Groundbreaking Conference on Homosexuality Held

BY CLINTON WAHLEN

An interdisciplinary conference on the theme “Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church,” sponsored by a number of church institutions including the Biblical Research Institute, was held at Andrews University on October 15 to 17, 2009. Bringing together experts in religious liberty and public affairs, theology and ethics, and psychology and pastoral care, the presentations addressed a wide swath of issues that have churned within the Adventist church and other Christian denominations for some time. Here is a summary of the conference.

Scientific, Psychological, and Pastoral Approaches

Mark Yarhouse, professor of psychology and the Hughes Chair of Christian Thought in Mental Health Practice at Regent University, in the first of two presentations at the conference, squarely addressed the issue as to whether homosexuality is innate like skin color or results from a number of factors, including environmental influences. Yarhouse observed how some widely-cited studies supporting a biological determination for homosexuality have been seriously undermined by more recent investigations. One of the most interesting of these studies, from J. Michael Bailey, involved identical twins and employed an improved methodology compared with that used in work done by Bailey himself and Richard C. Pillard ten years earlier. The more recent study “did not provide statistically significant support for the importance of genetic factors” for homosexual orientation.” A study published in 2008 concluded that environmental factors not shared by twins was predominant in the development of same sex attraction. Yarhouse also pointed to other recent studies confirming that environmental influences play a larger role in homosexual orientation than previously allowed.

Perhaps most significant is the question of whether change in one’s orientation is possible. Yarhouse, summarizing the results of a longitudinal study co-authored with Stanton L. Jones of homosexuals enrolled in change ministries, reported that at year six fully 53% of homosexuals seeking to move away from that lifestyle were successful to some degree while 25% experienced failure. Although these figures are not conclusive because only 64% of those studied remained participants through to the end, the study does demonstrate that “fluidity” can occur—significant change is possible for homosexuals. In fact, they found that men on the extreme end of the homosexual spectrum experienced the most significant degree of change in a heterosexual direction. Another interesting finding is that undergoing a change attempt did not cause participants more distress but, if anything, served to reduce their distress.

Yarhouse’s second presentation was more practical, providing a paradigm for ministry to homosexuals. He argued that, since sexual identity is an act of “self-labeling,” it is important to move beyond the dichotomy of gay versus straight to a three-tiered distinction (based on studies of the intensity of attraction):

1. Same Sex Attraction (experienced by 6.2% of men and 4.4% of women).
2. Homosexual Orientation (present in only 2% of men and 0.9% of women).
3. Gay Identity (attaching to a percentage too small to measure).

(continued on page 3)
EDITORIAL

“Don’t Do What We’ve Done”

So said Robert A. J. Gagnon of Pittsburg Theological Seminary when asked about his advice for Adventists. Gagnon is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCA), which voted in 2008 to rescind homosexual exclusion by eliminating the require-
ment that church officers and candidates for ministry adhere to “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or in singleness.”

Theglossoverturnedbyamajorityvoteof
the local presbyteries in 2009, the denominations leadershippromised that “the PCUSA will continue to seek ways and means to see God’s blessing on alternative forms of covenant be-
tween two people.”

In an exclusive interview after the conference, Gagnon warned that dialogue is not always worthwhile because “the dialogue is never even-handed” and tends to detract from the centrality of Scripture by focusing on experience. “Each side says what they think Scripture means, they agree to disagree, and very quickly Scripture is neutral-
ized. Dialogue fixates on heart-wrenching stories to show why ho-
mosexuals should not be discriminated against.” Adventists, he said, should choose a different path. “Jesus described love as taking on one’s cross, denying oneself, and losing one’s life.” Similarly, Ellen
White counseled long ago:

“...be of the mind that if you think you are free, you are free. To be in love with sin is to put it into your life. To be in love with sin is to be in sin.”5

Ministers of the gospel sometimes allow their forbearance toward the sin to degenerate into toleration of sins, and even participation in them. They excuse that which God condemns, and after a time, become so blinded as to com-
 mend the ones whom God commands them to rebuke. Who has blunted his spiritual perceptions by sinful leniency toward whom God condemns, will erelong commit a greater sin by severity and harshness toward them whom God approves.6

Interestingly, the more conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), affirmed in 1977 that “both the act and the desire” of homosexuality is sin and that “a practicing homosexual continuing in this sin would not be a fit candidate for ordination or membership in the PCA.” It went further in 1999, instructing its churches “to inform this sin would not be a fit candidate for ordination or membership in homosexuality is sin and that “a practicing homosexual continuing in sexual agenda in the schools.”

