To vaccine, or . . .?

Summer is over (at least here in Australia). Grab your scarves and coats, and brace yourselves for the cold, hard reality of winter.

Okay, so maybe we’re not quite there yet. But there’s no harm in looking forward.

Which brings us to an interest story from this past week. The Seventh-day Adventist world Church issued an official statement on vaccines, saying it “encourages responsible immunisation” and has no faith-based reason to discourage believers from participating in immunisation programs.

Vaccinations have generated considerable discussion on our website in recent times, and we thought we’d give you the opportunity to revisit some of the ideas.

**Vaccination: what should a parent know?**

An ounce of prevention

For more stories worth talking about, keep reading this week’s edition of Record eNews.
Recapturing Adventism's big picture

For the first time in more than a decade, the South Pacific Division (SPD) has held a Bible conference, taking the “Recapturing the big picture” theme on the road.

ADRA receives NGO of the Year honour

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Samoa has been named Non-Government Organisation (NGO) of the Year in Newsline’s honour list of 2014.

Can Christian television be better?

Builds for God: Find out how Zuki and Pali Mxoli are risking it all for the sake of the gospel.

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:  
• Online evangelism reaches millions  
• Hillsong goes to the movies  
• Could this be Jesus’ boyhood home, in Nazareth?

Even after the ongoing spectacle of ICAC, the Australian Christian Lobby’s Martyn Iles says the leaders of both major parties in NSW are men of integrity.

Weight loss secrets with
Record InFocus host Kent Kingston chats with the president of the international Hope Channel TV network, Brad Thorp.

**Heritage**

We have no choice in our heritage. But we do have a choice in the heritage we leave for the next generation.

**Sabbath defence**

James Standish says there is a growing movement within our Church that irrevocably undermines the foundation of the Sabbath. It's a very real challenge—one the Western Church seems unprepared to deal with.

Sue Radd: The problem is not whether dieting works—**the problem is YOUR diet.**

The 2015 Manifest Creative Arts Festival kicks off next Friday (March 20) at Avondale College of Higher Education in Cooranbong, NSW. Come along and explore, encourage and celebrate faithful creativity in the arts at this annual festival coordinated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific. For all things Manifest, click **HERE.**
Adventist Church adopts stance on vaccines

Photo Source: iStockphoto | "The Adventist Church says it "encourages responsible immunisation".

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued an official statement on vaccines, saying it “encourages responsible immunisation” and has no faith-based reason to discourage believers from participating in immunisation programs.

The full statement, titled, “Immunisation,” says:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church places strong emphasis on health and well-being. The Adventist health emphasis is based on biblical revelation, the inspired writing of E G White (co-founder of the church), and on peer-reviewed scientific literature. As such, we encourage responsible immunisation/vaccination, and have no religious or faith-based reason not to encourage our adherents to responsibly participate in protective and preventive immunisation programs. We value the health and safety of the population, which includes the maintenance of ‘herd immunity’.

“We are not the conscience of the individual church member, and recognise individual choices. These are exercised by the individual. The choice not to be immunised is not and should not be seen as the dogma nor the doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

Click HERE to read “Vaccination: what should a parent know?”
Vaccination: what should a parent know?

For more than 60 years most Western countries have had mass vaccinations for adults and children. In Australia, the rates of childhood vaccination in the community are generally greater than 90 per cent.1 So what have been the effects on the community at large? What should our response be? Are vaccines safe? Are those who don’t choose to vaccinate endangering their children? We all want to do the right thing by our kids, so should we vaccinate or not? As a parent myself, it’s a question I take very seriously, as you do too I’m sure.

Are vaccines effective?

