Church is in Session . . .

It’s been a big week for the Seventh-day Adventist world Church. Don't believe us? Well, when the General Conference Session (#GCSA15) is among the top 10 items trending on Twitter (in Australia) this past week, something big is happening.

Generating the most interest was the vote on whether to allow each church division the authority to ordain women, which took place at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas, on Wednesday evening (DST).

While a decision has been made, the matter isn’t over. Much will be said—both publicly and privately—about the vote over the coming weeks and months, which is why we need to continue to pray for God to bless and guide our global church family going forward. Because at the end of the day, "a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

Two days of Session remain. Tune in HERE, talk about the issues, and take some time to pray.
Delegates vote "no" on ordination issue

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Glenn Townend elected SPD president

Pastor Glenn Townend has been elected president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s South Pacific Division.

Fundamental Beliefs updated

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that, among other things, underscores the church’s teaching of a recent, literal Creation week.

WATCH: The South Pacific Division report

“Changing history—one heart at a time” is a short documentary on the activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific region over the past five years.

On reflection

Dr Barry Oliver, newly retired from his role as president of the South Pacific Division, shares his hopes and dreams for our Church family going forward.

No Heil Hitler: the Paul Cieslar story

When Hitler invaded Poland, Paul Cieslar's childhood was irrevocably changed. How did his faith survive the crisis of World War Two?

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
• Christian groups raise concerns on tough asylum seeker laws
• 7 African-American churches burnt in 10 days
• 65,000 Adventists gather for General Conference meetings

Do you know the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the story behind their discovery? Editor of Archaeological Diggings magazine, Gary Webster, explains.

Family life educator Trafford Fischer comes to the rescue of men who are habitual forgetters of special days. Interview with new InFocus presenter Monica Gallasch.
Barry

So, Barry Oliver has retired. He’s gone. Done. Dusted. He’s walked out of the corner office and he ain’t coming back. There’s nothing he can do to me now! So it has come time to level with you about what I really think about Barry.

More Editorials
Delegates vote "no" on ordination issue

San Antonio, Texas, United States

Delegates turned down a motion that would have allowed each division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to decide for itself whether to ordain women to the gospel ministry in its territory.

By a margin of 1381-977, with five abstentions, delegates by secret ballot ended a five-year process characterised by vigorous and sometimes acrimonious debate.

General Conference president Ted Wilson appealed to church members to unite in the mission of the church after the vote at the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas.

"Now is the time to unify under the bloodstained banner of Jesus Christ and His power, not our power," Wilson said after the ballots were counted on tables at the front of the Alamodome stadium. "Now is the time to unify in our mission as Christ's church."

He thanked delegates for the "careful and prayerful manner in which they carried themselves and addressed the subject" during six hours of discussion.

A secret ballot system was used that General Conference officers said offered the most fair and secure voting process possible.

"We have tried to be transparent, honest and thoughtful, and to ensure the privacy of the vote to the best of our ability," said Nancy Lamoreaux, chief information officer for the General Conference and organiser of the logistics for Wednesday's vote.

The ballots were printed on special paper, cut to the size of a half sheet of letter paper, and divided in half. One half contained the word "Yes", printed in five languages, and the other the word "No", also in five languages. The languages are English, Spanish, French, German, and Portuguese.

The secret balloting system was prepared well in advance of the General Conference session as a backup in case
an electronic voting system didn’t work, said undersecretary Myron Iseminger, whose sector oversees voting at GC sessions. The e-voting system, which debuted at the GC session, proved problematic, and delegates voted on Sunday to no longer use it.

“From the beginning we had a backup plan in case the electronic ballots didn’t work,” Iseminger said.

Wilson, who opened the morning session with an appeal for all church members to abide by the vote’s outcome, underscored both then and after the vote that decisions made by the General Conference in session carry the highest authority in the Adventist Church.

The daylong discussions, which began at 9:30 am and broke for a two-hour lunch at noon, stopped nearly a dozen times for prayer. Participants engaged in silent prayer, one-on-one prayer, and group prayer. Scores more Session attendees packed special prayer rooms organised by the General Conference’s Ministerial Association and Women’s Ministries departments.