“Don’t Do What We’ve Done”

Editorial

Groundbreaking Conference on Homosexuality Held

(continued from page 1)

Western culture tends to confuse homosexual attraction with homosexual identity. Studies indicate that it can take up to fifteen years from the time a person becomes aware of homosexual attraction to the adop-
tion of a homosexual identity. The most critical ages are the teen years. The typical progression begins with awareness, then to confusion, then to behavior attribution, labeling and finally to a homosexual relation-
ship. Homosexual advocates try to insist that a person’s beliefs should change to conform to their homosexual behavior, a process of gay identification. A Christian approach, by contrast, moves the other way: encour-
aging behavior change to conform to the persons beliefs. Rather than the “discovery metaphor” (discover who you already are) employed by gay rights advocates, Yohhouse proposes an “integration metaphor” (choose to center your identity on aspects and experiences other than mere sexual attraction). Pastors should seek to protect those who experience same sex attraction from assumptions laid impossibly and labels imposed by others and should encourage them to explore the “weighted aspects” of their identity. In other words, before het-
erosexual identity of a person who experiences same sex attraction derives from their physical gender, intentions, behavior and values and not merely from the sexual inclinations they experience. It is up to each individual to assess the rela-
tive weight each of these aspects carries in forming their peso identity.

One of the subsequent panel discussions also ad-
dressed the practical pastoral and counseling issues involved in dealing with same sex attraction. Carlos

Before an over-emphasis on change while still encour-
age hope. 2. Uphold the value of both marriage and single-
ness. 3. Enable same-sex-attracted individuals to create a Christian “script” or self-identity. 4. Equip people with a concept of stewardship that embraces all believers. 5. Lead by example.

Religious Liberty and Public Affairs Issues

Several experts in religious liberty from across North America expressed the worrisome implications for the church and church-run institutions of permitting mar-
riage to be redefined. Barry Bussey, Associate Director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference, chaired the panel. Drawing upon his experience arguing cases in Canada and legal juries, Bussey delineated the efforts underway to prevent any indoctrination in the church or at home that would hinder people from embracing homosexu-
ality as an alternate lifestyle. Gerald

Chipeur, an Adventist lawyer working in Canada, used several legal cases to illustrate how his countrys legal recognition of marriage be-
 tween homosexuals has moved the debate from tolera-
tion to outright support, resulting in expensive litigation in order for religious institutions to maintain employ-
ment discrimination. According to Alan Reineach, “it is impossible to overstate the risks” of allowing a similar redefinition of marriage to occur in the United States, warning that if sex discrimination is established as a fundamental right it would trample the right of religious freedom.

The conventional wisdom that “Adventists should not get involved in politics” was challenged as overly simplified by Bill Knott, editor of the Adventist Review and Ad-
ventist World magazines. Leading the audience on an enlightening walk through the pages of the Review at critical junctures of American history, he showed that, from the beginning, Adventists had become vigorously involved in social issues of sufficient moral gravity. For example, the Review took an unequivocal stand against slavery in the mid-1800s and lent energetic support to the temperance movement in the early years of the twen-

Footnotes


Robert A. J. Gagnon, Associate Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, emphasized many of the points made in published works.

Understanding 2 Cor 4:7-10 to teach that not acting on natural impulses is necessary for a satisfying spiritual life, he considers that Jesus and Paul had to say about marriage and homosexuality. In Mark 10:1-12, Jesus quotes two key verses from the Genesis creation account to establish God’s original ideal for marriage: that it is between one male and one female and that these two complementary beings are to become one flesh (Gen 1:27; 2:24).

Paul deals in Rom 1:26-27 not with violent, coercive or abusive homosexual relationships, but consensus intercourse because homosexual behavior is “unnatural”; and, third, because of “the almost universal experience of shame” by homosexuals prior to “coming out.” Society has failed homosexuals by making “‘ought’ to the point that the ‘is’ of homosexuality is labeled ‘wrong.’”

