts to the Adventist faith who were engaged or nurtured by the media ministry. But surveys of the general public have never found more than a very small percentage of non-members who have ever seen or heard of the network. No ratings data has ever been made available and many of the local stations in the United States are low-power licenses that have very limited range and very small audiences. Just as the “History Channel” on cable television is tuned in only by those who have an interest in history, the very concept of an Adventist channel limits viewership almost entirely to those who already have some interest in the Adventist faith.

In the interview with the Adventist Review, Shelton, who is 64, stated that 3ABN is preparing younger staff members to take over leadership. He mentioned Greg and Jill Morikone “as well equipped to take the presidency” of the organization. Greg came to 3ABN as a college intern 16 years ago and was promoted to production manager last year. Jill is administrative assistant to the network’s president and a host on some programs, as well as an author and columnist for the Adventist Review.

Shelton told the Adventist Review that he has no plans to continue his role for “another 10 or 12 years.” He is quoted stating that “this ministry is bigger than any one person. I’ve never seen it as my ministry. It has always been the Lord’s ministry.”
**Adventist Doctor in Republican Party U.S. Presidential Debate**

**Updated August 7, 2015:** Dr. Ben Carson, a retired brain surgeon who is an active member of the Adventist denomination, participated last night in a major political debate produced by Fox News and Facebook. This was the first Republican presidential primary debate for politicians bidding to be the party’s nominee for president of the United States of America.

As the debate unfolded with millions of Americans tuned in, Carson was given six opportunities to speak, each about 90 seconds long. The first question he was asked was about how he would conduct war against Muslim terrorists in the Middle East and he stated that he thought a “politically correct” war was impossible and seemed to indicate that he was not afraid of violating the Geneva Conventions in such a conflict. He was later asked about the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war and stated that he saw a need for the U.S. to build up its military in order to make more credible threats in that kind of situation.

Carson used the Bible principle of tithing to explain his approach to tax policy in answer to another question. He stated that Americans should pay a flat tax of an unspecified percentage no matter what their level of income instead of the graduated income tax that has been in place for nearly a century. This is a favorite idea of conservatives in the U.S., although it is not used in any of the industrialized countries because it is generally viewed as benefiting people with higher incomes and hurting those with lower incomes.

Asked specifically about poverty in America, Carson answered that he believes that the “secular, progressive movement” is causing the problem because of the $18 trillion national debt. Toward the end of the two-hour program, he was asked specifically about “what you believe God tells you to do” about race issues in America. His answer again focused on those he disagrees with in U.S. politics, stating “don’t take every incident and use it to divide” Americans, but work for “unity.”

In the run-up to the debate a Fox News poll, placed Carson fourth (7 percent) among nearly 20 possible candidates, behind Donald Trump (26 percent), the billionaire reality TV star; Jeb Bush (15 percent), former governor of Florida and the son and brother of former U.S. presidents; and Scott Walker (9 percent), governor of Wisconsin.

Seventeen key Republicans have joined the presidential race; however, only ten were asked to be part of the debate. In May, Fox News released the criteria for selecting participants. “They must meet all constitutional requirements; must announce and register a formal campaign; must file all required paperwork with the Federal Election Commission; and must place in the top 10 in an average of the five most recent, recognized national polls leading up to Aug. 4.”

Carson is well-known within the Adventist community for his books *Gifted Hands* (1992) and *Think Big* (1996), though he has also written more recent books, such as *America the Beautiful*, *One Nation* and *One Vote*. Carson began to receive national media attention after promoting conservative policies and denouncing political correctness at the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast, an annual event hosted by the White House.

Now retired, Carson was a noted neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins University Hospital, where he completed the first successful surgery to separate conjoined twins who were joined at the head. Carson was director of pediatric neurosurgery and also co-director of the Johns Hopkins Craniofacial Center. President George W. Bush awarded Carson the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2008. If he gets the party nomination and then wins the general election, Carson would be the first Adventist to become leader of one of the most powerful nations on earth.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz also participated in the debate. He received six percent of the votes in the Fox News poll, falling one place behind Carson. Cruz’s wife, Heidi, is an Adventist. She recently stepped down from her position as...
a vice president at Goldman Sachs in order to support her husband's presidential bid.

Related Articles

- Ben Carson Announces Bid for US Presidency (May 4, 2015, Updated May 5)
- Ben Carson Not Allowed to Speak at Baptist Event Because He is an Adventist (April 27, 2015)
- First Adventist in the White House Might be a Woman (March 26, 2015)
- Ben Carson Apologizes for Comments on Homosexuality (March 5, 2015)
- Adventist Doctor Continues to Build a Campaign for the U.S. Presidency (Feb. 26, 2015)
Medical Clinic Provides Free Health Care to Spokane Residents

From News Release, August 6, 2015: More than 1,600 healthcare professionals and volunteers operated a no-cost medical and dental clinic in Spokane, Washington on August 3-4, 2015. According to event organizers, a total of 7,757 free services were offered to 3,111 noninsured and underinsured residents of Spokane, including 319 who were given surgical services at no cost. The clinic was held at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center, where organizers had originally estimated that services would be given to 3,000 residents.

The event was organized by Your Best Pathway to Health, a service of Adventist-Laymen's Services & Industries (ASI), in partnership with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, Adventist Health System West and other entities. Your Best Pathway to Health was co-sponsored by the Spokane Mayor David A. Condon as well as the Spokane County Commissioner.

Free on-site services included primary care visits, women’s health services, gastroenterology, neurology, pulmonology, rheumatology, infectious disease, general and orthopedic surgery, pediatrics, podiatry services, immunizations, root canals, crowns, fillings, extractions, dental cleaning, pharmacy, eyeglass fittings and examinations, STD screenings, medical massage, physical therapy, x-rays, laboratory services, audiology, consultations by medical specialists including heart evaluation, as well as haircuts, free men’s suits and wedding dresses, chaplaincy services and a free meal.

No insurance and no identification were required. Appointments were also not necessary, except for surgical procedures, which required free of charge pre-surgery visits.

The mega clinic will be held next in Los Angeles, California on March 23-25, 2016.
Does the General Conference Have Authority?

By Gary Patterson, August 3, 2015: The obvious answer to the question is yes. But unfortunately this answer does not address the real issues generally being raised when the question is asked. What is at stake in the context of this question is in reality, “What authority does the General Conference rightly and properly possess?”

Proper Authority

In order to place the question in perspective, consider for a moment a foolish comparison. Hard by the west side of the Alamodome in San Antonio, where the meetings of the recent General Conference session were held, runs highway Interstate 35. A steady stream of vehicles continued to rush by at the 60 mile per hour speed limit as posted on that highway.

If the session voted to change that speed limit to 45 miles per hour, it would have no effect on the traffic, given that such an action is not within the jurisdiction of the General Conference. That decision resides with the City of San Antonio and the State of Texas. This may seem to be a ridiculous comparison, but for all its seemingly foolishness, it gets at the heart of the issue by asking what really is within the jurisdiction of the General Conference.

In an attempt to give authority to the application of actions voted by the General Conference, a statement Ellen White made in a private letter in 1875 is frequently quoted, in which she observed, “When the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon earth, is exercised, private judgment must not be maintained, but surrendered.” (Testimonies for the Church, Volume 3, p 492)

While this concept has merit, other observations she makes are rarely placed in context with it. In a letter written in 1896, some twenty years later, she stated, “The voice from Battle Creek, which has been regarded as authority in counseling how the work should be done, is no longer the voice of God.” (Letter 4, 1896; Manuscript Releases, Volume 17, pp 185, 186) Two years later she wrote, “It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God.” (Letter 77, 1898; Manuscript Releases, Volume 17, p 216)

As the 1901 General Conference session drew near, she said, “The voice of the conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not.” (Manuscript 37, 1901; Sermons and Talks, p 159-160) And even after the 1901 reorganization of the General Conference and the establishment of union conferences, her concern continued to the 1903 session as well.

Her resistance to centralization was expressed in her opposition to what she called “kingly authority,” which she rejected. “It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences. The power vested in the Conference is not to be centered in one man, or two men, or six men; there is to be a council of men over the separate divisions. In the work of God no kingly authority is to be exercised by any human being, or by two or three. The representatives of the Conference, as it has been carried with authority for the last twenty years, shall be no longer justified in saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.’ The men in positions of trust have not been carrying the work wisely.” (Manuscript 26, 1903)

Does this mean the General Conference has no authority? Certainly not. But the statement regarding it being the highest authority on earth, used as it often is to impose control over the church, is at best disingenuous, and perhaps, misleading. Even if at times it may be true, this on again, off again coverage is clearly spotty over time, and the question arises as to when and how we determine it to be such an authority.
Authority and Inerrancy

Being an authority does not convey inerrancy. That the General Conference in session can and does err in its judgement and actions is demonstrated by the issues of the 1888 session, which are still debated today over a century later. In addition, some actions taken in subsequent years since that time are certainly not above question. To assume everything voted by the session is the will of God is a mammoth leap of reason, to say nothing of theology. Perhaps, rather than a ringing endorsement of its authority, the comment should be taken as an apology, stating that this institution, with all its human foibles, is the best that we have to work with at any given time.