The overwhelming weight of evidence is that vaccinations are highly effective in preventing infectious diseases. The evidence is so clear that it beggars belief that any reasonable person would seriously raise this as a question. In fact, it would be fair to say that vaccinations are one of the most efficacious population health interventions ever developed, perhaps only second to access to clean water.2 There are numerous epidemiological studies showing the clear and unambiguous benefit in reduction and prevention of infectious disease when vaccines are administered both to an individual and to communities en masse. There’s also mounting evidence that vaccination is beneficial in preventing some cancers. For a summary of these studies as well as an overview of the history of vaccination, and much more information, see “Vaccines” by Plotkin et al.3

Do vaccines cause harm?

This question deserves serious attention. There are many contentions against vaccination. We don’t have space and time to address each one of them, but I would refer you to the documents “Myths and realities of vaccination”4 and “The science of immunisation”5 if you wish a more detailed examination of the science and facts. Minor reactions such as low grade fever, irritability, an injection site lump, localised pain and rash are common to many childhood vaccinations. In very rare cases, severe, life-threatening reactions have occurred. While every single negative reaction is important, it must be weighed against the enormous number of people whose lives have been saved by vaccinations. On balance, the enormous benefit far outweighs the very small chance of significant harm. I'll address a couple of the more frequently asked questions about vaccine harm.

Do vaccines weaken the immune system?
No. Vaccines actually strengthen the immune system and certainly do not weaken it, because they induce an adaptive immune response the body remembers so that if exposed to that disease in the future, it can quickly eradicate it before it takes hold.

**Do vaccines cause autism?**

No. In 1998, a British surgeon and researcher, Dr Andrew Wakefield, along with a team of researchers, published an article in medical journal *The Lancet* proposing a link between the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine and gastrointestinal disorders and autism in children. Later his evidence was shown to be methodologically flawed and the paper was immediately retracted. No further research has been able to demonstrate this supposed link despite many reviews of the evidence in different countries.

**Is vaccination “unnatural”, therefore bad?**

This question misses the point: not all natural products are good for us, and not all manufactured products are bad. After all, there’s nothing more natural than opium, marijuana, cyanide and tobacco, which have been responsible for great harm! On the other hand, you’ll never find a soy cow to give you soy milk, and everything from seatbelts, toothbrushes and toothpaste, to life-saving surgical operations, directly interfere with the natural course of things—and just as well.

But in the case of vaccination, the story is actually a little complex because some vaccinations are made from naturally occurring material, and some are synthetically derived. The process by which they work—stimulating the body’s immune system—is a natural process. If you choose to believe they are “unnatural” should you refuse them? Only if you refuse all the other “unnatural” things that prevent premature death, like airbags in cars, modern sanitation, the refrigeration of food, anaesthesia and so forth.

**Does getting the disease itself induce better immunity than the vaccination?**

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said: “that which does not kill us, makes us stronger”. The problem in the area of infectious diseases is that many of us would be killed were we not vaccinated. How do we know that for sure? Because that’s precisely what happened before vaccinations. And Nietzsche was not correct, at least when it comes to medicine, because many people who survive infectious diseases do so at enormous physical cost for the rest of their lives. So, if you think death is something to trifle with and permanent disability isn’t all that bad, then vaccinations may not be for you. Assuming you are a rational person who is serious about honouring your body as the temple of God, then vaccinations make sense.

**Is vaccination only an issue about me?**

No. When vaccination rates in a community fall below a certain level, infectious disease outbreaks return. This happens because if there are enough non-immune adults/children in the community, infectious disease can be spread more easily, thus so-called “herd immunity” is lost. And it has happened on numerous occasions. In 2011, there were roughly 158,000 people who died of measles, the vast majority were unvaccinated children under the age of five living in developing countries. But believe it or not, measles is beginning to break out again in Western nations because the number of unvaccinated children has reached a critical mass. The result is predictably devastating.