Both Wilson and Michael Ryan, a retiring general vice president of the General Conference who chaired Wednesday’s discussions, voiced delight at the “sweet spirit” that permeated the proceedings.

Ryan made sure proper meeting decorum was followed, chiding attendees several times for applauding during the discussions. Delegates agreed earlier to refrain from applause in an effort to keep emotions under control.

Ryan, who announced the final vote results, sharply admonished a group of Alamodome attendees who broke into applause at the outcome.

“There is nothing triumphal about this,” he said. “There are no winners or losers.”

Erton Köhler, South American Division president, echoed Ryan’s sentiment that this was not a political contest.

“My expectation for the church is not to have winners or losers, but that each one may feel the decision as God’s and may make it his or her own,” he told the Adventist Review. “May everyone have the humility to acknowledge that God can manifest His will in a way that differs from personal opinion.”

Jerry Page, Ministerial Association director, also spoke of humility. “If we take time in prayer, humble confession, repentance, and service for others, we can move forward instead of spinning around and going backward because of the conflicts,” he said.

Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, education department director, said she hoped delegates would show respect toward each other.

“My hope and wish is for forbearance on behalf of our brothers and sisters who face ministry challenges in ministry that differ from ours around the world,” she said. “Forbearance is a grace that can only come from God, not to hold one another hostage or abandon the body when something offends us.”
A total of 2363 ballots were cast in the vote on a motion prepared by senior General Conference officers and division presidents and approved at the 2014 Annual Council, a business meeting of world church leaders. The motion read in full: “After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White, and the reports of the study commissions, 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.”

A total of 40 delegates—20 who supported and 20 who opposed the motion—took to microphones to express their positions on the motion. The discussion was stopped 35 times by delegates who wished to make “points of order”, objections to how some aspect of the proceedings was being carried out.

Partway though the afternoon proceedings, Ryan invited Jan Paulsen, a former president of the General Conference, to make a statement.

Paulsen urged delegates to vote “yes”, saying it was a matter of trust. He said church members had to trust that their counterparts in other divisions knew better what their local churches needed.

Ryan also invited Wilson to make a statement. Wilson did not recommend a “yes” or “no” vote, saying only, “My views are rather well known and I believe them to be biblically based.”

Wednesday’s proceedings began with an agreement from the delegates to end discussion for a vote at 4:30 pm to begin the voting process. As the time approached, a number of delegates urged Ryan to extend the discussions, but Ryan declared the requests out of order.

General Conference executive secretary G T Ng indicated during Wednesday’s discussions that the General Conference hoped for full compliance from all church entities.

“We are one church,” Ng said.

“God gifts all believers with unique spiritual gifts to carry on the mission of the church and to edify and build up the body of Christ. Ordination is not a criterion for giftedness. I long for the church to keep in focus clearly that the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts was poured out on both men and women. The gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 belong to both men and women.

“So ordination is not a criterion for service, witness, or proclamation. I really believe now that we need to focus on maximising the gifts of all members of the church—young and old, male and female—coming together in unity to focus on the mission of the church. We need to move from our discussions on ordination to focus on how to reach a lost world for Christ.”

—Mark Finley, evangelist, editor-at-large at Adventist Review

“Members of the North American Division are naturally disappointed in the vote, but we are very committed publicly and privately to our world church and to continuing our cooperative efforts to be a blessing in the world church. Our intention is to be a part of that final movement that hastens the day when Jesus comes.”

—Daniel Jackson, president, North American Division

“Today North America faced a disappointment for many, many members and for the women who are in ministry. For those who do not believe that this was the right vote, I would challenge them to think of Joshua and Caleb, who went forward after they could not go into the promised land and stayed faithful to God’s people.”
—Don Livesay, president, Lake Union Conference, NAD

“We will keep preaching, and we will keep uplifting Jesus.”

—Elizabeth Talbot, The Jesus 101 Biblical Institute

“Our mission is bigger than any issue that may arise in the Seventh-day Adventist Church at any time of our church life. We must remain united. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a mission and an agenda to finish the work that our Lord left to us. We should not allow any issue to divide us.”

