Getting Past GC 2015

In the wake of the July 8 General Conference vote there are a number of Adventist Millennials (and older generations) in the NAD that are beginning to wonder if they can still journey forward with this church. They are in our local churches. They are in our own families. In this special edition of Best Practices for Adventist Ministry seven pastors...
share important perspectives and talking points you can use in your ministry.

A Video Message of Reassurance and Hope, from NAD President Daniel R. Jackson

We believe that God's movement here on earth will continue until Jesus comes again, and that it will succeed. The North American Division is a part of that movement. We want to give you the assurance that as far as our division is concerned, we are a part of a world family. Having said that, we want to also give you the assurance that we will continue to utilize all of the resources that we have - our men, our women, our young people...

Jesus is the number one focus of our attention, and He needs to be because He is the Fundamental, the Source, the Center of all our 28 Fundamental Beliefs...
Encouragement for Disappointed Millennials
By Rich Carlson

To all my young adult friends to whom I have given my life: I want to share my heart about the recent General Conference decision on the freedom not granted to choose the best path for honoring women in ministry as seems culturally appropriate. I personally wish the vote would have gone a different way, but I continue to be blessed as I watch you all struggle at first with what seemed to be rejection and then realizing that there can still be ministry for all of us no matter the decision. Read More

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To Those Sanctified
By Seth Pierce

In this July 11, 2015 message, Puyallup, WA Pastor Seth Pierce takes us into the world of be angry and sin not (Ephesians 4:26) to help us understand that our anger over the July 8 GC decision spills out of our deep love for the church and our commitment to journey together to a better place. Listen Here

Tip for Joy
By Kristina L. Dubs
With $50 cash in small bills tucked in my purse and the commission to tip those who I came in contact around the Austin, Texas NAD Ministerial Convention 2015, I was on a mission! But honestly, I felt a bit nervous and awkward, revealing how shamefully foreign it is for me to tip anyone outside of the typical fumbling with mental math while staring at a white receipt in order to scribble down what I believe the waiter/waitress "deserved" at conventional sit-down restaurants. Read More
Encouragement for Disappointed Millennials

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To all my young adult friends to whom I have given my life: I want to share my heart about the recent General Conference decision on the freedom not granted to choose the best path for honoring women in ministry as seems culturally appropriate. I personally wish the vote would have gone a different way, but I continue to be blessed as I watch you all struggle at first with what seemed to be rejection and then realizing that there can still be ministry for all of us no matter the decision.

I believe in this Church. I believe God is leading. That does NOT mean that every decision will be right or that I will agree with every decision. To have tension in any organization, including the church, is normal and I believe healthy. If we all agreed we would be a pathetic stagnant organization! The body of Christ has many parts and they don't all work the same. We praise the early church in Acts as some kind of model but go back and read the book again and look at all the disagreements in there! Some even reached the place where they parted ways, from each other, but NOT from the system.

I know things did not go the way many of us had hoped but my prayer is that you will not react by leaving or giving up. The church is still a good avenue of support as we focus on what is most important, that being, in my opinion, to look at Jesus and His work in our lives, allowing His love and grace and mercy to fill us so it shines through us to allow others to see something better than what this world offers. My focus is not on who gets ordained or whether I should discipline or destroy people who have lifestyles or philosophies that differ from me. My focus is on Jesus and the work He has given to me in support of His kingdom and His children.

A world church is a VERY challenging thing to try and run. I don't envy ANY of the leaders who are trying to do it. My life is much better when I realize that they are not evil people trying to destroy me and they are not infallible saints with all the right answers. They are people who are committed to the same thing I am, and hopefully you are. Sometimes we agree and sometimes we don't. But just like I don't divorce my wife if she doesn't agree with me, and I don't disown my kids if they choose differently that I wish they would choose, I will not abandon my church even if I don't agree with them. We are family and we're going to make it through no matter what decisions are made.

I will continue to focus on Jesus. I will continue to do my best to treat women with the equal respect they deserve, not because they are women, but because they are children of God and God sees ALL of us as equal – equally in need of HIS love and mercy and grace. I will continue to focus on Jesus. I will continue to disagree with some people in my church for choices they make, but I will not stop loving them as much as I do with those I agree with; in fact I'll continue to pray for God's love, mercy and grace so I can even love them more than those I agree with.