Identity derives from physical gender, intentions, behavior, beliefs and values and not merely from the sexual inclinations we experience.

Identity derives from physical gender, intentions, behavior, beliefs and values and not merely from the sexual inclinations we experience.
Homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world was like its modern counterpart: a consensual, loving relationship between equals.

As important as the presentations on psychology, pastoral and legal issues, and theology and ethics were, it was the testimonies that made the meetings "real"—hearing the stories of people like "Jonathan" (though he was only virtually present through his written testimony referred to by David), Pastor Ron Woolsey recalling his conflicted feelings while studying theology, he ultimately became angry with God because, he felt, "God could help others but couldn't help me." Finally, after sixteen years of looking for love "in all the wrong places," a turning point came: when he stopped blaming God for his homosexuality and enabled to believe in God's "Plan A" (His "original plan for your life") which encompasses change, healing, restoration, recovery, "little daily miracles," and "a real, believable friendship with Him.

The Andrews University International Religious Liberty Institute organized the conference in cooperation with Andrews, Oakwood, and Southern universities, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, the General Conference's Biblical Research Institute and the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, the North American Division Ministerial Department, the Church-State Council of the Pacific Union Conference, the North Pacific Union Conference and the Northwest Religious Liberty Association. In compiling this report, David Hamsra's blog on the conference proved most helpful; cited 10 November 2009; online: http://blogs.adventist.org/2009/11/blogging-a-sexual-revolution.html

His presentation updates information found in Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarborough, Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate (Downers Grove, III.: InterVarsity, 2000).


"Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarborough, Ex-gays?: A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2007).


"Citing Richard B. Hayes, The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 39. Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoeiotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. Thus, on this issue, there is no synthetic problem for New Testament ethics. In this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from many such issues as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and countered witnesses. The biblical witness against homosexual practice is universal.

"The sermon is available at: http://media.pcHugh.org/mp3/Ser-

Adventists and Homosexuality: The Central Issue in the Debate

By Angel Manuel Rodrguez

In its commitment and loyalty to the will of the Risen Lord as revealed in the Scriptures, the Adventist church has rejected homosexual behavior as a proper expression of human sexuality. This position is universally held by the church. A shift has occurred among some Adventists who argue that although homosexual behavior is generally rejected it is acceptable under a specific situation. The core issue in the discussion is not whether homosexual behavior is good or bad, but whether loving same-sex relationships within a permanent commitment to one partner should be accepted by the church. They argue that in such cases the church must support and accept homosexual behavior. In what follows I will summarize in broad strokes and comment on the reasoning behind that proposal.

Stated clues to the statistical details are collected and shared describing the deep emotional impact that some Adventists go through when realizing that they are homosexuals. Listening to them or reading about their experience is indeed emotionally painful. We also read about the traumatic experience their Adventist parents go through. They all love the Lord and yet they find themselves in a situation that they never anticipated. They look for the support of the "caring church," but they only find rejection. As a result they have created their own support system at the margin of the church and have found spokespersons for this within Adventism. We should not underestimate the deep emotional disturbance they experience. Church members, pastors, and leaders should lovingly minister to them. The caring church must stand by them. The church has done so by clearly distinguishing between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. The church would be truly the will of the Lord by allowing sentimental sympathy and loving understanding to become sentimental sympathy and loving understanding to become

Some Adventists argue that loving same-sex relationships within a permanent commitment to one partner should be accepted by the church.

Theological Focus


Citing Richard B. Hayes, The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 39. Though only a few biblical texts speak of homoeiotic activity, all that do mention it express unqualified disapproval. Thus, on this issue, there is no synthetic problem for New Testament ethics. In this respect, the issue of homosexuality differs significantly from many such issues as slavery or the subordination of women, concerning which the Bible contains internal tensions and countered witnesses. The biblical witness against homosexual practice is universal.

"The sermon is available at: http://media.pcHugh.org/mp3/Ser-
associated with the practice of homosexual acts in pagan religions. The NT, they add, opens a way for the church to welcome homosexuals back into the Christian fold because Jesus eliminated ceremonial uncleanness. The biblical passages have been discussed elsewhere in this issue and in other resources from BRI. I will only make some general remarks.