—Blasious Ruguri, East-Central Africa Division president

By Andrew McChesney and Marcos Paseggi, Adventist Review/ANN. Initial reporting by Jarrod Stackelroth (click HERE).
San Antonio, Texas, United States

Pastor Glenn Townend has been elected president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s South Pacific Division (SPD).

The announcement comes after the SPD Caucus met in San Antonio, Texas, at 7pm on Sunday (DST) to recommend a new division president to replace Dr Barry Oliver, who is retiring after nine years in the role.

After a thorough discussion, the Caucus voted to recommend to the General Conference (GC) Nominating Committee Pastor Townend, who currently serves as president of the Trans-Pacific Union Mission (TPUM), based in Suva, Fiji.

The GC Nominating Committee put Pastor Townend's name to the gathered delegates of the 60th GC Session on Monday. He was voted into the position overwhelmingly, along with the 12 other world division presidents.

Pastor Townend spent years of his youth in Papua New Guinea as the son of missionaries and speaks Melanesian Pidgin.

During his decade as president of the West Australian Conference, he emphasised church planting.

Pastor Townend was elected president of the TPUM in May 2013. He is respected for his visionary leadership and interpersonal skills.
Delegates at the General Conference session in San Antonio, Texas, have approved a milestone update of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs that, among other things, underscores the church’s teaching of a recent, literal Creation week.

The core statements of the church’s Fundamental Beliefs had not been touched since they were first adopted in 1980, with the lone exception an additional belief in 2005. The delegates’ approval on Tuesday, after two days of discussions, marked the end of a five-year revision and vetting process.

None of the revisions change any of the Fundamental Beliefs, and many simply update and tighten the text, General Conference president Ted Wilson assured delegates at the start of the discussions.

“We are not changing our Fundamental Beliefs,” Wilson said. “We are simply trying to enhance them and make them more understandable.”

Parliamentarian Todd McFarland and presiding chair Ella Simmons consult together during Tuesday’s business session. [Photo courtesy: Tor Tjeransen AR/ANN]

The review committee modified 21 of the 28 beliefs, and Artur Stele, a General Conference general vice president and chair of the Fundamental Belief Review committee, presented the proposed changes to the delegates.

Many of the proposed changes were minor, such as the replacement of the word “which” with “that” to reflect modern usage. Instances of “man” and “mankind” were changed to “people” and “humanity” to make them gender inclusive.

Delegates overwhelmingly backed revisions that clarified that marriage is between a man and a woman in belief number 23.
The delegates considered and approved revisions to 24 of the Beliefs on Monday, voting on them one by one. A two-thirds vote was required to refer an item back to the revisions committee.

But recommendations about four beliefs—on the Holy Scriptures (number 1), Creation (number 6), the Great Controversy (number 8), and Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary (number 24)—were sent back to the review committee for further work.

The review committee returned to delegates on Tuesday with amendments that took their concerns into account.

Most of the discussion on both Monday and Tuesday centered around “Creation,” where the text was revised to add the word “recent” to describe when the Earth was created and “six literal days” to explain the length of Creation week.

Among the delegates who made recommendations for additional changes at the microphone were Jiří Moskala, dean of the theological seminary at Andrews University; Richard Davidson, professor of Old Testament Interpretation at the seminary; and Lawrence Geraty, president emeritus of La Sierra University.

Wilson prefaced the second day of discussion by saying a word could be interpreted in many ways, but the word “recent” was chosen because “we need to clarify that this process was not old”.

Wilson said he personally believed that the Earth is about 6000 years old. “But we are not putting that language in here. We are using the word ‘recent,’” he said in an acknowledgement that Adventists are not uniform in their understanding of the exact age of the Earth.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, a former director of the church’s Biblical Research Institute and a member of the revisions committee, said Adventists have estimated the Earth to be 6000 to 12,000 years old but are united in believing “Creation took place not too long ago”.

Adventist Review editor Bill Knott, a member of the Fundamental Beliefs Review Committee, shared insights on the committee’s work. [Photo courtesy: Tor Tjeransen AR/ANN]

He saw “recent” as an acceptable description.

“The church has never dated the divine act of Creation,” he said.