Assuming that every action taken at the session is the will of God for the world church, what does such a stance say about those who voted against the action? Were those who in good conscience voted in opposition to a given action, thus voting against the will of God? Clearly, many things voted at the session would not fall into the category of the will of God. Such matters as voting to close discussion, or times of meetings, or adjournment would not generally be considered will of God issues.

All this being the obvious case, it then needs to be determined just which things are in the jurisdiction of the General Conference and which are not. Though the list is much longer than given here, yet a few examples will serve to illustrate the point, as delineated in GC Working Policy B 05, point 6.

Different elements of organizational authority and responsibility are distributed among the various levels of denominational organization. For example, the decision as to who may/may not be a member of a local Seventh-day Adventist Church is entrusted to the members of the local church concerned; decision as to employment of local church pastors is entrusted to the local conference/mission; decisions regarding the ordination of ministers are entrusted to the union conference/mission; and the definition of denominational beliefs is entrusted to the General Conference in session. Thus each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility that may have implications for other levels of organization.

Authority belongs to each of the four distinct levels of church structure which, as the policy states, is "a realm of final authority." Thus the General Conference may not act upon issues relating to individual membership. Though in the Roman Catholic system, the Pope may excommunicate individual members, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, neither the General Conference in session nor any level of church governance, other than the local congregation, may do so. Membership, as well as church officer election, belongs exclusively to the local congregation. And though the congregation as a constituency does not operate under a constitution and by-laws as the other constituent levels do, the Church Manual serves as its template for action.

Likewise, the staffing of pastoral positions, as well as conference level employees, is within the authority of the local conference and may not be countered by other levels of the denominational organization. Further, the structure of the church established in the 1901 and 1903 General Conference sessions, as clearly stated in policy B 05.6, places the authority for the ordination of ministers at the union conference level of church structure. While it is true that the general level does establish the criteria for both membership and ordination, it does not have authority as to who may be accepted as members or who may be employed or ordained, so long as they meet the criteria established.

So firmly are these authorities established as "a realm of final authority and responsibility" that it was deemed necessary to provide an exception in GC Working Policy L 45.4 in order to allow Division and General Conference Committees to authorize their own candidates for ordination through their respective executive committees, sparing them from the requirement to do so through union conference committees to which ordination is assigned. As we often observe, “it is the exception that proves the rule.”

Illustrative of the issues that arise when cross constituency meddling occurs, is the vote of the General Conference several decades ago “authorizing” the ordination of women as local church elders. While it may have been a good idea to encourage churches to do so, there was no cause to “authorize” the practice, since such authority for selecting elders rests with the local congregation and there was no prohibition for selecting women to such a post.
How incongruous would it have been to vote to “authorize” the election of women as church clerks, or church treasurers, or Sabbath School Superintendents when, likewise, no such prohibition existed for staffing these offices?

Furthermore, the argument for the need to keep the world church together regarding the ordination of women is shown to be without merit, given that GC Working Policy BA 60 10 states in a footnote to point 2, “…The exception clause, and any other statement above, shall not be used to reinterpret the action already taken by the world Church authorizing the ordination of women as local church elders in divisions where executive committees have given their approval.”

All this forces the question, why is it acceptable for the divisions to go their separate ways regarding the ordination of women as local elders, but it is not acceptable for them to do so regarding the ordination of ministers? To say that the one splits the church and the other does not, makes no sense. An additional argument advanced is that ordination to ministry is for the world church. But so is membership and ordination as an elder. Any person who has been accepted into membership is free to join any church worldwide by transfer, and anyone who has been ordained as an elder is eligible to hold such position in any church. This argument also makes no sense.

Fundamental Beliefs

The development of a statement of fundamental beliefs for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, though seemingly necessary, is fraught with difficulties, so much so that the founders of the church resisted the idea with strong statements of the perceived risks inherent in creedalism. The preamble to the Fundamental Beliefs seeks to allay these fears and risks, by saying “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”

Yet even beyond these caveats is the underlying problem of language itself. Though we are fond of the notion that words have exact meaning and are capable of conveying precise clarity on a given topic or idea, the reality is that people do not share exactly the same meaning of the words they employ in expressing themselves. Differences in culture, education and personal perceptual skills gives credence to the idea that words do not have meaning. Rather people have meaning which they impose on the words they use and hear.

To complicate matters further, the world church is made up of people from multiple nations and languages. Thus any statement of beliefs must be both presented and understood in multiple settings where people not only think different things, they also think the same things differently. Turning Fundamental Beliefs into a creed violates this principle of perception.

In addition to the language and perception problem is the authoritarian drift that such statements inherently possess. Vested in the General Conference level, as the policy indicates, is “the definition of denominational beliefs.” Yet even here we need to ask, are the 28 fundamental beliefs tests of membership, tests of fellowship, tests of leadership, or tests of employment? Must one accept all 28 statements (or whatever number there are of them at a given point) in their entirety to join the church? Or can a person be dis-fellowshipped for failure to accept them all?

Is it a requirement that all 28 be agreed to in order to hold office in the church? Or what about employment? Are these a requirement for ministers and teachers, but not necessarily for janitors or cafeteria employees? And can the church employ someone as an attorney, or financial advisor, or a musician, who does not accept all 28? Or for that matter, who may not even be a member? Furthermore, given that membership issues belong to the local church, who will enforce these matters, and how will it be done in a consistent manner?

The 28 beliefs as currently expressed would not have been believed or accepted by many of the early leaders of the church. A prime example of this is the doctrine of the Trinity. Many early Adventists held Arian beliefs regarding the
life and ministry of Jesus. And this notion persisted well into the middle of the 1900’s, as demonstrated in the hymnal of the church printed and used during that era.

The well-known hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy” which in its original Protestant form contained the verse, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity” was changed to fit the Arian perspective and was sung as, “God over all, who rules eternity.” In the current hymnal, it is returned to its original wording, reflecting the Trinitarian view. Does this mean that those of the Arian notion were not real Adventists? Were they unworthy of membership, or fellowship, or leadership, or employment? And if we overlook that divergence in the past, do we ignore it today?

Further to the point is the divide over the role of Ellen White in the church and the prophetic office. In the early days there were many who did not accept what is generally proffered today as her authority in the church. Not only was she not accepted in parts of Europe early on, but her time in Australia was devised by church leadership, not so much as a mission venture, but as a method of getting her out of North America and away from the General Conference leadership.

As the preamble maintains, the statement of beliefs is changed from time to time, as better understanding and language is used to more clearly convey the church’s shared perception of biblical truth. But by this very concept, the statements are demonstrated to be only an expression of beliefs at a given moment in time, of perceived truth found in Scripture. If the Bible is the only creed, as the preamble states, then we should not be writing into the Fundamental Beliefs wording and expressions that are not in the Bible. In this context, much has been made of the effort to insert into the fundamental beliefs, wording regarding creation that is not in scripture itself. And speculation abounds as to how insistence on this wording will play out in such matters as membership and employment.

Decision Making Process

As clearly demonstrated at the San Antonio General Conference Session, the process being followed to do the business of the church has become nearly non-functional. It does not take much rational thought process to realize that attempting to carry on an open floor discussion with over 2,500 people is not a viable way to do business. The system needs to be changed to reflect reality. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the point.

Given that all changes in the Church Manual require a vote from the session, an editing process was undertaken in which it was discussed at length whether the preposition “in” or “on” should be used in the document under consideration. Multiple speakers with varying linguistic backgrounds and native languages weighed in at length on the issue. Not only was the folly of such a discussion on the floor obvious, but the fact that the document would be translated into multiple languages made it even more absurd to spend the time of the world church on such matters.

Another similar editorial change that had to be voted by the session was the change of name for one of the divisions which was employed to more accurately reflect the territory and people it was serving. But rather than merely making such an obvious editorial adjustment in the text, it had to come to the floor for a vote, where it engendered useless discussion.

Perhaps the most abused process of a session seeking to have open floor discussion among thousands of delegates is the “Point of Order” request. In the San Antonio meeting this abuse was rampant. Whether it was based on ignorance of the rules of order in a democratic process, or an intentional attempt to subvert the process is difficult to assess. However, when speakers at the microphone calling for points of order nearly equal the number of those speaking to the issue before the body, it is clear that the process is broken.