The approach used by the theologians supporting a homosexual lifestyle violates the principles of sola scriptura. It considers the texts to be culturally determined, that they do not address the issues that we face today. Besides this, their approach has allowed non-biblical sources to determine their reading and interpretation of the Bible. By violating the clear contextual, linguistic, and grammatical meaning of the text they provide a false sense of security to those practicing homosexuality.

4. Theological Arguments. In order to limit the practice of homosexual behavior to its expression in the context of a loving same-sex relationship in Christ, they attempt to transfer the biblical theology of human sexuality from a heterosexual understanding to a homosexual one. They are forced methodologically to argue in generalities about the legitimacy of same-sex love. The goodness of sex instituted by God, they say, is opened up to such intimacy. In the setting of love, primacy is given to relationships and not to the sexual deed. It is not a matter of whether the deed is right or wrong, but whether the relationship is good or bad. Love as affection, loyalty, and mutual respect can be expressed in the intimacy of homosexuality.

Allow me two comments. First, the transfer of the sanctity of the biblical marriage to same-sex marriage is like transferring the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. What God has not explicitly sanctified cannot be sanctified by theologians in opposition to His will. Second, the idea that relationships are more important than deeds is an ethical statement that needs careful justification. It is offered as a fact when in reality it is a simple opinion. It is practically impossible to separate relationship from deeds. When love is defined outside the context of God’s specific will for us it is corrupted. In spite of the efforts made by these theologians to justify homosexual behavior of a particular type, it remains biblically unjustifiable.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez is director of the Biblical Research Institute.
erlasting character of the new covenant seems to imply an eschatological dimension. It is not only the new covenant that brought a covenant phase to a close, but it also played a crucial role in revealing the divine standard to which all are accountable. It thereby convicts people of sin and brings them to a realization of the fact that the Bible always places it within the covenant framework of grace.

In the second part of this two-part series, we will look at the modern categorization of biblical law and application of these categories within the context of Christianity, including the place of the Seventh-day Sabbath. We will also look at some objections that have been raised to the idea that the weekly Sabbath is required of “new covenant” Christians.

The Law and the Gospel

God’s law is very concise, yet all-encompassing. The Ten Commandments as found in Exodus 20 contain about 320 words, depending on the translation, whereas a law of the European Community dealing with the import of caramel products contains 26,911 words. The problem today is with people’s attitude toward the law. There are two extremes: rejection of the law or seeking salvation through keeping the law. Neither do justice to Scripture.

Different Laws

If studied carefully, biblical statements about the law, such as those that describe the law as being abolished or those containing the validity of the law, are not contradictory. The law “is used in various ways, even by the same author and within the same document. The immediate context determines which law is dealt with. Notice how Paul uses the term:

Rom 3:19 The entire Old Testament

Rom 3:21 The five books of Moses (the Pentateuch)

Rom 7:7 The Ten Commandments (the Decalogue)

Rom 7:23 A principle

1 Cor 9:8-9 Mosaic commandments

Gal 5:3 The law in its entirety

Scripture Applied

The Law and the Gospel

Even Moses distinguishes the uniqueness of the moral law of Ten Commandments from other laws, such as those for Israel as a theocracy. Biblical laws point to the life and work of the Messiah that shed their fulfillment in Jesus, and various other laws. Although all of these laws ultimately came from God, they differ in scope and duration (see appendix on p. 13).

The Ten Commandments in the New Testament


Matt 5:17-19 While Jesus upheld the Ten Commandments, explaining more fully what it means not to kill (5:21-26) or commit adultery (5:27-30), he modified the commandment on the transient bill of divorce (5:31-32) — returning to Gen 1 and 2, as well as the common understanding of taking oaths (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), and the biblical injunction to love one’s neighbor and hate one’s enemy (5:43-48).