Turning to the inclusion of the phrase “six literal days” in the same Fundamental Belief, Rodríguez said no one was suggesting that Creation took place in six days of exactly 24 hours but simply that it happened in “literal days”.

“Genesis 1 to 3 describes what literally happened there. It’s a historical record,” he said.

The inclusion of “six literal days” received quick support from James Standish, a delegate from the South-Pacific Division, who said the revised text reflected the very definition of “Seventh-day Adventist”.

“If the first six days were not literal days, why do we rest on the literal seventh day?” he said.
But Adrian Platts, a delegate from the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, said a literal day could not be counted by the rising and setting of the sun because the sun was only created on day four of Creation week.

Another delegate, Marvin Wray of the North American Division, said the word “recent” was too ambiguous.

“Who are we to guess the age of the Earth?” he said, citing Job 38 where God asks Job, “Were you there when I made the world?”

Other delegates spoke strongly in favor of adopting the “Creation” revisions. Clifford Goldstein, Adult Bible Study Guides editor and a General Conference delegate, said that the new text was a proper response to attempts to bring the theory of evolution into the church. Kathryn Proffitt, another General Conference delegate, noted how her son had left the church because of confusion over what he was taught about Earth’s origins in an Adventist school.

Delegates had little issue with revisions throughout the Fundamental Beliefs that made them gender inclusive except during the presentation of belief number 1 on the Holy Scripture. The review committee recommended using “inspired authors” instead of “holy men of God”. Several delegates made a distinction between “author” and “writer”, saying God was the Author of the whole Bible and humans were its writers. Other delegates voiced concerns that the replacement of “men” with “authors” might be linked to modern culture, saying only men wrote the Bible so there was no need to use gender-inclusive language.

Bill Knott, a member of the revisions committee and editor of the Adventist Review, assured the delegates that the committee had prayerfully sought to exclude pressures from cultural or societal forces when they considered the wording of belief number 1.

No changes were made to Fundamental Belief number 1, the statement on the Bible.

In a sign of the ease with which the delegates accepted the final revisions, the discussions finished about 20 minutes before the scheduled lunch break, even though they were slated to last all morning.

Stele, the revisions committee chair, also announced on Tuesday that the General Conference planned to publish an easy-to-read book containing the Fundamental Beliefs. He spoke after several delegates from the Trans-European Division expressed concern that newly baptised Adventists and Adventist young people faced difficulties relating to the beliefs in their current form. Stele called for the beliefs to be explained in modern language with the goal of reaching a new generation.

Stele acknowledged that the current text of the Fundamental Beliefs “might not be the best evangelistic tool”. But, he added, “We intend to work on a book that will make the language understandable to the younger generation.”

Originally published at <www.adventistreview.org>.
Not long before my grandfather died he said something that, on reflection, was almost unbelievable. My grandfather Norm Overend lived a good, honest but sometimes quite hard life. He certainly didn’t pursue tertiary studies. In fact I don’t think he even went to high school. He lived through the tough Depression years and two world wars. He made a living for his family as something of a jack-of-all-trades around Goulburn in rural New South Wales.

But even though he could be a bit rough around the edges at times—that independent Irish-Australian spirit—I remember him as having something far more valuable than tertiary qualifications, wealth or urban sophistication: he had a deep, abiding faith; a faith that expressed itself through a lifetime of service to our family, our Church and our community.

I’m sure he knew he wouldn’t be with us much longer. After coming home from hearing a sermon by South Pacific Division president Pastor L C Naden, we were sitting together around the dinner table reflecting on the way life had a habit of throwing up surprises. While I cannot remember too many details about the conversation almost 50 years later, I do remember this: he looked over and said simply, “you never know Barry, one day you might be president of the Division!”

I was young, full of plans, hopes and dreams. And none of them had anything to do with ministry or Church administration, let alone being president of the Division! That was a long way away from where my young mind was. I have no idea how I responded but I think I probably just laughed.