Given that the chair ruled most of such requests as failing to meet the requirements of a point of order, it is evident that a better system needs to be devised. Rather than employing the services of one parliamentarian to advise the chair on process, it would be helpful to provide deputy or assistant parliamentarians on the floor to screen such point of order requests before spurious interruptions to the process consume the time of the business at hand.

Nomination and Election
The work of the Nominating Committee is, in particular, an unrealistic process. The members of this body are constituted by a caucus of the divisions/attached unions soon after the opening of the session. Upon being selected and voted by the session as its Nominating Committee, these individuals, who had no advance knowledge that they would be on the committee, then proceed to elect a Chair and Secretary from their midst, who likewise have no knowledge or time for preparation for such a responsibility in advance.

This large group of over 100 members, constituted of people from all over the world church, must embark on selecting for nomination, hundreds of individuals to serve not only in General Conference leadership positions, but in the thirteen division territories as well. Few on this committee have a knowledge of either the territories represented by the world church, or their needs and personnel for leadership.

After getting organized, the work of nomination begins, usually by the first Friday morning of the session. The first order of business is the nomination of the General Conference President, which is expected to be delivered to the floor of the session before noon. When presented, its acceptance is generally assumed and the vote called for quickly. This expected short time frame of a few hours on Friday morning of the session is in stark contrast to other nomination and leadership processes and requirements of the church.

The nomination of local church officers and leaders generally occurs over a period of time of a month or two of careful study, and once presented to the church body, the nominations require a first and second reading, separated generally by one week or more. The selection of a new pastor often extends into several months, or even a year of search. Leadership in such positions as principals and presidents of educational institutions generally follow a long and careful search process. In this context, it seems astonishing that we would expect the election of world church leadership to be pressed into a few hours on the first Friday of the General Conference session.

To further complicate the dilemma of the Nominating Committee, it is tasked not only with providing for the election of General Conference leadership, but division leadership as well, given that divisions are not constituent entities and do not have such authority on their own. Thus members of the committee are expected to staff divisions which the bulk of the committee members know little or nothing about. So the divisions go into caucus and present a list of prospective officers and leaders to the Nominating Committee who basically “rubber stamp” the selections and pass them on to the floor of the session for their “rubber stamp” as well – given that they know even less about the individuals nominated than the members of the committee do. And one has to wonder why this matter is not just left with the divisions to decide on their own at a time and in a setting where much more informed and careful decisions can be made.

Perception and Reality

There is a persistent perception that the General Conference has a policy or vote forbidding the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, but such is not the case. No such action exists, nor has it existed in the history of the church, despite those who say that it does. The most prevalent of this notion of a prohibition is that the actions of the 1990, 1995 and 2015 sessions forbid the ordination of women. Following are the minutes of the actions at these three sessions:

1990 Session in Indianapolis: “The Commission, having listened to the arguments and presentations for and against the ordination of women; having sensed the needs and concerns of the world field; having carefully considered what is probably best and the least disruptive for the world church at this time; and recognizing the importance of our eschatological mission, the witness and image of our spiritual family, and the need for openness and unity in the Church, reports to the 1990 General Conference Session upon the recommendation of the 1989 Annual Council the following result of its deliberation:

“1. While the Commission does not have a consensus as to whether or not the scriptures and the writing of Ellen G White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry, it concludes unanimously that these sources affirm a significant, wide ranging, and continuing ministry for women which is being expressed and will be
evidenced in the varied and expanding gifts according to the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

“2. Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world Church and in view of the possible risk to disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the Church, we do not approve the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.”

**1995 Session in Utrecht:** “The motion reads as follows: To refer to the General Conference session the North American Division request that the General Conference in session adopt provisions on ordination as outlined below:

“The General Conference vests in each division the right to authorize ordination of individuals within its territory in harmony with established policies. In addition, where circumstances do not render it inadvisable, a division may authorize the ordination of qualified individuals without regard to gender. In divisions where the division executive committee takes specific actions approving the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, women may be ordained to serve in those divisions.” [Not voted.]

**2015 Session in San Antonio:** “The General Conference Executive Committee requests delegates in their sacred responsibility to God at the 2015 General Conference Session to respond to the following question: After your thorough study of the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White, and the reports of the study commissions on ordination, and; After your careful consideration of what is best for the Church and the fulfillment of its mission, Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No.”

The action presented in all three of these sessions was to approve the ordination of women. The action failed on all three occasions. When a motion fails, it simply goes away. It does not create the opposite of the intent of the motion. Therefore, the result neither establishes nor forbids the practice of ordaining women in these sessions.

Three factors are significant in this issue. First, the ordination issue does not belong to either the division or the General Conference level. It is assigned by policy to the union conferences. As such, this was not an item that should be on the General Conference agenda without changing the basic structure of the Church. Second, there is not, nor has there been a policy against ordaining women to ministry. Since no such policy exists, there is no valid reason to vote on giving permission. We do not need to authorize that which is not forbidden. Finally, the failure of the vote to authorize such ordination on these three occasions, results in the action simply going away. And it is neither authorized nor forbidden. A motion that fails, results in no action.

It is accurate to say that both precedent and perception regarding such ordination lead to the opinion that it is not allowed. However, neither precedent nor perception are policy. Given that these actions do not forbid the ordination of women to ministry, then as stated, the position of the church remains as it was before these actions. The question then is, what is that position? Ordination authority is clearly defined in General Conference policy. Regarding the approval of persons designated for ordination GC Working Policy B 05 states, “decisions regarding the ordination of ministers are entrusted to the union conference…” Regarding such decisions the policy further states, “each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility…. Thus, in the selection and authorization of such individuals, the General Conference has no authority over the union conference decisions, so long as these decisions are in harmony with the criteria established for ordination by General Conference policy.

The General Conference Working Policy does establish the criteria for ordination. There are fifteen such criteria listed in GC Working Policy L 50, none of which refer in any way to gender. If, therefore, any individual approved by a union conference meets these fifteen criteria, the General Conference authority has been satisfied. Given that there is no gender reference in these requirements, the union conference is acting within its authority to ordain women as stated in GC Working Policy B 05. Policy exercises governance over both practice and perception. But in the case of gender issues in ordination, there is no policy. However, over a century of practice has created the perception that there is policy on this matter, and one hundred years of practice certainly does establish precedent. But it remains that policy is the issue in ordination, neither practice, precedent nor perception.
The actions of the three GC Sessions are not based on policy, leaving one to wonder what they were based on; practice, precedent, perception, or perhaps prejudice? But unless the General Conference changes its policy and takes away the authorization given in GC Working Policy B 05 to other levels of governance such as the local church regarding membership, or the local conference regarding employment, or the union conference regarding ordination, it is not free to intrude into these areas. Thus its attempt to counter the union authority in the area of ordination is a violation of its own policy.

If the General Conference wishes to address the issue of gender in ordination to ministry, it may do so, but only after changing its policy to a straightforward requirement that ordination is male gender exclusive, forbidding the ordination of females. There is no such policy presently in existence, nor has there been in the history of the church. Practice, precedent, perception and even prejudice do not constitute a policy. Only straightforward, clearly articulated policy governs the issue of gender inclusive ordination.

The perception exists that the General Conference cannot violate policy, that whatever it does constitutes policy, but this is not so. The General Conference can violate policy just as well as any other level of the church, if and when it acts contrary to the provisions of policy. Unless and until the General Conference changes the policy by specific vote, any action contrary to that policy is a violation. Thus, the union conferences are not out of policy on this matter of gender inclusiveness in the ordination of ministers. The General Conference itself is out of policy by intruding where it does not have authority.

**Correctives**

What actions, therefore, need to be taken to address these policy and function disorders? The following is a suggestion of areas that need to be addressed:

1. Divisions should be made constituent levels of organization, and much of the business of the GC Session should be transferred to these levels. As the church nears the twenty million membership level, and as most divisions number over one million members, the leadership and authority for their work should be shifted to their own territory for better efficiency and understanding of needs.

2. Better methods of seeking input on issues should be found, rather than attempting to conduct open floor discussion with over two thousand people. The democratic process can still be accomplished by providing opportunity to vote on issues without open discussion in a time crunched environment.

3. Uniformity of action imposed on all divisions must not be confused with unity of purpose for the church as a whole. Diversity of behavior already exists in the church in such matters as life style, dress, Sabbath activity, polygamy, family relationships and a host of cultural, religious and traditional behaviors. Imposing the traditions and tastes of one area of the church on another, is not a method of securing unity. Rather it is a recipe for disunity, clearly demonstrated by the cheering, booing and hissing which accompanied perceived victories over votes taken at the recent session.