Take, for example, the case of a 12-year-old French girl who died in Geneva University Hospital as a result of complications from measles. She was unvaccinated. To have beautiful children, made in the image of God, being permanently disabled or dying, not because of a lack of access to life-saving healthcare, but because of a deliberate refusal to accept it, is a tragedy with profound moral ramifications. A strong moral argument can be mounted for
vaccination en masse to induce “herd immunity” from infectious disease. I believe this is in keeping with the Golden Rule that Jesus proclaimed of doing unto others as you would have them do to you.\(^8\)

**Do vaccines contain dangerous poisons like mercury?**

No. A compound called thiomersal is a mercury-based preservative that is used in only a few vaccines. Mercury is found naturally in the environment and in very low levels is perfectly safe. The levels of thiomersal used in vaccines are well below recommended mercury levels for humans. However, since 2000, as a precaution, thiomersal has been removed from all childhood vaccinations.\(^4\) There’s no evidence that modern vaccines contain harmful chemicals that have been linked to disease or disability.

**Did Ellen White support vaccination?**

Not only did Ellen White not oppose vaccination, she was vaccinated herself and actively supported others getting vaccinated. This occurred when she was in a community where there was a smallpox outbreak—Mrs White was vaccinated and she encouraged others to be as well.\(^9\)

**Summary**

While we should be sensitive to every person’s autonomy to make decisions about their own health and the health of their children, vaccination has been clearly shown to be one of the most efficacious health interventions and I believe a merciful God has directed the minds of physicians and scientists over the years to develop vaccination as a way to prevent human suffering. It’s my hope that by providing some facts and debunking some of the myths, those who may have been wavering about the pros and cons of vaccination may clearly see the health benefits and choose to vaccinate themselves and their families to prevent needless disease. I would encourage anyone with genuine concerns to read through the articles referenced below, and discuss them with your family. Talk to your family doctor for more information. Better to bury inaccurate ideas, than a precious child.

8. Matthew 7:12

*Dr Andrew Pennington is a GP obstetrician living in Kilmore, Victoria. He is passionate about preventive health and wellness. He and his wife, Danielle, have a two-year-old son, Callum, and are expecting their second child in June.*
An ounce of prevention

If you’ve never been to Howick, I’d recommend a visit. It’s a lovely village, situated on the eastern side of Auckland. In the middle of Howick’s high street is a picturesque pub, and at the end stands a quaint church surrounded by an old graveyard. Walking down the street, it feels very much like you’ve wandered into a village in Surrey or Berkshire in south-east England. If that’s not enough to tempt a visit, views of beautiful Cockle Bay entice from the higher points of the village.

When I was in Howick, that old graveyard beckoned me in. I’m not morbid, but there’s something oddly appealing about reading gravestones from a bygone age. I suppose the inscriptions provide perspective. And they’re often deeply affecting. Maybe all that perspective and pathos is the reason I was the solitary figure wandering in the cemetery that day, while across the road people bustled by on their errands.

But it was what I read on a special memorial that stopped me in my tracks. It turns out that in 1854, Howick had an epidemic. Three of the vicar’s children died within nine days of each other—a little boy and two little girls. His family was not alone in tragedy. Fifty children in all died and were buried in little graves in this peaceful Anglican churchyard and the nearby Catholic cemetery. The grief that must have swept this idyllic community sitting on the far edge of the Empire is almost impossible to imagine.

How fortunate we are to live in an era where it has been so long since communicable diseases have decimated our young, that we have almost forgotten about them. So much so, I suppose, that some of us have become enamoured with various movements in opposition to common sense, proven measures necessary to ensure we do not return to an era where cemeteries are full of lifeless little bodies.

The fascination with novel health theories is not entirely surprising. Adventists have a long history of health extremism. So long, that right from our beginning, Ellen White dedicated substantial time warning us against getting carried off on fanatical tangents. For example, in 1868 she castigated “extremists [who] would run health reform into the ground”.

Being around physicians for much of my life, I grew up hearing my father warn against a whole host of bizarre “health” fads in the Church. There were those who were travelling offshore for injections of the essence of apricot kernel to treat their cancer, with predictable results; others who refused modern medicine in total. And then there was the remarkable array of exotic diets. There was the church member who couldn’t hold down a job because he restricted his diet to dried fruit which, to put it politely, had a rather drastic impact on his digestive system. And the woman who...
was feeding her children raw soybeans. Suffice to say, you wouldn’t want to be stuck next to those kids on a long flight!