Today I smile to myself for a very different reason, because I’m writing this to you as I prepare to pack up my personal effects and move out of the president’s office at the South Pacific Division (SPD) after a lifetime of service. It has been an amazing journey. You see, when through a series of remarkable events I found myself at Avondale preparing for ministry, I planned to spend my life as a local church pastor serving our Church family. I never imagined being the president of the Division would be on God’s agenda and it certainly was not on mine. But somehow what God impressed on my grandfather’s heart happened anyway.

As I prepare to leave this office I have been asked if I could pass on some final thoughts to you. I suppose you could say these are my dreams for our Church family. To use the well-worn metaphor, there are rocky shores I want our Church to avoid and a bountiful harbour in which I hope we will anchor.
**A Christ-focused Church**

It is my deepest desire that we become a far more Christ-focused and biblically anchored community.

I hear you say that we are already Christ-centred and who is more biblically based than us? Yes, in theory that's true. But let me ask you a few simple questions; questions that I ask myself:

How much time did you and I spend studying or even reading the Bible yesterday?

On the other hand, how much time did we spend watching TV or doing something else just as insignificant?

How much effort did we put into endeavouring to understand the life and character of Jesus and modelling our lives after Him?

On the other hand, how much effort did we put into making money?

It gives me considerable grief to say it but the typical Seventh-day Adventist today is spending far more time absorbed in secular pursuits and entertainment than in the Word of God, and we are far more focused on earning a living than letting God live through us.

I don’t say this to be judgemental. I say this because I love our Church. And when I see the way we invest our time and the priorities around which we organise our lives, I know God has something better for us. Something higher. Something deeper. God wants to do miracles in our lives—but we have to open the door so He can. We need to be Christ-focused and biblically anchored.

**A unique and special Church**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church isn’t here by coincidence. This Church is a movement predicted in ancient prophecy, called for a very specific time and equipped with the most awesome mission ever entrusted to anyone on earth.

And yet, I fear we are forgetting our calling. We are trading the exceptional for the mundane, the best for the passable, the unique for the generic.

Yes, it is good to love other Christians. We can even admire and learn from aspects in other Christian denominations. Most of our hymns were, for example, written by Christians who were not Seventh-day Adventists. And it’s good to appreciate what is best about all cultures and faiths. Adventists are not called to a chauvinistic or triumphalist view of the world. But we can appreciate others...
without forgetting our own, very unique calling.

Our understanding of the great controversy provides a context for a perspective that is unparalleled in Christianity. It is time for every Seventh-day Adventist Christian to delve into the depth and breadth of this unique message. From the remarkable health message God has given us to the laser sharp insights on education, from the breathtakingly broad understanding of prophecy to the beauty of our understanding of the character of God. All of it, and much more. Yes, it makes us different. And yes, that is good! It is good to be different for God. As everything God has given to us is good.

Adventism is not Christianity-lite. It is not the lowest common denominator. It is not reheated evangelicalism with a little apocalypse on the side. This Church has been called into existence by the Lord God of Hosts to prepare a people to meet the Son of God Himself upon His return. There has never been a higher calling. And that highest calling is yours and it is mine. What a privilege! Let’s never trade away our Adventist birthright in exchange for a tepid substitute.

A loving, caring Church

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” asks the psalmist. It’s a very good question. If a sinful human being was in God’s position, would he care about a planet full of impotent rebels grinding their way to self destruction? I don’t think so. And even if the sinful heart did begrudgingly care a fraction, would a sinful person leave the splendour, love and contentment of heaven to come and die for those rebels? It’s completely inconceivable.

And yet that is what our God did.

And that fact should colour everything we do. It should colour how we talk to each other. It should colour how we treat each other. It should impact how we invest our time, what we do with our financial resources and how we think of other human beings—even those who despise us.

As a Church family, I think we can do better. I don’t want us to think about how people have mistreated us in the Church—all of us could make our own little lists. Rather, I want all of us to think about how we have mistreated others. What have I said or done; what have I failed to say or do? If Jesus were actually directing every thought and action in my life, how would the way I treat others change?

Jesus said there is a simple test to determine if we are His followers. Ultimately there is just one sign of authentic Christianity—it is whether we love one another (John 13:35).