4. The process of hermeneutical interpretation and understanding of scripture is in jeopardy when narrow fundamentalist readings of scripture trump the council of the leading biblical scholars of the church and its seminaries. Picking and choosing parts of scripture to make a point while ignoring other parts – at times even in the same verse – is at best dangerous, and perhaps even dishonest. Such faulty biblical interpretation must stop.

5. Authority in the various constituent levels of the church must be clearly defined and adhered to. No part of the church is without its constituted authority and it must be seen as operating in “a realm of final authority” in its assigned responsibilities as policy states, lest we reverse the structure of the church developed in 1901 under the leadership of Ellen White and return to the “kingly powers” error so strongly opposed at that session.

6. The tendency toward ever expanding and explicit fundamental belief statements, with the potential of leading to creedalism, should be halted or reversed. Jesus summed it up with two simple but profound statements, “Love the
Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself.” The early Christian church summarized requirements in four restrictions, “abstain from food sacrificed to animals, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” We can do better than to continue to build an ever expanding and more tightly defining list of beliefs.

7. Address issues of broad scope for the mission of the church at these sessions, and avoid the minutiae of such things as editing and wording of documents. Let such materials that must be processed by the session, be prepared with broad opportunity for input over adequate time frames, and vote them up or down without floor discussion.

8. Do not allow the session to be encumbered by those who, out of ignorance of process or intent to disrupt, or desire to be seen and heard, frustrate the purpose of the agenda and proper procedure.

9. Make it clear that practice, precedent, and perception are not policy. No matter how long an idea may have persisted, it is actual policy that governs the church at all levels. If we do not like the policy, change it. But do not violate it by usurping that which belongs to another constituency.

10. Construct the session program so that its purpose is to cast a large vision for the future of the church, rather than spending time addressing minutiae that can be better handled by other levels of the church structure.

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After the Alamo and back Again

by Pastor Mark A. McCleary, August 2, 2015:

The Alamo is a Texas state shrine. Numerous non-fictional works have been produced concerning its historical impact—Disney’s *Davy Crockett* (1955) and *The Alamo*, starring John Wayne (1960), and a 2004 version starring Dennis Quaid and Billy Bob Thornton. July 1-11, 2015, the 60th Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) was held around the corner from the shrine where the final epic battle of the Alamo was fought between President General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna’s governmental forces and the revolutionary Texan army. SDA delegates, from around the world (over 2,600) deliberated and voted on various agenda items, chief among them being “whether to allow SDA Divisions to ordain women as pastors as they felt led by God on a per Division basis.” The final vote was 1,381 (No), 997 (Yes), and 5 (Abstained). Like the pivotal Battle of the Alamo when the future land determination of Texas was decided, the SDA decision of women’s ordination and intra-church social relations will be pivotal for Church faith, practice, and unity. I believe it will be pivotal because it reflects the deep pathologies that fester in our church around race and gender.

The background to the Texas Alamo event is compelling. The fact that Santa Anna was president indicates that San Antonio was Mexican territory at the time of the infamous siege (February 23—March 6, 1836). Texas had been largely populated by immigrants from the USA. These immigrants were familiar with a federalist form of government and revolted against Mexico’s centralist approach to governance. It is recorded that Santa Anna wrote to US President Andrew Jackson concerning immigrant non-adaptation to and interference in Mexican cultural affairs.[1] I reference this episode in US history not as a strict designation of anyone or anything today being the replication of the parties involved then. Rather, this conflict is gripping because it provides a bridge for viewing what occurred at San Antonio among SDA’s in light of its own history and as it moves into its future. In my view, the SDA Church has been under siege beyond the issue of women’s ordination. My observations concern SDA dysfunctionality around social disunity while proclaiming its version of speaking for God in these last days. The following situations are evidence which, I believe, takes us [SDA's] back to the Alamo and finds us coming away with the same ‘hidden underbelly’ of structural racism, marginalization, male supremacy, and social disunity.

First of all, at the close of business near the Session’s end, a “Question of Privilege” was offered by a delegate who serves as a Vice President of the North American Division (NAD) of SDA. His commentary concerned taking a moment of silence in respect and solidarity in the aftermath of the tragedy at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in Charleston, South Carolina. Nine unarmed people who were attending a Wednesday night Bible study had been murdered. The day before the women’s ordination vote, South Carolina Governor Haley stated, “This flag [Confederate], while an integral part of our past, does not represent the future of our great state.” A “Question of Privilege” comes under parliamentary rules as a privileged motion and interrupts everything except a vote in process. However, it requires admission by the chair, who in this instance asked, “Didn’t someone say something about that this morning?” The Chair’s casual response to this motion and thus to events that have shocked and polarized our nation is emblematic of “SDA upper-level administrator attitudes” in my opinion. On a previous occasion, the newly elected President of a regional [black] conference asked the previous NAD President if they [morning worship gathering] could pray for the newly elected 44th President of the USA, Barack Obama. The request was denied with the retort, “You pray for him.”

Some will say I’m overly sensitive, but I respond that when I see similar Church actions, I sense a “Red Flag.” An example of such is that the now former Vice President for the General Conference, Delbert Baker, who has served the SDA Church with distinction that made him worthy of the position – such service including editor of *Message Magazine* and President of Oakwood University, which attained university status during his tenure – was not reelected. I hear some saying, “It was God’s will,” and “the Church must be more fiscally sound by merging
responsibilities at its upper administrative levels.” I respect those opinions, but wonder why, in an increasingly diverse global Church, would we not reelect at least one of the two Black male VP’s, one of whom was Baker? I am amazed, but not surprised that there must have been much struggle with God’s will when the incumbent President Ted Wilson’s name was taken back to the nominating committee three times before it was decided to reelect him. From my Conference level experiences, presidents use their influence to effect the future downline membership of their cabinet. Perhaps Baker was not retained because of a philosophical disconnect between him and Wilson. Maybe Baker’s non-reelection also had to do with his attending the South Carolina funeral of the Emmanuel AME Nine as an “unofficial representative of the SDA Church.” Whatever it is exactly, it reminds me of Elijah Muhammad’s censor of Malcom X, when against organization restrictions, Malcolm explained to a reporter his interpretation of the John F Kennedy (JFK) assassination—“It is a matter of chickens coming home to roost.”

Perhaps the recent vote against Division enablement around women’s ordination and my “red flag” observations above can be viewed as being similar to the struggle between the Mexican government and Texan immigrants that led to the Alamo showdown or to Malcolm’s editorial statement concerning JFK’s assassination.

I am “Adventist-born, Adventist-nurtured, and probably Adventist till I die.” But the stand-offish behavior of SDA’s, particularly Whites, as demonstrated in the C Hall concession area, where on several occasions I was asked, in spite of a large backdrop picture and caption that read “Pastor Dr. Mark McCleary,” if I was SDA. My sister and those who helped in our booth all described the body language of mostly Whites who avoided my concession booth at the 2015 GC. Some of the avoiders distributed materials to our next-door neighbor Spectrum and then went past us to the next manned booth. It happened too often to be an aberration. These experiences and observations give me pause that my church continues to maintain a “good old boys” or segregationist spirit. Such spirit is often ineffable yet expresses motivations and intentions that are unctuous and swim in the depths of human subconsciousness as forgotten sea monsters. These monsters have prevented the unity President Wilson called for in his message as a delegate before the women’s ordination vote and in his final Sabbath sermon. It is more like the game Simon Says, as in Missionary Volunteer Society being changed to Adventist Youth, and then I read the Valuegenesis study subsequently because “their” youth were not attending AY or are leaving the Church. “Simon says, “Lay activities should become personal ministry, while very little White-led personal ministry takes place. In reality, there is a White flight phenomenon and a shrinking urban presence of White congregations. “Simon says,” Dorcas and Adventist men should morph into Community Services, and Ingathering should be altered so our SDA White segment’s preference for reaching the community can be addressed largely by ADRA. In other words, Adventism has been under siege before the 60th Session in the shadow of San Antonio’s memorial of the Alamo.

Our climactic vote against women’s ordination cannot hide its deep-seated trouble of intra-Church disharmony that stems from insensitivity, an exclusive mindset, and deafness to both its internal voices and external friends who want the SDA Church to succeed.