My government is not perfect and I don't agree with all their conclusions, but I'm not giving up my citizenship. My world church did not agree with me– it's a big church with lots of people from lots of cultural backgrounds that I know almost nothing about. I have to believe that they voted their conscience. But no matter what the outcome I will
continue to be blessed by being a part of this family and I will continue to be blessed as I focus on Jesus and live my life as He leads me. Please, my dear young adult friends – all you who are my students, current or past, whom I will continue to unpolitically correctly call my "kids," –please, you don't have to be "right" to the point of rejecting what can still be what I have found more support than burden. Don't bale if it doesn't go your way. Remember 1 Timothy 4:12 "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are a young adult (or a woman in ministry,)" Rise above that. "Be an example to the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." Be proactive, make a difference, rise above what you might disagree with and focus on what Jesus has called you to be – an example of what you want your church to be – what God wants His church to be – examples to the world of what speech, life, love, faith and purity look like. Whether everyone else does it the way I do, or even does it at all- I will still focus on what God has called me to do. Please don't bale. Please join me. We can still impact His church and His people. But I can have no impact on what I am not a part of or what I am not committed to.

I pray for the decision that was made and the possible impact on many; but I pray more for my faithfulness to His calling. THAT will be my impact on my church today.

Rich Carlson has spent 40 years as a campus chaplain – 7 in secondary school and 33 at Union College in Lincoln, NE.
What It's Really Like to Be a Woman Pastor

By Alicia Johnston

I hear a lot of people saying the Adventist church does not support women pastors because of the recent vote not to allow women to be ordained. Many are questioning their membership in the Adventist church because of it. So I want to set something straight. The support I have received as a woman pastor has been incredible. Here's the gist:

1. At Union College, my professors were nothing but supportive. They recognized God's calling in my life and encouraged me to be a pastor.

2. At Andrews Theological Seminary women pastors were constantly supported, defended, mentored, and put forward for employment.

3. In the Carolina Conference I was given the privilege of pastoring, as well as support and encouragement from the entire executive team.

4. My male colleagues in ministry have supported, encouraged, and sympathized when things were difficult. Even before they were colleagues, I was encouraged and given ministry opportunities in my local church by several different pastors. I was even asked to be an elder at 22.

5. The leadership at the North American Division has been actively encouraging women in ministry and has put in place a plan that will double the number of female pastors over the next 5 year.

6. Several Union Conferences have absolutely put their necks on the line for us. They didn't have to do that. It is unselfish and self-sacrificial.

7. Since the General Conference vote, I and other female pastors have received an overwhelming flood of love and support by Facebook, messages, texts, calls, tweets, and the like. Some people even got flowers. It's turned a difficult week into a joy.

Every level of the church has supported my ministry. My experience is common, not unique. I don't want to make it sound as if it's easy to be a female pastor. It is incredibly difficult. There are independent organizations and individuals that used to be dedicated to evangelism who have made it their mission to discredit the ministry of female pastors. It saddens me deeply. Jobs are still very difficult to come by. Poor assumptions are still made. It is undeniably difficult. Yet in that difficulty, there is overwhelming grace and love.

So why the vote? We are one of the most diverse organizations in the world. Those who live in patriarchal and misogynist cultures outnumber those in cultures who understand the full capability and value of women. Still, God knows we in the West have many of our own problems, and their lives are a constant rebuke to us in so many ways. Yet in this they have made what many are convinced is a mistake, believing their patriarchy and misogyny are biblical and not trusting various divisions to make this determination on their own, but imposing these values on the world church. This decision is not the decision of your local church (though there are some sad exceptions to this)
and certainly not of the North American Division. Before you leave, think about the fact that women in this church are encouraged in their calling. Even in areas that are patriarchal, women are given opportunities for education and advancement they would often never receive if they were not Adventist. Even in China there are more female pastors than anywhere else in the Adventist world. There is opposition, but there is also progress.

Yes, you can choose to stop engaging with a church that has challenges because of its global reach, but then aren't you just running away into your own Western bubble? That is neither noble nor helpful.