My heart grieves when I hear of abuse in the Adventist community. Let me be clear: if you are employing physical violence or emotional blackmail against anyone, particularly against family members, your heart is not at one with
Christ. If you are abusing another sexually, your heart is not at one with Christ. If you are using your words to
denigrate and humiliate others, your heart is not at one with Christ.

Every one of us needs to humble our hearts and beg for Christ to break our sinful character and rebuild us so that,
as we’re told in Philippians, we will have the mind “which was also in Christ Jesus”. When we have Jesus’ mind we
will be patient with one another, as He was patient with everyone—from His strong-willed disciples to the little
children. If we have His mind we will care for others, just as He cared for the lepers, the soldiers who crucified Him,
the crowds of people who followed Him and just as He cared for His mother. If we have Jesus’ mind in us we will be
very, very different people. Going to church, keeping the Sabbath or even giving offerings doesn’t make us
Christians. What makes us Christians is our acceptance of the grace of God and loving each other. Under Christ’s
grace we can do better.

A strategically-minded Church

There is one more thing I want to touch on. It’s an area that we sometimes don’t give
enough thought to, and that is strategy. There are many, many things we can do at
any given time. Good things. But unless we act in a thoughtful, strategic way,
prioritising wisely, we will end up running in a thousand well-intentioned directions but
achieving very little in the process.

As a community we are not strategic enough in the way we employ our resources and
invest our time and effort. Which is good news as we can improve our impact for
Christ dramatically if we act strategically—even without dramatically increasing the
cost and effort.

Let me give you one example. Health has always
been a very strong part of the Seventh-day Adventist
community. In the South Pacific we have health
departments at the Division, the unions, the
conferences and the missions. We operate Sanitarium
Health & Wellbeing, Sydney Adventist Hospital and
Atoifi Adventist Hospital, 57 island clinics and
Avondale’s nursing school. We have first-rate
dietitians, a network of Adventist health professionals
who run everything from consulting rooms to health
retreats, and much, much more. And we also have a
first-rate media arm that includes a myriad of
websites, magazines, books, radio and TV networks.
The strategic failure? We’ve never pulled this all
together in a manner that delivers our health message
to the general public as part of a sophisticated outreach process leading to Jesus.

We have all the activity. And we all share the same goal. We have an enormous amount invested. And we have
tremendous professional capacity. We just haven’t coordinated in a manner that produces a first-rate, high profile,
attractive and engaging product that all of our society can readily interact with. In many of our communities people
do not even know we exist despite the fact that they interact with us in some way almost every day!

As we look to the future, the SPD is about to release a strategy for the next five years that aims to improve our
effectiveness. It is our goal to focus our collective energies around health, media, discipleship and our mission to the
cities. There are many, many other things we can do. But we are looking to focus our effort. Why? Because by acting strategically we can do a better job introducing people to the magnificent love of Christ. It is my hope that, going forward, our work at every level of the Church will be much more strategically focused.

Along with this, we need to be united. It's true that when we do things by ourselves or in a small group we can implement ideas very quickly. But it takes coordination to do very big things.

It's like the little torpedo boat commanded by John F Kennedy that was rammed by a Japanese destroyer near the Solomon Islands during World War II. It was a fabulous little craft—very fast and manoeuvrable. But, of course, as important as torpedo boats were, they weren't the tool that proved decisive in the Pacific campaign. No, for that you'd have to look at the aircraft carriers. An aircraft carrier is relatively slow, it takes a long time to turn and a lot of coordination to operate. But when it gets going, what an immense power it can project!

We all have a choice. We can choose to put our efforts into little torpedo boats or we can pull together as a team and be part of an aircraft carrier for God. Both are very good things to do. But if we want to do the best—to make the most of our time and talents—there is no substitute for working together. On the aircraft carrier we might be the ones who arm the planes. We might steer the carrier. We might navigate. Maybe we might fly one of the planes. There are thousands of indispensable parts that are essential to be played to make that aircraft carrier function. When all of them work together, aircraft carriers win wars.

We are in a spiritual war. We each have a part to play. Let's act strategically, intelligently and in a unified manner. Why? Because when this war is won, the great controversy will finally end, God's character will be vindicated before the universe for eternity and we will all go home to a far better land.