Re-elected President Ted Wilson made a stoic plea for unity before the “big” vote. In order for that not to end up being merely a case of political rhetoric, I suggest he speak to and seek to implement unity holistically at the grass-roots level of SDA social life. AME, AME Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal members could teach us a thing or two about dealing with W. E. B. Dubois described as the “problem in America is the color line,” as they struggled with the same troubles within their former parent affiliation—the White-led Methodist Church. It was once the leading Protestant denomination in America, growing out of the developmental leadership of George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and primarily the ministry of John and Charles Wesley, but it has subsequently struggled with intra-church unity and performed as bad stewards in the vein which gave rise to ecclesiastical revolutionaries such as Richard Allen (AME, Philadelphia, 1794); John Jamison Moore (AME Zion, New York, 1796); and the founding of the Christian (aka Colored) Methodist Episcopal Church in Jackson, Tennessee in 1870.[2] Why bring race into this? Because I definitely see a correlation with the women’s ordination vote, the promotion of GC hegemony, and the lingering matter of disharmony among us that will continue to undermine President Wilson’s public call for unity even as he winks at historic SDA intra-church social disharmony. The same spirit that laid siege to the Methodist Church is eating away at any real unity in the Adventist Church. It seems to me to be similar to Santa Anna calling for centralist Mexican control and Texan revolutionaries acting to appropriate their rights. The women’s ordination vote
is over, but Wilson’s call for unity is still not being realized. It is sad to affirm the statement of the President of the Lake Region Conference of SDA, R. Clifford Jones, who in his book *Utopia Park, Utopian Church: James K. Humphrey and the Emergence of Sabbath-Day Adventist* states, “The denomination has struggled with the issue [equitable treatment of all people] as it relates to people of African descent, and on occasion has reflected the contradictory racial tendencies and practices of the American society in which it was born and weaned.”[3]

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ, we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Matt. 28:19, 20; Ps. 133:1; 2 Cor.5:16, 17; Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:2-6, 14-16; John 17:20-23).[4]

In 1987, I attended the Norman Road SDA Church in Newark, New Jersey [a predominantly White SDA congregation], after assuming the pastorate at the First Church of SDA in Montclair, New Jersey. Whites made up 90% of the attendance the day that I preached. Before being reassigned in 1992, I preached there again, around 1991. There were five White elderly ladies attending that day and the remaining attendees looked about 45% Afro-Caribbean; 20% Asian; 30% Hispanic, and 5% other. Since then, I have observed the same phenomenon in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland, where Whites have left their former church homes for rural spaces. In my opinion, these trends are not an aberration or collective action in behalf of unity, but reflect the historic attitude and behavior of disconnection and disassociation. Our church has been under siege with this negative attitude and action for decades. A graphic example of this happened to the brother of the former mayor of Philadelphia. In a test-case effort, he went out to the then-White Boulevard Church in the mid 1960’s, when I was in my middle teens, and was “threatened” to keep him from entering the church on that Sabbath. I recall my experience at Andrews University (AU), during my matriculation there (1969-1972), when a meeting took place among the Michigan Conference President and NAD and GC personalities, convened by AU President, Richard Hammill, to discuss with a sample of Black students their apparent disconnect with the majority White students and school social life in general. This meeting included former GC President Neal Wilson, father of our current President, who was either in Communications or a GC VP (1971). When my turn came, I explained how I greeted White students daily, but was most frequently ignored. I continued to state that, “Such greetings were a part of my neighbor upbringing.” The next day, while I was approaching the Student Hall, Elder Wilson yelled, “Hey, Brother McCleary.” I was told years later that he was famous for remembering faces. In reflection, I truly believe that in his greeting he was trying to effect a change in my deportment in light of my comments the day before. However, in order for the SDA church to be responsive to President Ted Wilson’s call for unity and move beyond what are valid observations of deep pathology, he will have to focus on helping us remember and practice respecting that each of our faces are different and we come from diverse spaces. This is the unity I hope he is calling for and not uniformity to a White standard of being in Christ. The recent women’s ordination vote and our historically poor intra-Church social misbehavior makes me concerned that President Wilson and SDA White voices speak about *sola scriptura* while they say little about interpersonal and intragroup disharmony among us.

We seem more like the White Methodist Church, who did not respond productively by including its Black members fully, or the Assemblies of God denomination which developed (1914) around a segregationist discourse after formerly receiving its ecclesiastical endorsement from its Holiness movement parent, The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), which had been led by a Black man, Charles Mason (1907).[5] What does this have to do with the recent vote, the GC, or the President’s appeal for unity? As I see it, everything, because it relates to the siege of Adventism at the social level. This is what the “Elephant in the Room” is. It is what early Black SDA pioneers such as John Mann, J. K. Humphrey, and Louis Sheafe battled with—embracing this message while struggling against White SDA leadership insensitivity, non-inclusion, and Jim Crowism. The specious nature of this siege is that SDA discourse and policy-making is more like Santa Anna’s centralist vision, whereas Blacks, women, and non-Whites are the
Texans seeking their right for expression and acceptance in the face of old boy White male leader’s reluctance to share power.

Mann, Humphrey, and Sheafe all left after long battles around social issues and incidents concerning Black SDA member marginalization.[6] The late E. E. Cleveland, a giant of Adventist evangelism, reported segregated lunch rooms at the old GC building on Eastern Avenue, NW, in Washington, DC. Andrews University Pastor Dwight Nelson’s score-long pulpit-platform calling for unity or “come back home” sounds strangely like Pope John the XXIII’s call for Protestant “separated brethren’ to return to the mother Catholic Church during the historic Vatican II Council (opening, 1962). Why do Black Regional Conference SDA’s have to come at all or initiate organizational reform? Black SDA’s have never been at the table in sufficient numbers to affect structural transformation. Furthermore, why do we have to come back when we have already been here? Unless we picket as was done at the 1970 GC Session in Atlantic City, New Jersey, or threaten to go to the media concerning social injustice as initiated by Black SDA Ohioans (the late Doctor Frank Hale and Mr. Silas Martin) at the GC Session in San Francisco, California, in 1962, it seems that SDA upper leadership will react in acts of appeasement or tokenism.[7]

It is these types of reactions that, I believe, help explain White leadership’s approval of the Regional Conference Proposal after the “straw that broke the organization’s racial pathology’s back,” when the Washington Adventist Hospital refused to treat SDA patient Lucy Bayard after reading on her intake form that she was Black.[9]

So what are my suggestions to address this pathological siege of race and gender around the matter of unity that our President seeks? The vote concerning women’s ordination enabling a Division to decide independently is over. However, if we can learn anything from the interactions that led to the Battle of the Alamo, it is that honest communication that includes all of our diverse voices must be encouraged, listened to and responded to according to the principles of “It is lawful to do good” on Sabbath or at any other time. The Mexican and Texan people of 1836 missed an opportunity for unity. And unless we enter the Spirit of unity, like patrons do as they enter the Alamo Shrine to see that it was a mission for peace and not a fort for fighting, we will miss the signs of the times and not know that every SDA gender and ethnic group should be encouraged to express the three angels’ messages in their own medium of expression. Let not our top Church leader hint or ‘demand’ that people stop clapping or involving their body in affirmation or worship (Psalms 150). Let not marginalization be the norm for diverse ways for using one’s gifts for or praising God in the congregation. The substratum for unity is humility; and the substratum for humility is love; a love that embraces me as I am and invests in me to be all I can be in Christ and not just as I adapt to a White Euro-centric model of behavior and worship. Research informs us that Black men and woman were observing Sabbath in Africa long before SDA’s showed up in the presence of their missionaries. Whites have not invented nor been the exclusive arbiters of biblically grounded religious expression. In fact, Africans were shocked when White European missionaries came with Sunday.[10]

The first suggestion for us is not to retreat or succumb to non-Kingdom egalitarianism that is the obverse of Paul’s Kingdom unity (Galatians 3:27-29), but push forward together in the spirit of the Sixteen Points Program[11] and empower rather than exclude our members from leadership positions. In my opinion, the women’s ordination matter is coming back. The increase of votes in agreement, from 41 (1990) to 997 (2015) indicates the issue is not over and is more organic in nature than many recognize. We have lingering matters that are related to it and in many ways supersede it that demand immediate attention if the President’s appeal for unity is to be realized. My second suggestion is that our dear President Wilson not travel with bodyguards or wear a bullet proof vest. I pray these rumors are just mischievous gossip. If it is true, however, please remove the vest and let the guards go—“He shall give His angels charge over thee” (Ps. 34:7). As our President or spiritual high priest, stand like a tree planted by the rivers of righteousness and social justice and speak against the inertia of White flight by challenging the White descendants of our founding pioneers to practice Jesus’ prayer “That we be one even as He and His Father are one” (John 17:22)—in the city and the suburbs; in all thirteen SDA Divisions; in the lives of men and women, young and old. Remind the descendants of our organizational pioneers that to be the head of this diverse bridal Church means to lead according to Paul’s model (Eph. 5:22-33). If you focus on this, I believe true unity will be nurtured—a unity that respects the gifts of women and ethnic others; a unity borne from active and reflexive listening and negotiations that produce practical relationships in the Northeast/South/Midwest/West areas of the NAD and around.
the globe within SDA social life.