Despite our community’s bitter experience, however, we remain particularly susceptible to health extremism. And no extreme is more dangerous today than the movement against basic childhood vaccinations.

“It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into,” observed Jonathan Swift, and in my experience his observation remains as true today as when he made it in the 1700s. So I won’t try. After all, if you’re willing to believe the whole medical world is part of a grand conspiracy that has stretched from Louis Pasteur to your local Adventist doctor, what am I going to say to convince you otherwise?

What I do intend, however, is to firstly encourage those on the fence to listen to health professionals (see the excellent article by Dr Andrew Pennington here), not internet speculation—no matter how firmly stated or how well the speculation might be presented. And, secondly, let’s ensure we never confuse the wonderful Adventist health message with the wanton rejection of proven medical advances.

I’m glad we chose to vaccinate our precious children. It was the right thing to do for them, and for other children they come in contact with. And I am deeply grateful that I live in an era of low infant mortality due, in large part, to the wonderful blessing of childhood vaccination. If per chance you’re tempted to turn your back on modern medicine, maybe a walk through an old graveyard will help provide perspective.

*James Standish is editor of RECORD.*
For the first time in more than a decade, the South Pacific Division (SPD) has held a Bible conference, taking the “Recapturing the big picture” theme on the road. The conference was held in three venues: at Avondale College of Higher Education, where roughly 120 attended, Fulton College (150) and Pacific Adventist University (160).

Organised by outgoing SPD field and ministerial secretary Dr David Tasker, the conference served to acquaint pastors with issues like the nature and place of the spirit of prophecy, the role of Ellen G White, the establishment of doctrine such as the investigative judgement and the divinity of Christ as well as dealing with some of the controversies that have struck the Church in the past 30 years.

Dr Tasker said the conference “reinforced the importance of gaining our understanding from Scripture and not from a pressure group”.

All of the presenters were systematic theologians, meaning that they looked at overall themes and big picture issues rather than specific or narrow fields of interest.

Guest lecturers included prolific author Dr George Knight, now retired, who presented his journey in the science of salvation; Andrews University lecturers Dr Darius Jankiewicz and Dr John Reeve, specialists in historical theology; Dr Kwabena Donker from the Biblical Research Institute; and Dr Kendra Haloviak-Valentine (who took the morning devotions) and her husband Dr Gil Valentine, author and specialist on Ellen G White.

“This was an incredibly significant event for our Church around the Pacific,” said Dr Barry Oliver, SPD president and final presenter at each event.

The Avondale program was attended by ministers with Masters qualifications or above from across Australia and New Zealand, while the events at Fulton and Pacific Adventist University (PAU) were limited to pastors with at least Bachelors qualifications.

There were breakout discussion groups after each lecture at Avondale and Fulton. This allowed participants to engage more directly, asking questions and going deeper into the issues being presented. At PAU, due to space constraints, there was an open forum Q&A session instead. “One of the strengths of these conferences was the programmed discussion groups,” Dr Tasker said. “We’ve never had Bible conferences with this much discussion.”
One of the topics that resonated most with participants in the island venues was from Dr Kwabena Donker, who spoke about the clash of culture and the spiritualism that is a part of life for many church members across the world. The Ghanaian doctor told participants that the village he is from is the centre of spiritualism and voodoo in Ghana, a real “heart of darkness”.

“We need to do this kind of thing—speak in a safe environment, freely, without fear—we need to do this more regularly and examine these hot topics,” said Dr Tasker, who has recently taken up a position lecturing in Old Testament studies at Avondale College.

The event served as a handover of sorts. Dr Tasker’s role has been split into two: Dr Branimir Schubert has taken on the ministerial secretary role and Dr Graeme Humble is the new field secretary.