Conclusion

My vision for our Church family as we move forward is that we will be Christ-focused, confidently unique, love each other far more and organise our strengths to act strategically. Together, one in Christ, focused on the mission He has given us and full of love for each other, our Church family can live out the destiny God preordained for us.

Before I close I hope you don't mind if I mention my family. If it wasn't for them I would never have had this extraordinary experience. My thanks begin with my parents. Like myself, my father felt the call to ministry. He was only a few months short of graduating from ministerial training at Avondale when I arrived. And that changed everything. With a newborn baby and no money in the bank, he was forced to put study on hold and go to work fulltime.

He never did finish that theology degree. A lesser man might have resented the baby who came in the way of following his calling. But that wasn't my father. I'd like to think God rewarded his faithfulness because, at a mature age, my father was finally called into the ministry. What a privilege we had to serve God in ministry together!

As many of your know, ministry is a team effort. That effort is heightened when one is called to Church leadership. The truth is, the presidency of the SPD is not a position that is easy on the family. We have a vast territory, very complex institutions and the president serves on a number of entities at the world level. Sometimes the hours are punishing and the days away from home are long and taxing.

God has given each of us more than one calling. Being a pastor and a leader is a calling from God but I also have a calling to be a husband, a father, grandfather, brother, etc. In the years ahead I plan to dedicate myself
predominantly to those callings, without neglecting His calling on my life to ministry. It is, as the term is popularly known, a time for rebalancing. Not abandoning, but balancing my life back towards my calling at home.

And so, soon after writing this, I will be walking out of my office for the very last time as president. I'll be shaking hands in the hallway, getting into my car and driving up the long road home. And I pray God will give Julie and I many, many happy years together reliving the highlights of the incredible experiences God has given us, spending time with our children, grandchildren and extended family, enjoying catching up with dear friends, and the blessing of being part of our local church family. And not having to pack another suitcase or sit in another board meeting for a very, very long time.

Dr Barry Oliver retired from his role as president of the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on July 6, 2015.
OK, let me get this off my chest. Yes, Barry was my boss for four years. And, yes, now he’s out of the way. He’s gone. Done. Dusted. He’s walked out of the corner office and he ain’t coming back.

There’s nothing he can do to me now!

So it has come time to level with you about what I really think about Barry. You see, there are some things I’ve been mulling over for four years. And I’ve never been able to share them with you until now.

Sit back, strap yourself in and let’s get started.

This is my candid assessment of the man: the minute he walked out the door our Church lost a giant. And my guess is, you don’t fully realise it. And I don’t blame you. Because one of the most underappreciated characteristics Barry exhibits is humility. In fact, it took some work to get him to agree to this feature for Adventist Record—he simply is never about Barry. He is all about the mission of the Church, knuckling down and getting the job done—even when it is tedious, unrewarding and goes completely unnoticed. In fact, I think he prefers the latter when he is involved.

In many ways division leadership is a pretty thankless task. You’re far enough removed from church members to appear irrelevant to many, but everything you do can dramatically impact the health of the Church for good or ill. All the responsibility of leadership but none of the glamour or warmth.

You’re general conference president? Everywhere you go you’re treated like a celebrity. You’re conference president? Everywhere you go you’re treated like family. Division president? Neither. And you cop a lot of flak—often for things you haven’t done!

And it turns out to be a crushingly complex job. Think about this. The South Pacific Division stretches east to west, covering a third of the circumference of the earth! Our Division is also the most culturally and economically diverse in the world. And we run some of the most complex institutions anywhere in our Church. We operate the largest single-campus private hospital in Australia—which is integrated into both a medical and a nursing school, an enormous health and wellbeing company, the premier university of Papua New Guinea and Avondale in Australia,
and a media centre that is globally respected. Then there are the unions. And that’s just the beginning.

Imagine waking up with all of that on your plate!

Barry, however, put it to me this way once: “I let the mantle of leadership rest lightly on me.” And he did. He was seldom flustered. He wasn’t worried. He slept well at night. Why? Because he trusted God, and he entrusted those who reported to him with the leeway to do their jobs.