May we occupy together, in the true sense of unity, but not uniformity, until Jesus comes to take us to eternal bliss. This will take President Wilson, like the Pope, encouraging every Conference ministry person and pastoral leader to preach, teach, and exhort unity of the John and Jane Doe members of every nation, kindred and tongue, while not winking at or tacitly supporting behaviors of disharmony, disparity, and disassociation. “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” (Psalms 37:11). Not an earth for men over women (Gen.1:26-28) or ghettoized and depreciated from a heavenly uptown section; or a new earth with a lower class and an upper class; or racial, ethnic or gender enclaves; nor one where White SDA leaders are going to “come over to your side [of heaven] to hear you [Black] folk sing,” but an earth where there will be justice for all as far as the sea. Maranatha! Even so, come, Lord of Unity, and help us make the unity our President appealed for a reality, where we stop fighting as if we are at the Alamo again.

Bibliography


Jones, R. Clifford (2007). *Utopia Park, Utopian Church: James K. Humphrey and the Emergence of Sabbath-Day Adventist* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 6


[11] Jacob Justice, 150-151. This action grew out of discussion around Division Presidential structuration in the early 1900’s. Such deliberations prompted further discussion concerning Union and Regional [Black] Conference authority determination, particularly, a proposal for Black Unions. Eventually, this Affirmative Action plan was voted as a two-year experimental-period and compromise for dealing with racial injustice in the church.

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He has been married to the former Queenie P. Bryant for over 40 years. In his opinion, she is a role model for every First Lady. They have three adult children, Brian, Michael (married to Andrenee and two children, Micah and Miles, and Michelle.

Pastor McCleary has completed the following degrees: B. A. (1974); Master of Divinity (1978); Doctor of Ministry, "Congregational Renewal" (1998); and Ph. D. "Conflict Analysis and Resolution" (2013).

Pastor McCleary has published—The Gospel Presentation; Back to Basics Bible Study; Reflections on Daniel workbook; A Guide to Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts; and Assurance, Insurance, and Reassurance: Pre-Marital and Marriage Information Series; “A Conflict Resolution Manual for Resolving Intra Church Social Conflict” is pending.

His personal vision and objective statements are: “To be recognized as a good pastor by my members and a helpful and accessible chaplain to their various communities”, and “To be a role model of Christian values, in order to inspire positive life-style transformation in others.”
My Son!

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, Aug 5, 2015  One of the most sorrowful stories in the Bible has to be the death of Absalom, told in 2 Samuel 18. I don’t have the courage to try to write about it in the first person, but perhaps if we just consider the story for a few minutes, we can gain personal insights for ourselves.

It is difficult for us to imagine, in these “enlightened” ages, what David’s life was like—or the life of any king in that era. He started as a shepherd boy, expecting to live out a quiet and unknown life with his sheep. To his astonishment, he was chosen and anointed as the next king-to-be, then went from palace favorite to wanted fugitive in short order. Over the next years, the godly shepherd boy became a bloody-handed warrior, and finally king.

David married several women in order to forge alliances. Who knows which, if any, he truly loved, or even if he knew what deep and trustful love meant? The ones he had weren’t enough. Along with his bloody-handedness, he had grown to be a lustful man, even going so far as to have another man’s wife “brought to him,” quite possibly against her will. That crime was hateful enough, but when David’s underhanded plans to cover it up didn’t work, he made the deliberate choice to have her husband killed in battle.

And Joab, his commander, obeyed without apparent question. Then David oh-so-kindly made Bathsheba his wife.

Fortunately, all godliness was not lost in this faulty king’s heart. When Nathan confronted him, David did sincerely recognize himself in the mirror of his own appalling sin, and since David never did anything by halves, we have as good a record of his repentance and forgiveness as of his falls.

He probably wasn’t that surprised to have jealousy and intrigue showing up in his mixed family; in those days it wasn’t uncommon for kings’ sons to rebel against or even kill their fathers. But David’s sons went so far as rape and murder. Try for just a minute to imagine David the father’s true feelings, as opposed to David the king’s actions and judgments. Add in the fact that one of the actors in this sordid family drama was David’s favorite, Absalom.

“Abba’s Shalom,” “father’s peace,” was the son of Maacah or Maachah, the daughter of the king of Geshom. As he grew, he was every young girl’s dream of a Prince Charming. Possibly David thought he would make a good king, since the Bible stories make it appear that it was up to him to choose his successor, rather than the more modern custom of firstborn son automatically inheriting the throne.

Imagine David’s anguish when this favored son turned against him, plotting, whispering, turning on the charm as he knew so well how to do. Try to picture David’s reluctance to send his own spy into Absalom’s household, and then prepare for war against his own son.

Throughout, David was clinging to the hope that he would not lose his son. Perhaps Absalom would yet repent and come to his father. David knew about forgiveness. He would have granted it, though Absalom would certainly forfeit any chance of future kinghood, even if David had had that idea.

When the battle raged, the king ordered his commander, Joab, until now faithful even David’s sinful whims, “Be careful! Watch out for Absalom!”

“The lad, Absalom,” in fact, though Absalom was not that young at this point.

Instead, at the Battle of Ephraim Wood, Absalom’s treasured mane of hair caught him right off his mount, and Joab, finding him helpless, deliberately killed him.

Only those who have lost a beloved child—surely the worst of human losses—can truly relate to David’s anguish.
when he received the news. How much was his sorrow compounded by the heavy load of knowing himself safer with his son dead? How much by guilt, the knowledge that he had pampered Absalom too much?

And how similar might this grief be (in a small way) to the grief God feels when his children fight, hate, kill each other, and ultimately die of our own pride?

What can we do differently—this very day?

To hear a haunting melody memorializing this moment in David's life, go here.
Loma Linda University Health’s National TV Show

By Briana Pastorino, LLUH, posted by Debbonnaire Kovacs, Aug. 5, 2015

National TV show, ‘Life on the Line,’ back for a second season

Show produced by 12-time Emmy® Award winning team

and narrated by celebrity journalist Lisa Ling

Editor’s note: Last spring (2014), Loma Linda University Health unrolled their first national TV show, a documentary with six inspiring half-hour dramas, called “Life on the Line.” That first year’s stories showcased the broad reach of LLUH, showing episodes from California, where the hospital is based, to the Amazon jungle and the Philippines. According to LLUH Media Relations Specialist Briana Pastorino, the show had a successful year, and the second year is about to begin.

By Briana Pastorino, LLUH  Loma Linda University Health’s first national TV show, “Life on the Line,” is coming back with a second season airing on public television stations across the nation beginning August 12.

The show’s first season was successful, airing on nearly 300 public television stations in over 125 markets in the United States. The documentary series features stories of strength and resilience – from a newborn fighting for his life to the International Behavioral Health Trauma Team dispatched to the Philippines following a deadly typhoon.

Narraated by celebrity journalist Lisa Ling, “Life on the Line” season two features seven half-hour episodes. The first episode, “Rough Beginning,” follows the journey of a couple – Janett Anguiano and Gian Ledesma – expecting a baby boy who will be born with a life-threatening condition, gastroschisis, a birth defect in which the intestines are outside of the body. Without immediate medical treatment, baby Theodore’s life will be in danger as soon as he is born.

“I was scared to hold him when he was still so fragile,” Ledesma said of the day he held his son for the first time.

After undergoing two surgeries, fighting infection and healing, Theodore was on the road to recovery.

“I was overwhelmed,” said Anguiano when she held 10-day-old Theodore for the first time. “To feel his warmth was one of the best days of my life.”

Additional episodes of “Life on the Line” season two will follow the lives of two young children born with heart disease in Nicaragua; survivors and the aftermath of the typhoon in the Philippines; organ transplant recipients and others who struggle to survive their individual, unforeseen circumstances.

“It is a privilege to share these inspiring stories with our viewers around the nation,” said Cosmin Cosma, director, advancement films at Loma Linda University Health. “This show is about how real people find meaning in the midst of a tragedy. This is where the real story lives and their strength of spirit shines.”
Watch and experience Loma Linda University Health's mission to continue the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ through these inspiring stories of resilience and courage.

For the full schedule, episode previews and more information about the show visit lifeontheline.tv.
Sleepin' Single in a Double Bed

Dianne could not provide for the children by herself but she knew that Gary loved them and would help her. She applied for welfare assistance. Gary moved into a nearby motel and every other weekend he would take half the kids and the alternating weekends the other half. Though the children missed his being at home, they didn’t mind visiting with Gary at the motel and in fact, thought it a lot of fun.