Matt 22:37-40 The so-called Greatest Commandment does not abolish the Decalogue. God gave us the Ten Commandments because of our...
January 2010
Reflections – The BRI Newsletter
Page 13

Paul makes several indirect statements, all of which presuppose a law which is still valid: bringing about “the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (Rom 1:5; 15:18; 16:26); obedience toward God (e.g. Rom 6:16); the existence of sin (Rom 3:20; 7:7); and the necessity of expounding beliefs to live a moral life (e.g. Rom 12:17, 19; 21, 13). Besides these, Paul also makes more direct statements maintaining that the Ten Commandments remain valid:

Rom 2:21-23 Although Jews emphasize the Decalogue, they have not kept it and therefore dishonor God.
Rom 3:31 The law is not nullified but established. In the immediate context, this verse seems to refer to the moral law.
Rom 7:7, 12 Quoting the Ten Commandments, Paul says it is this law that shows us what sin is and also that the law is holy, righteous, and good.
Rom 13:8-10 Again, quoting some of the Ten Commandments, all are summarized in the commandment to love.
1 Cor 7:9 Paul’s distinction between circumcision, which had become unnecessary, and the necessity of keeping God’s laws points to the difference between the moral law and laws which were transitional.
Rom 10:4 Several different interpretations of this verse have been proposed: (a) Christ is the termination of the law; (b) Christ is the goal (or aim) of the law; (c) Christ is the fulfillment of the law; or (d) Christ is the termination of the law as a means of salvation. In light of the immediately preceding verses (9:30-10:3), the last option is to be favored. Obviously Paul uses “law” in a general way (no definite article is being used) and affirms that justification is accepted by faith and not attained by keeping the law. Paul’s statements do not contradict each other.

The Ten Commandments are “the law of liberty” and the standard in the judgment process.

**Importance and Functions of the Law**

The Ten Commandments must have existed prior to Sinai. Cain would not have been guilty of murder without a law prohibiting the killing of another. Abraham knew God’s law (Gen 26:5), as did Israel before God gave the tables of stone to Moses (Exod 16). Christianity defends the validity of the moral law as prohibiting idolatry, murder, lying, adultery, etc. On the other hand, many Christians reject the fourth commandment and although keeping the other nine, when pressed, declare that the Ten Commandments or, at least, certain so-called “ceremonial” aspects of them, have been abolished. The major problem is the rejection of the fourth commandment, which leads to the rejection of the others. Some people regard the law as too inconvenient and idealistic. While some reject God’s law outright, others attempt to be saved by keeping the law and thus go to the opposite extreme of overemphasizing its importance. However, Jesus had to die because the law could not be abolished (Matt 5:17; Phil 2:8).

The law has several distinct functions:

1. **The nature of God’s law is love.** Like the lights on airport runways which allow the pilots to touch down safely, it wants to guide us on the right and good path. It is “the law of liberty” (Jas 2:12), and we keep it because we love God.

2. **The law shows us our sinfulness and condemns us.** Even this function has a positive effect, because we realize our need of salvation and that we need the help of Someone else.

3. **The law leads us to Jesus who saves us.** As Peter Elderveld has said, “Mount Calvary is only for those who have been to Mount Sinai.”

4. **Jesus leads us to obey the law.** Whoever has been led to Jesus by the law will, by Jesus, also be led to obedience to the law. Such people will express their gratitude for salvation by keeping God’s commandments (Ps 119:70; Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16-17). According to Matthew Simpson, “the law without Gospel is dark and hopeless; the Gospel without the law is inefficient and powerless.” And, as John MacKay pointed out: “Apart from the law, the Gospel cannot be understood or be more than mere sentimentalism. Apart from the Gospel the Law cannot escape becoming pure moralism.”

**Conclusion**

Law and Gospel belong together. We need both. The problem is not God’s law; rather, oftentimes, it is the attitude of rebellious human beings towards the law.

Appendix

Even the Reformers acknowledged that there are different laws and that some are still valid. For example, the distinction was already known to Melanchthon, colleague of Martin Luther, and is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

**The Law of Ten Commandments**

- Written by God – Exod 31:18; 32:16
- Written on stone – Exod 31:18
- Handed to Moses by God – Exod 31:18
- Placed inside the ark of the covenant – Deut 10:5
- Focuses on moral principles – Exod 20:1-17
- Reveals sin – Rom 7:7
- Is spiritual – Rom 7:14
- Established through faith – Rom 3:31
- Blessed by keeping this law of liberty Jas 1:25
- To be kept in its entirety – Jas 2:10
- To be judged by this law – Jas 2:12
- Violation of this law is sin – 1 John 3:4