Barry was also willing to take risks. If you want to know, for example, why *Adventist Record* is among the most interesting publications in our Church, it isn’t a coincidence. Barry empowered our team to deal with complex issues in creative ways. We see this empowerment all around our Division, and particularly in the dramatic expansion of our Division institutions under his leadership.

He was a careful leader but he took plenty of calculated risks. And that’s a good thing. Because risk-free leadership is stagnation.

There is something else about Barry you probably don’t appreciate fully. He is smart. Really smart. He could have gone into virtually any career he wanted. And he would have excelled. And made a lot more money with a lot less hassles. In fact, that is one of the strange things. If he’d gone ahead with medicine, which he was accepted into, he would be universally admired. But church leadership? Not so much—which is perverse. We are so fortunate he dedicated his intelligence and talents to serving Christ by serving our Church. And as a community, I think we should be a lot more respectful and thankful than we generally are.

But most of all, the Barry I’ve known over the past four years is a genuine Christian. A man of God. A man of faith and faithful to his calling. I’m very sorry to see him leave. And, that, my friends, is what I really think about Barry.

*James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.*
GC Session 2015

Snapshots from the Session 5

13 Jul, 2015
A few snapshots from the final days of the 60th General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas.

Posted by: Linden Chuang | Tags: Sanitarium, Fiji, Barry Oliver, Solomon Islands, South Pacific Division, Women's Ordination, Glenn Townend, Kalvin Dever, Vote, Gc Session 2015, Nerolie Dever

South Pacific affirms women in ministry

11 Jul, 2015
The South Pacific Division delegates met on Friday morning to affirm women who are called to ministry.

Posted by: James Standish | Tags: South Pacific Division, Women's Ordination, Glenn Townend, Vote, San Antonio, Gc Session 2015

Vote by the numbers

11 Jul, 2015
There are many ways to view the vote to disallow world divisions to determine whether to ordain women.

Posted by: James Standish | Tags: David Trim, Kevin Jackson, Ordination, Women's Ordination, Glenn Townend, Vote, San Antonio, Gc Session 2015

Wednesday night: after the vote

10 Jul, 2015
Wednesday was a big day. The vote on the ordination question ran the business over until after 6.

Posted by: Jarrod Stackelroth | Tags: Solomon Islands, South Pacific Division, Vote, Gc Session 2015, Miracle Singers, Lesley Bower, Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division, South East Asia Union Mission

GC Thursday

10 Jul, 2015
Today was a fairly quiet day. Most of the Divisions had caucus meetings during the afternoon so there was nothing on at the dome all afternoon. Many of the constitutional things and other business items were voted this morning. Our division officers were reelected, including Danijela Schubert and Kelvin Peuser. I've seen a lot of people posting their disappointment with yesterday's vote online and had conversations with a number of people who were upset. But from all the SPD leaders I've spoken with today, the message is the same. We hoped and prayed for a different outcome but we must continue to move forward.
**SPD president comments on ordination vote**

10 Jul, 2015

On Wednesday, July 8, the delegates of the 60th Session of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church voted not to give the world divisions the freedom to decide whether or not to ordain women as pastors within their territory. The discussion during the day included two voices from the South Pacific, both of whom supported providing freedom to the world divisions to decide this question.

**NAD responds to the vote on women's ordination**

10 Jul, 2015

The following statement is provided by the North American Division Communications department.

**On reflection**

10 Jul, 2015

Dr Barry Oliver, newly retired from his role as president of the South Pacific Division, shares his hopes and dreams for our Church family going forward.

**Barry**

10 Jul, 2015

So, Barry Oliver has retired. He’s gone. Done. Dusted. He’s walked out of the corner office and he ain’t coming back. There’s nothing he can do to me now! So it has come time to level with you about what I really think about Barry.

**South Pacific Division officers reelected**

10 Jul, 2015
South Pacific Division (SPD) treasurer Rod Brady and general secretary Pastor Lionel Smith were among the SPD officials to be reelected to their positions during Thursday's meetings of the 60th General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas.

Posted by: Vania Chew | Tags: South Pacific Division, Danijela Schubert, Rod Brady, Lionel Smith, Kelvin Peuser, Gc Session 2015

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