Dianne continued attending church every Sabbath with the children. However, since the reasons for the divorce were not publicly revealed, the church body took a dim view of the divorce, knowing that it was Dianne who had obtained it. She was not allowed to drive school bus for the church school. Once more, she was a “fallen woman” in the eyes of the church. Dianne held her head high, though, and continued to attend.

Since she honestly believed that public school was of the devil, she could not allow herself to enter her children there. However, not having the job as bus driver, she could no longer afford church school for the children. Even if she could have driven bus, Janelle had now reached school age and the pay of the bus driver would not cover four children's tuition.

Dianne applied to the state and received permission to teach her children at home. She purchased some of their textbooks but others would not arrive until October. School began. Dianne had gone to a teacher’s aide store and had found a book on phonics, which she used to teach Janelle. The regular schools had adopted sight-reading at this point, but Dianne was loyal to phonics and Janelle was reading at first-grade level by December.

The kitchen table became the group desk. There was a regular schedule with recesses included. The ceiling above the table became the children’s “award board” and stars and trinkets ornamented it. The children progressed well.

One day the phone rang. A psychiatrist from Portland Adventist Medical Center was calling to ask Dianne some questions. Was she at all interested in restoring her marriage? Dianne had to tell him, “No.” Too many times she had requested marital counseling, Gary had attended with her, and then he would stop. She did not wish to go through the ordeal again, and the latest events, which had opened her understanding as to the cloud that had hovered over them, were just too much.

The psychiatrist said that Gary had come to seek help for himself but all he was saying was “save my marriage.” Dianne suggested that if Gary wished to save his marriage, he should have worked on it many years ago. It had taken her a long time to reach the point of divorce and she was not going to change her mind now and subject the children to a repeat of everything that had led up to it.

The psychiatrist asked Dianne if she had noted any change in personality or if there had been any recent medical problems for Gary. She said that there had not, except that one time when they were arguing, Gary had gone out onto the front porch and when he had come back in the house, he had claimed that he had vomited blood. Dianne figured that he was only seeking attention, however, and ignored it. She also told the doctor that Gary seemed to have one eyelid drooping but she attributed it to the fact that they had been undergoing some very traumatic times and this was Gary’s physical reaction to it. The doctor listened and then said that he thought he would send Gary to a neurologist.

Another phone call. Gary was in the hospital. Dianne rushed to his side. She and the children were the only family
he had in Portland. The rest of his family was in Iowa, since his parents had recently moved back there from Missouri to be near their daughter. The pronouncement was that Gary had an aneurysm in the brain. Emergency surgery was scheduled.

Concern for Gary and the impending surgery put a hold on the children’s schoolwork. No matter what their personal relationship, he was the children's father. He had even adopted Janetta after they had arrived in Portland. They were all his children now.

Because of the children, Dianne could not be at the hospital as much as she wished, but she was there when Gary went to surgery and she stayed near the phone afterwards. She was relieved to hear that he had done well and was now in recovery. When he began to awaken, she was at his side. She soothed him and assured him that when he was released from the hospital, he would be able to come home with her.

True to her word, upon his release from the hospital, Dianne took Gary home. She could not feel for him as she should a spouse, though, and took every opportunity she could to be away from the house while he was there. She did take care of him but tried to leave personal feelings out of it. It really was not a good situation and Dianne wondered if she had made the right choice by having Gary at home but she also knew that he needed someone to care for him and that he was incapable of going to Iowa. They muddled through the best they could and when Gary was sufficiently recovered, Dianne asked him to leave the home again.

Gary swore undying love for Dianne and told her that he would never remarry. Dianne saw him only one time after that. His unemployment check had accidentally been sent to Dianne’s address, and he stopped by to pick it up. In the car with him were a woman and several children. Dianne scoffed at Gary’s avowal of love but she was glad for him that he had seemingly found someone to care for him.

Because of the surgery and the upheaval of the household schedule, Dianne had decided that she must give up her idea of teaching the children at home. With a very heavy heart, knowing that she was subjecting the children to the wiles of the devil but also knowing that by state law they must be educated, she led them up the steps of the public school and enrolled them there.

A knock sounded at the front door, and when Dianne answered, it was the local pastor, (not Elder Unterseher, who had been transferred by this time) and the head elder. Dianne had, they told her, been observed doing something that the church did not allow. Though she denied vociferously that it was true, she was told that her name would be removed from membership at the following board meeting the next Wednesday night. Dianne determined to be there.

When her name came up at the board meeting, the pastor said that this was the first time in his career that a person had attended a board meeting to oppose their name being taken from the roles. Though Dianne again denied that what they said was true, she was determined to be a fallen woman because of her divorce and she was put on six months of probation.

Dianne pulled back into her shell. She spent much time in contemplation of her probation. She was sick at heart. The first time her name had been removed was because she and her family had been serving her country overseas and she was not able to attend church and this time she had been accused of doing something she did not do. She began to question her reasons for attending church. She began to see God as some sort of tyrant, always demanding and always accusing. She knew in her heart that she was a sinner and certainly not perfect. But try as she might, she could never seem to live up to what she felt a Seventh-day Adventist should be. She felt that everyone else in the church was a much better Christian than she was.

At the end of the six-month probationary period the pastor and head elder once more appeared at her door, this time proclaiming congratulations, for Dianne had "passed" and could remain a member of the family of God. But Dianne had given up. She no longer wished to participate in the political games of the church and, knowing that she was not
what she ought to be, she did not wish to be hypocritical. She also had come to the realization that it didn't matter
whether or not her name was on the books of the Seventh-day Adventist church but rather, whether or not they were
on the books in heaven. At this time her prayer had become, “Lord, I know that I am not worthy to be there but look
upon the hearts of my family and friends and especially upon the heart of my mother, Grace. I know that she has
problems, but forgive her for what she has done, Lord, for she thought, in her own misguided way, that she was
doing the right thing.” Dianne told the pastor and the head elder that she appreciated their call but she would also
appreciate it if they would go ahead and remove her name from the books.

She now began to look for love in all the wrong places. She began to date a friend of hers, Leonard. During their
time together, Leonard and Dianne were involved in a serious automobile accident. Though Leonard had not been
staying with Dianne, he now came to be in her home so that they could try to work together to recover from their
injuries and take care of the children.

A couple of ladies from the Seventh-day Adventist church came by to help but upon finding Leonard there, they told
Dianne that as long as he was there, they would not help her. Leonard was to go wherever it was that he should go
and then Dianne would be worthy of help. Dianne thanked them very kindly and told them that she and Leonard had
determined to work together for the sake of the children and that Leonard was staying. Sniffing their pious noses,
the ladies left in a huff and Dianne and Leonard did the best they could together to provide for the children.

Because of the seriousness of the accident and their working together, Dianne and Leonard’s relationship became
more serious, and a pregnancy developed. Chad was born but his father eventually rejected him and walked out of
Dianne’s life.

Gary too, had left the country and the children were now distraught. They would gather under the now untrimmed
laurel bushes and weep together. Dianne was aware of this but as the children did not share their feelings with her
and refused to talk of Gary, she was unable to reassure them. Gary never called and never wrote. It would be over
20 years before the children would hear of him again, though Dianne kept them in touch with Gary’s mother in Iowa
so that if there were a possibility of contact, they would be the first to know. Gary had disappeared from his mother’s
life also.

With seven children now, Dianne was not able to keep up the garden and much of the rest that Gary had done while
he was still with them. Being on welfare, the children were not dressed in the latest fashion any longer. Dianne
began to feel as if she was the local bag lady.

She had occasion to meet her former boss, Ted, from Portland Adventist Schools, and shared with him that she and
Gary were now divorced. It wasn’t long until he began to stop by the home now and then, to see how Dianne was
doing and not long after that, he and Dianne began a relationship.

Ted finally moved in with Dianne and Dianne once more began attending church. This time she chose a very large
church a little farther away from her home but where she thought she had friends from the school. Because of their
circumstances, her live-in lover refused to attend with her but Dianne went every week and sat on the front row. The
members of the church however, were not real thrilled to have the local “bag lady” and her brood attending their
church. They knew that Dianne was living with her former boss and some church members even refused to speak to
her or acknowledge her presence. Dianne reached the point where she knew there was no reason to continue. She
would never be able to live up to what God wanted… why try?

Dianne and Ted had two more children, adding Cynthia and Randy to the family. Dianne didn’t mind. She was proud
to be able to give these children to their father. This was Ted’s first son and Dianne was excited for him. Storm
clouds soon descended on this relationship too, however.