“The value of the conference is to let the pastors know that we have a prophetic and salvific heritage that we need to continually make afresh for each new generation as it comes through. [They] need to own the faith and not just blindly accept it from the 'elders' but carefully evaluate and internalise it,” Dr Tasker said.

The cost of the event makes it unlikely that it will be held more than once every five years. However, Dr Tasker hopes to run similar conferences at Avondale more frequently where interested pastors and lay-people can pay their own way. Until then, plans will continue for the next biblical conference some time before 2020.
ADRA receives NGO of the Year honour

Apia, Samoa

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Samoa has been named Non-Government Organisation (NGO) of the Year in Newsline's honour list of 2014.

The recognition is due to ADRA Samoa's frontline work after Cyclone Evans and its continued support of the affected communities. One of the first NGOs on the ground, ADRA Samoa provided shelters for the families whose homes had been destroyed. The agency then provided those same communities with water tanks.

ADRA also started a Sustainable Economic Development Fund (SEDF) project, where communities grow their own food to eat and sell. More than 3000 families have benefited from these initiatives.

ADRA Samoa built this woman a shelter and is helping her to grow her taro crops (on the left).

ADRA Samoa director Su’a Julia Wallwork said, “[We] seem to go from level to level. We’ve gained recognition of international donors, and our government. We serve an amazing God.”
In 1903, my Great-Grandmother Emily Best wrote to her eight children as she lay dying in Gympie Hospital, some 70km over rough bush track from her family. She was dying of gangrene of the arm, which was progressively amputated using only chloroform as an anaesthetic. Six days after writing the letter, she died, aged just 41:

My chief regret now is that I did not spend more time in teaching you more of Him and His love. Some years ago when we were at the farm you remember, I did try to spend one part of the day in this blessed way, but something, no matter what now, caused that time to be discontinued. Dear Arthur and Teddie have sometimes had this blessed privilege with me, when you bigger ones were at church, but, my dearies, all of you have this matter in your own hands.

Mollie, Gracie, Georgie, Jack and Arthur, you all can read, and I earnestly ask that some time or other in the day you will spend some time in reading God’s Word and as Teddy, Dorothy and Marjory grow older and able to read for themselves, you will teach them to do this. Also, tell them not to forget to start the day with prayer, giving thanks to God for all His Goodness, and ask them to end each day the same . . .

I feel as I lie here that nothing is of any use but to know the Lord Jesus. I feel if I had to go over my time again I should never be tired of the theme or be tired of telling. One happy comfort I have now is, He does sustain me. It is very hard not to see any of your dear faces just now when I want you so much; but God is good, and underneath me are His everlasting arms.

My great-grandmother on the other side of my family faced heartbreakingly difficult times too. After having eight children, one of whom died, her husband was killed by the kick of a horse. She was left with seven children to care for and a farm to run. Weighing on her was also the premature death of her father, who had committed suicide. As the world slipped into economic depression, she also took her own life.

My family is not unique. Tragedy of almost incomprehensible scale punctuates the lives of everyone living in a sinful world, as does courage and faith even in the hardest of circumstances. The tragedies, and how they are handled, become interwoven into our heritage.

I am fortunate. My parents gave me a heritage of Christian love. My childhood memories are of Mum reading her Bible in the early hours of the morning and of Dad in his study praying and studying his Bible.
But today I’m challenged with the kind of heritage I’m going to provide to my children. There are some mums who are constantly yelling at their children. I swore to myself that I would not do that and yet at times I catch myself doing the same thing.

It’s very easy in a busy household for me to think, “I’ll pray more when I get these kids off to school . . . when the kids start sleeping in I’ll read my Bible more first thing in the morning . . . I’ll cook dinner then I’ll play with the kids . . . I’ll check Facebook then I’ll read my devotional, etc.” Maybe all of us make excuses like that? But Ecclesiastes 11:4 says: “If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.”