What would be helpful? Contact a female pastor you know. Thank her for her service. Tell her you are with her. Give women opportunities to speak and minister in your sphere of influence. Encountering the ministry of a woman who is called to ministry changes many minds. Talk to your church and see if they would be willing to entertain the idea of a female pastor. If they are, let the conference know that you would love to have a female pastor at your church. Jobs are the most difficult challenge right now. If you are a male pastor, prayerfully consider requesting the same credentials your female colleagues receive. Encourage women to be elders in your church when you recognize that they are gifted to do so. Explain to your friends just how supported female pastors are in this church. Study the Bible and learn about the theology of ordination and leadership. Start with our church’s most recent study here: [https://www.adventistarchives.org/about-tosc](https://www.adventistarchives.org/about-tosc) or something a little more digestible in this [blog](http://www.lightbearers.org/a-closer-look-at-womens-ordination/)

More importantly, we need your prayers. Pray for the leading of the Spirit. Pray for Adventists around the world to get on their knees then open their Bibles with the spirit of a seeker of truth. Pray for those impacted by this vote. Pray for those making decisions about how to respond to this vote. Pray for your church. Pray that we can love each other well. Pray for wisdom about how you can make a difference. And don't leave. Help us see this thing through.

*Alicia Johnston has spent the last two years planting churches in the Carolina Conference*
Ministry Partners

5 Things Adventist Millennials Can Do After the General Conference.

By Kevin Wilson

It. Is. Finished.
Now what?
There are 5 things that you and I can do in light of, and in response to, what has happened.

1 – Speak up. Even Twitter didn’t see it coming – the interactive contribution of SDA millennials across the globe displaying the most effective use of a hashtag I’ve seen till date.

If Twitterverse has told me anything during the past week, it is this: Millennials have a voice. And we want to be heard.

So speak up. Raise your voice. Do whatever it takes to shake up the status quo, either in your local congregation or community. Do so in a manner that shows the clearest picture of Jesus.

And lest we forget: Few millennials with a relevant message spoke up once with a passion fueled by the fire in their bones.
Now they are 18 million strong. And growing.

2 – Get connected to your local church. Our current demographics within the Adventist church reveal that we are not the church of tomorrow, but the church of today. In light of that fact, the gross under-representation of young adult delegation at the GC could evoke in us one of two responses: Express angst and continue to find reasons as to why we should have been better represented, or ensure our representation in #GCI2020 by getting plugged in now.

This is what Elder Gilbert Cangy, the youth director for the General Conference, had to say when interviewed about the process of becoming a delegate at the General Conference session:

The General Conference, as an entity, does not choose delegates. The delegates are chosen as close as possible to the local churches. It only makes sense to trust the leaders closest to the local churches to know the individuals who can contribute in a significant way to the (future and direction) of the church (at large). Each division of the world church ensures the credibility of its delegates by “screening” them through the responses of union presidents and local church pastors.

He later went on to say that when a young adult is faithful to the principles of our faith and is an affirming, empowering voice at the local church level, chances are that he or she will be noticed by other local leaders as someone who has the best interest of the church at heart. After that, it’s only a matter of time till their name is referred for nomination.

All this tells me that the surest path to becoming a delegate at the GC session always starts at the doors of your local church.
Get involved at your church. Lead a ministry. Be proactive.

3 – Be informed. **The GC session can be a cure for “denominational myopia.”** Let me unpack that.

As millennials, we have a high-functioning radar can detect anything from an ugly logo to an inefficient system. Scrutiny and critique can oftentimes be effortless.

So let me be the first to admit that it’s easy for me to get distracted by something that happens to me at church and indiscriminately colors my perception of the church at large with a large, hairy, brush – all the while not realizing that I’ve haphazardly colored over some other things as well.

**Myopia** is simply being hyper-focused on what lies nearest to you that you fail to include the larger context. And I was myopic about my denomination.

Experiencing the GC, albeit for two days, significantly lessened this myopia by exposing me to the larger context of the world church. Listening to the division reports, interacting with those from other cultures and nations, and seeing God’s activity among them showed me that the ‘church’ is more than just what happens to me in my local church.

The GC reminded me that the ‘church’ is bigger than its issues. The more I was informed, the less myopic I became. The more I got to know the larger context, the less I reacted to the smaller ones.

**What we do is greatly impacted by what we are up against. Therefore the more we are informed about what’s happening in our local congregation, community, and the global Adventist community, the better we are suited to be game changers for the Kingdom.**

4 – Find a Christ-centered mentor who has your best interest at heart. Nuff said.