Ted was an alcoholic. He was recovered but one never loses the propensity for alcoholism. He had been the
Sabbath School leader in his church but when he took up residence with Dianne, he dropped away from all church

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activities. Guilt set in and the relationship with Dianne deteriorated without God’s presence at its center.

Ted was able to obtain a contract to transport school buses for one of the local school districts and Dianne went with him. They would hire a babysitter for the children, fly out in the middle of the night, pick up two buses, and in three days’ time be back in Portland. The buses came out of varying places, Illinois, Iowa, Virginia, Georgia, and Arkansas. It was a good time in their lives. Transporting paid good money and once again Dianne was able to care for her children properly.

Soon Ted, however, would want a beer when he came in off the road. Dianne didn’t oppose him. She had never been a witness to alcoholism and did not know what the results would be. The single beer increased to a couple of beers and then a six-pack and soon Ted was a full-blown drinker again.

Dianne recalls an incident when Ted had placed a chair in the middle of the front room and was watching television as he drank his beer. He had finished a twelve-pack and sent Dianne for more. He could barely sit on the chair and the children were not happy. They picked up his can of beer from the floor, poured it down the drain and refilled the can with water. Ted was so drunk he didn’t even know the difference.

The new cat the family had brought home loved Ted, though Ted did not like cats. The cat would find any occasion possible to sit in his lap. On this occasion, true to form, the cat sat beside Ted as he drank. This infuriated Ted and he picked up Cynthia’s toy baton and struck the cat forcefully across the mouth with it. The children screamed and grabbed the cat but the damage was done. Ted had broken out all of the cat’s front teeth. Dianne was devastated. She had walked from the frying pan into the fire. She grabbed the toy baton and bent it double. Ted would never use that toy again, nor would Cynthia.

The contracts for transporting the school buses were each for about twelve buses annually and in the interim, Ted took up driving cab in Portland. His drinking increased and it came to a point that he would go to work and not return home for a couple of days. Dianne’s heart was broken. She had loved and trusted him so much. She began, when he would disappear, to pack the children in the car and travel around town looking for him. On the occasions that she found him, she would plead for him to come home but it was a rare time that he would.

One time he came home and the fenders of the car were mashed. When Dianne asked him what had happened, he said that he didn’t know but that he could drive drunk better than most people could when they were sober. He stumbled into the house and passed out on the bed. He and Dianne now began to argue daily.

When Dianne found Ted with another woman it was the end of the line, though Ted swore that the woman meant nothing to him. She had found him seated in a bar cozied up to the woman and when she leaned over to whisper in his ear that she was removing his clothing from her home, the woman stood up and began attacking Dianne. The police were called and Dianne was severely reprimanded, though she had not been drinking and did not fight back nor did she say a word to the other woman. That was the last straw for Dianne. There was no need to try to even be decent. She ordered Ted out of the house.

Dianne was now 36 years old and had nine babies to support and care for.

In relating this story Dianne tells of an evening when, with the older children at summer camp and the younger children in bed, she was sitting on the couch in the living room of her dilapidated home, watching a movie about wolves in Alaska. “The movie came to a really good part,” she says, “when there was a knock on the door.”

Dianne went to the door and called out, “Who is it?”

A male voice answered, “My car broke down and I need to use your phone.”

Dianne answered, “Just a minute,” went to the phone and dialed 911. Within two minutes there were patrol cars, which entered from both ends of her street, in front of her house. There was no broken-down car nor was there a
man waiting to use Dianne’s phone.

Dianne became convinced of the protection of God for in the condition of her home, the front door neither latched nor locked. One push and the man could have walked right in on her but Dianne is convinced that angels held the door shut for her that evening.

Two days later a man was arrested in Portland for the killing of several women. In his possession was a list of women who lived alone.

In desperation, Dianne knew that her only way out now was to find a man to help her raise the nine babies. She didn’t know how she was going to do it but she knew she must. The house needed repairs, the septic tank had filled, and she could not afford to replace it or have it pumped. She made makeshift ways to survive. The toilet could only be flushed twice a day and a hole was dug under the kitchen window into which to drain the kitchen sink. Dianne had reached a low point in her life but it was to get worse before it would begin getting better.
Lagniappe

By S M Chen, posted Aug 5, 2015

*Lagniappe definition: A little something extra (from the French; used mainly in the South, especially around New Orleans).*

I first encountered the word ‘lagniappe’ decades ago, when listening to a medical education lecture while I commuted to and from work, over 30 miles away. The lecturer was from Louisiana.

I almost never use it in parlance, and had almost forgotten it, till I was searching for a title for this short essay.

My landlord and I have a somewhat unusual landscape responsibility arrangement. He takes care of the front yard, including a small lawn he mows on average once or twice a month. To do so, he drives over 60 miles each way (which takes him over an hour). I suspect he incurs more vehicle expense, including cost of petrol, than it would cost him to hire someone. Not to mention his time, which has to be worth something. No matter. He is an attentive landlord and entitled to mow his own lawn if he so wishes.

I am responsible for the backyard, which includes a smaller isosceles triangular lawn, which I manage with an electric trimmer. Both lawns have timed sprinklers, so my requisite maintenance more involves raking, sweeping, and tending to shrubbery, including those that regularly spill over adjoining neighbors’ walls, than grass cutting.

We had unusual weather recently. Light but durable rain, with accompanying thunder and lightning. Nice, in that it was cooler than normal. The sun beat down with force, and the air was heavy as guilt.

After trimming bushes on both sides of the backyard and placing them in the large plastic bin designated for greenery, I noticed that a couple yucca in the planter above the back lawn needed attention. Their precise name will remain innominate, for reason of the triad of three I’s (ignorance, indolence, and “I’ll look it up later” mentality).

Suffice it to say the plant is circular and has green leaves that resemble swords’ blades. A number of blades had died and turned brown. I decided to remove them.

Facing the back block wall, I started at the approximate 4:00 position, and worked my way around it in clockwise fashion. Some of the leaves yielded to gentle tug; others required more force to remove. Some loosened not at all and I snipped them. But the ground around the base of the plant looked better. I wondered why I had not done this sooner (I’ve lived here over three years).

When I reached 1:00, as I glanced down, I saw something surprising. At around 2:00, deep within the plant, almost at its base, was a nest. It was empty and wonderfully camouflaged. I was about to remove it when I thought, why destroy with relative ease and alacrity something that had taken a couple birds much time and effort to build? So I left it and surrounding vegetation alone and turned my attention to the other similar plant at the other end of the planter.

I didn’t expect to find another nest in this plant. One was accidental. Two would be—well, more than sheer
coincidence. And yet, as I moved in circular fashion around this second yucca, removing dead leaves as I went, pulling some, snipping others, I came upon another, similar nest. At 12:00, not 2:00. It, too, was nicely camouflaged. And also empty (see accompanying photo).

Any doubts as to the ownership of the nests were quickly dispelled shortly thereafter when a pair of crows flew to a nearby palm tree and began cawing their displeasure.

We have our share of feathered folk. One early morning I spied a large blue heron atop the roof of a nearby house. It was silhouetted and so still that I wondered briefly if it might be the statue of a stork, until it flew off and I marveled at its size. If I want to see seabirds, I have but to bike or drive to the coast, a scant three miles away.

Blackbirds, including crows (I recall a syllogism requiring deductive reasoning from some test of yore: All blackbirds are crows; this bird is black; therefore this bird is a crow), are common. But I’m quite sure that the cacophony of the two crows this morn was directed at me for having discovered their nests, despite being empty.

The serendipitous discovery of the nests got me to thinking.

The words of Paul in Ephesians 3:20 came to mind: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think…”

I’m convinced the Almighty wants good things for us. He tells us as much (Matthew 7:11).

Whether it be answered prayer, visual or aural beauty in nature, a moving passage or piece of classical music, or the delight of finding a bird nest in an unexpected place.
A Shape Note Lament

By Debbonaire Kovacs, posted Aug. 5, 2015

Shape Note music is an ancient method of music teaching, created for people who couldn’t read music on paper. Something like the Do-Re-Mi style popularized in the movie, “The Sound of Music,” the octave is designated by sounds. Then each note on the regular music staff has a shape that represents one of those sounds.

I am a member of the Shape Note singing group here in Berea, KY. This week, to go along with the devotion, I thought you might like to hear a shape note group (not ours!) sing a popular and heartrending tune, “David’s Lamentation.” You will first hear the group reading and singing the shapes of the notes in each one’s parts. Then they sing the lyrics, which are fairly clear in the recording, but in case you can’t hear it, the words are below.

David the king was grieved and moved

He went to his chamber, his chamber, and wept;

And as he went he wept, and said,

“Oh my son! Oh my son!

Would to God I had died, would to God I had died, would to God I had died

For thee, Oh Absalom, my son, my son, my son.”