Just as we plan for birthdays and holidays, we must plan for the spiritual heritage we will give our children. That doesn’t begin with what I tell them; it begins with how I invest my own time. Am I spending enough time studying my Bible? Do I spend more time praying or on Facebook? Do I pray with and for my children every day? Are my children seeing me spend time with God? Colossians 4:2 says: “Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”

We have no choice in our heritage—we inherit the good and the bad, the beautiful, the heartbreaking, the courageous and the tragic—but we do have a choice in the heritage we leave for the next generation. All of us will one day look back over our lives like my great-grandmother Emily Best did. And none of us will regret the time we invested providing a heritage of God’s love to our children.

Melinda Southon lives and works in Murwillumbah, NSW. She enjoys camping, waterskiing, the beach and the bush with her husband and children.
Eternity, the newspaper of the Australian Bible Society, recently ran a piece questioning the Sabbath doctrine. I wrote a response, which Eternity was graceful enough to print (click HERE). I received a number of notes from Adventists, pleased to see Sabbath explained to the broader Christian community. But I feel no joy. I feel no joy because even as I write to explain the Sabbath to other Christians, I know that there is a growing movement within our Church that irrevocably undermines the foundation of the Sabbath, and much more. And all across the Western Church we are displaying the lack of fortitude to necessarily address the magnitude of the challenge.

There are two ways to attack any institution. The first is to do a full frontal attack, but generally that will be seen for what it is. A much better strategy is to undermine the foundation of the institution and then wait for it to collapse in upon itself.

What we believe about creation is the foundation for what we believe about the character of God, the story of salvation and the Sabbath. And today there's a growing conflict within our Church between creationists and theistic evolutionists. This should shock us out of our complacency. Why?

Theistic evolution requires us to believe one of three possible explanations about the Ten Commandments—all of which reflect badly on the character of God. The first is that God claimed to do something in six days that He did not do.

A second explanation is the Ten Commandments are a hoax. But Jesus came and confirmed them. So Jesus Himself would have to be complicit in the hoax or ignorant of it. If ignorant, He could not be divine, as God is omniscient.

Some try to weasel around the problem by saying God really didn’t mean “six days” when He wrote with His finger “six days” in tablets of stone. But to believe this, we have to imagine the greatest Communicator somehow managed to flub His message, with the foreknowledge that people for thousands of years would be misled by His words. And if “days” in the Ten Commandments really mean “epochs”, Sabbath should be an epoch, not a day. Using this interpretive prism, the Ten Commandments could mean anything at all. Maybe don’t murder secretly means don’t ride donkeys? Who knows? We'll have to wait for an expert to give us the hidden meaning. Rather than the Rock of Ages,
we would be dealing with a god made of quicksand.

But there’s a bigger problem. Theistic evolutionists believe our all-powerful God deliberately and callously created animals to suffer and die in endless cycles throughout the eons, when, by definition, He could have created animals perfect from the start and avoided the excruciating pain common in nature. Atheist evolutionists deny God’s hand in nature’s suffering; theistic evolutionists blame Him for it. Which is doing the greater disservice to God’s character?

What of the story of salvation? Theistic evolutionists believe death is God’s building block of life and predates not only humanity but also sin. Why do we need a saviour? To save us from the cycles of death put in place by the saviour, of course. Sound nonsensical? That’s because it is.

And then we come to the Sabbath. God tells us, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. For in . . .” Go ahead, you fill in the rest. If He really didn’t, why are we keeping a weekly Sabbath? No creation week, no foundation for Sabbath. Full stop.

The temptation to mould God’s Word around men’s theories is not new. In fact, Ellen White had this to say about this specific problem:

“Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for” (Education, p 128,129).

Our greatest threat today isn’t from Evangelicals attacking the Sabbath; we can easily withstand that. But what we can’t withstand is our creation foundation being hollowed out. Evolution undermines the foundation of our faith in the character of God, the story of salvation and the Sabbath. Either we muster the fortitude to address the challenge or, in time, God’s Church will collapse in upon its hollowed out foundations.

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.