5 – Dig deeper into Scripture. As I was scrolling through my twitter feed on the day of the big vote, I couldn’t help but wonder: **What if millennials were half as engaged and committed to spending time in Scripture as they were on their Twitter feeds?** What would that look like? How would that look like in our personal lives and in the lives of our communities?

Iconic theologian and author A.W Tozer once made this provocative statement: “Social religion is perfected when private religion is purified.”

Boom. *drops mic*

Friends, we are not just millennials but Seventh-day Adventist millennials: a special group of people who have been entrusted with the end-time message of a living Savior to be shared with a dying world. For us to be bold in the world, we need to first be humble before God in the prayer closet. The more we dig deeper into Scripture, the more leverage and arsenal we will have along with the adults and leaders of our church.

**Our cultural relevancy is largely dependent on our Scriptural fluency.** When we are well-versed in Scripture, not only are we able to speak the language of other demographics within our denomination, but we become better influencers of those outside of it.

A lot of hurt and frustration has understandably ensued in light of the July 8 General Conference vote. I am right there with those who are disappointed. I’m sure those who are at the brink of leaving have legitimate reasons for doing so. If that’s you, my friend, I appeal to you sincerely – We need you and your pain. Some of the biggest turnarounds and movements in history have occurred when a small group of people harnessed their collective dissatisfaction in effective and constructive ways. If you want to move forward, these five steps maybe a start. If not, hit me up. Let me listen.

What are you going to do?

**Kevin Wilson is a student chaplain at Andrews University Campus Ministries**
Ministry Partners

Talking Points for the Conversation

By Tara Vin Cross

Many have been asking me, what do I say to those who are hurting after this vote? To young adults and others ready to walk away, what can be said to them? Here’s an answer I shared with a friend and church member that I think can make for a good discussion starter for those having similar conversations.

First, I say nothing. Listen to them. Hear the legitimate anger and pain over this decision. State that these are important and valid emotions. That you want them to know it’s safe to feel all they are feeling. God is big and can handle it.

Then, share with them that the voice and the actions of the church are not always the same as the voice and actions of God. This is a really important distinction. All though Bible history the people of God often do not do what God desires. Just because humans take an action does not mean that God was leading them to do it. God will, by God’s grace, keep working with us.

Love them. State their value to you and to those who have been blessed by them.

At the right time, as the Holy Spirit moves, invite them to be part of the change from the inside out. Depending on what people have experienced though, and their level of disillusionment, they may not be ready for this yet. But the right time will come and they can be invited to be part of the change together with you.

We are the church. We need each one. God will bring healing through us all.

Tara Vin Cross is director of REACH Columbia Union Urban Evangelism School and lead pastor for the REACH Philadelphia Church
Ministry Partners

Tenderly Caring for Our Wounded

By Allan Martin

Let us tenderly care for our wounded.
Let us empathize and listen intently.
Let us not be so mesmerized by the mission beyond...that we neglect the mission within.
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Let us see those neglected and let our sight be our best expression of embrace.
Let us hear and let our attentiveness be our best expression of hope.
Let us come close and let our nearness be the touch of GOD.
Let us do unto others as we would have had them do unto us in our moment of need.

Here are five suggestions for pastors as they help Millennials and others process GC 2015:

1. Actively listen and empathize. Initially, it is likely most important to hear their heart and allow them to voice their emotions and reactions.

2. Avoid defending, fixing, excusing, or responding from your personal purview. Allow there to be some to focus on the member's experience without lacing it with your own.

3. Apologize. To whatever degree there has been negative and hurtful consequences, it is healing to know there is an acknowledgement of the hurt and a sincere request for forgiveness.

4. Allow it to be messy. Permit members to process through their mix of feelings and reactions. Create a safe space for candor, while maintaining healthy conversation. This may take time and not resolve quickly.

5. Access additional resources. For some this will feel traumatic, even debilitating. Be sure to have supportive resources that can go beyond your pastoral care (i.e. counseling and therapeutic referrals).

A. Allan Martin is the teaching pastor for Young Generation – a vibrant young adult ministry of the Arlington church in Texas
Ministry Partners

Tip for Joy

By Kristina L. Dubs

With $50 cash in small bills tucked in my purse and the commission to tip those who I came in contact around the Austin, Texas NAD Ministerial Convention 2015, I was on a mission! But honestly, I felt a bit nervous and awkward, revealing how shamefully foreign it is for me to tip anyone outside of the typical fumbling with mental math while staring at a white receipt in order to scribble down what I believe the waiter/waitress “deserved” at conventional sit-down restaurants.