**The Mosaic Law**

- Written by Moses – Exod 24:4; Deut 31:9
- Written in a book – Exod 24:4, 7
- Handed to the Levites by Moses – Deut 31:25-26
- Placed beside the ark of the covenant – Deut 31:26
- Focuses on ceremonial and ritual ordinances – e.g. Lev 8
- Describes sacrifices for sins – e.g. Lev 1-7
- Parts depend on physical descent – Heb 7:16
- Abolished by Christ – Eph 2:15
- Loss of freedom by keeping this law to be saved – Gal 5:1-2
- To keep this law now means nothing – 1 Cor 7:19
- Not to be judged by this law – Col 2:16
- Violation of this law is not sin as it is abolished – Eph 2:15

**Worldwide Highlights**

**BRI Visit to AIAS**

About 160 theologians, administrators, teachers and students participated in the 12th AIAS Theological Forum held on the campus of the Asia-Pacific Interna
tional Institute of Advanced Studi
es in the Philippines, from October 29-31, 2009. The general topic was “Current Trends in Adventist Theology.” Each lecture was followed by a question and answer period. In addition, on Sabbath afternoon a whole hour was set aside for questions and answers which proved to be as popular as the lectures them
tselves. Many participants expressed their appreciation for the candid way the theological pluralism in the church was addressed and several attendees remarked that this was the best Forum they had ever attended.

Following the Forum, Drs. Mueller and Pfandl stayed on for another two weeks to complete their intensive classes on Daniel and Revelation which had begun a few days prior to the Forum. Students were enthusiastic and grateful for the time they could spend on this in-depth study of these books. One student wrote, “From the bottom of my heart I thank God for this beautiful moment in my life in which I could learn so many things.” The administration of AIAS expressed its appreciation for the contribution BRI made this year to the academic life of this tertiary General Conference institute in the Asia-Pacific region.
Hundreds Gather for Cress Memorial Service

Hundreds gathered from around the world on Sabbath afternoon, December 5, 2009 at the Sli-go Seventh-day Adventist Church to attend the memorial service for James A. Cress, who fell asleep in Jesus on November 26, 2009. Following the invocation and prayer of comfort, the ministerial association executive staff and their spouses recited a Scripture litany of hope. GC President Jan Paulsen and GC Vice President Gerry Karst shared tributes that came in from around the world. Among the sentiments expressed: “It is painful to accept that he is not with us” and “We shall miss his spiritual leadership.” Elder Paulsen also shared a number of personal reminiscences, including, “If we agreed we smiled. If we disagreed we could still smile.” Elder Karst recalled that “even when he was tired from travel, Jim somehow found energy to carry on with a smile on his face. He loved God and trained men to be good ambassadors of the Gospel and worked to provide opportunities for women to be involved in ministry.”

Charles Bradford, a long-time friend and mentor to Jim Cress and who gave the “Message of Hope,” focused on the assurance of eternal life found in 1 John 5:11-12, connecting it with John 10:28-29 and declaring: “We all die. But I know somebody who has won the battle! He has said ‘No, Jim, I won’t let you go. We may lay you in the ground but I won’t let you go.’ Mercy said no!” Bradford also quoted Ellen White’s comment on the passage in 1 John: “Christ became one flesh with us, in order that we might become one spirit with Him. It is by virtue of this union that we are to come forth from the grave,—not merely as a manifestation of the power of Christ, but because, through faith, His life has become ours. Those who see Christ in His true character, and receive Him into the heart, have everlasting life. It is through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us; and the Spirit of God, received into the heart by faith, is the beginning of the life eternal” (DA 388).

The message was followed by a flute and piano rendition of “Great is Thy Faithfulness” by Geri Mueller and Rae Lee Cooper. One of the most moving moments came with the expressions of gratitude given by Jim’s brother John Cress and Sharon’s tribute to her husband, read by John’s wife Pamela. In the tribute, Sharon wrote that “Jim had big shoulders, and an even bigger, more generous heart. He was the greatest blessing God ever gave me.” The service ended with the congregation singing “For All the Saints,” one of Elder Cress’s favorite hymns. After the benediction, given by Karst, the dozens of ministers in attendance, holding open Bibles, formed an honor guard along the main aisle as the Cress family and friends left the sanctuary. For many who were there, the words of assurance quoted several times during the service, take on new meaning: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps 30:5).