Processing and praying about who and when to tip, it was exciting to plan something unexpected for the bored-looking young adult who was clearing tables after our buffet lunch in the airline-garage-sized convention eating hall. For whatever reason, I felt shy to give. But I knew I had to dive in. “Hi, sir. Is it ok to tip you? Thank you so much for helping during our convention! The food was delicious.” His bland face brightened with a quick and quiet “thank you” – confirming my inquiry. As awkward as that blink of a moment was for me, he gladly accepted the tip. My heart felt really happy.

In the restroom after this experience, I tried to quietly express my appreciation for the middle-aged Hispanic lady sweeping the stalls. Even though she had a kind smile, she unfortunately and adamantly refused to accept any cash. She repeatedly stated, “No, no! I could never accept any tips! You’re very kind, but I am just doing my job!” Her humility astonished me. “Oh Lord, please help this not to come across offensively” I prayed.

Contrast to this experience, it was a piece of cake to slip a few bucks to the teenage bellboy holding the door open for us at our J. W. Marriott hotel. With our “Ministerial” lanyards dangling from around our necks, we thanked him for his help. No hesitation. He smiled, nodded, and smoothly snatched the cash – almost expecting the tip. It awakened my thrifty heart to be aware of my surroundings in any ritzy hotels we may stay in the future. Ha!

For supper, most Adventists attending the Convention had only a short window of time to grab a bite to eat before returning to the evening meetings. The closest Tex-Mex restaurant “Uncle Julio’s” was packed with lanyard laced ministers and their families. For the sake of time and limited seating, we joined the other Adventists at the bar to order our typical “water with lemon” and vegetarian entrée. I felt badly for the stressed young adult Asian bar tender (now waiter) as beads of sweat formed on his brow with all of our lanyards screaming, “We need to get back for our meetings!” Probably never before was his bar so full, but the tabs so small. Compared to his typical evening, I realized his tips would be quite puny tending to a bunch of thrifty “religious health nuts,” who drink free “water with lemon” instead of pricy alcoholic drinks and rarely order an appetizer or (gasp!) dessert.

My husband and I decided to tip him $40 between the two of us thus more than doubling the price of the food. When handing him the folded black receipt case with the money, we apologized for taking up his usual customer seats and thanked him for his hard work. He briskly nodded with limited eye contact and pivoted back to the cash register to secure the payment. I snuck a glance at his reaction as he opened the black case. It was the first time he paused
that night, eyes widening just for a moment as he saw the tip. Then, he simply kept busily serving waters with lemon water. This was my favorite experience tipping because the context was ripe for Adventists to be represented poorly or positively. I hope this little gesture of kindness fulfilled the latter.

The who-to-bless hunt continued as we tipped the waitress the next evening, wrote a “thanks for cleaning our room/Jesus loves you!” letter to our hotel custodians, and our bus driver on our way out of Austin.

Many lessons were learned. First, money brings smiles, especially when unexpected. Why? Each worker has a story behind his or her uniform and nametag. Each worker has a bill to pay, a debt to relinquish, a family member to care for, a hobby to keep up, a date to impress, a load of laundry to dry, a fulfilled grocery list to bring home, a dream to chase, a life to live. Anything extra is really appreciated. If we weren’t assigned this project, I would not have learned this lesson of selflessness; of opening my eyes to think outside my heart. I so often (and ashamedly) just stare at my own belly button (especially when I’m traveling), look out for my own bank account, and strive to stay within my own steward-savvy budget.

Secondly, humility is absolutely beautiful. Humility is so attractive, as evidenced by the bathroom custodian’s humble adamant refusal and the snatching hotel bellboy. I pray for God to recreate a more humble heart in me to deplete my selfish nature.

Thirdly, as an Adventist Christian, I want to be more giving – not only to represent Christ and our denomination positively by not being so stingy, but also to experience the joy of giving! As I witnessed afresh in Austin, having a designated stash of cash to tip/give to people I encounter is such a blessing to my own heart. There is freedom in giving! My husband and I want to designate a special fund of cash for each trip and budget intentional tipping whenever we travel to be on a hunt to bless others and in turn diminish selfishness by experiencing the freedom and joy of giving!

**Kristina Dubs is a seminary student at Andrews University**