

Women Pastors Baptize and Perform Marriages in North America

by Lori Kuehnert

Two large conferences in the North American Division are now permitting women to perform baptism and marriages. In the largest conference in the Pacific Union (for that matter, in the entire North American Division), the Southeastern California Conference, four women pastors have baptized 37 people and performed 10 weddings during the 17 months since December 1986. The Southeastern California Conference constituency, on September 28, 1986, approved women performing baptisms and marriages: "It shall be the practice of this conference to give to unordained women and men the same rights and privileges in regard to officiating at baptisms and weddings in our conference." Since the late 1970s unordained male pastors in North America have been permitted to perform baptisms and marriages, so the action of the constituency meant women in the Southeastern California Conference were able to do so as well.

The executive committee of the Potomac Conference, the largest conference in the Columbia Union, May 18, 1988, adopted a similar policy:

Whereas we believe it is neither right nor expedient for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to continue denying anyone full participation in ministry on the basis of gender; it shall henceforth be the practice of this conference to give women and men in ministry the same rights and privileges in regard to officiating at baptisms and weddings.

Actually, three women pastors in the Potomac Conference—Marsha Frost, Jan Daffern, and Francis Wiegand—began performing baptisms on February 24, 1984, two years before Margaret Hempe performed the first baptism by women in the Southeastern California Conference. How-

ever, within a few months, under pressure from the General Conference, the Potomac Conference in August 1984 suspended further baptisms by women until the General Conference had considered the matter.

Since then two international commissions appointed by the General Conference and chaired by its president, Neal Wilson, have met in late March of 1985 and 1988. On neither occasion did they make official recommendations concerning ordination of women or performance of baptisms and marriages in North America by unordained women. The second commission is scheduled to meet again before the 1989 Annual Council. When the first commission was appointed in 1984 it was expected that some action would be taken at the 1985 General Conference Session. Now, it is not clear that even the second commission will recommend in its 1989 meeting that the 1990 General Conference Session take any action.

Neal Wilson, in his report in the May 12 *Adventist Review* concerning the 1988 meeting of the commission he chaired, urged church members "to avoid further controversy and argument. . . to abstain from circulating books, pamphlets, letters, and tapes that stir up debate and often generate more confusion." He admonished church officials and members that "it is time for us to be done with argument and discussion about this issue, time for us to utilize every resource, every talent, every ability, every gift. It is time for us to unite to finish the work and go home to live with our blessed Lord forever."

Still, since the meeting of the commission this year, the North American Division officers and union presidents in May 1988 requested that the General Conference officers consider that

there are discrepancies between the responsibilities of and remuneration of licensed ministers and commissioned ministers who are associates in pastoral care. Reportedly the NAD is the only division that permits the unordained minister to perform the essential functions of ministry. However, the same privileges have not been accorded to women.

And in two large conferences in the North American Division women pastors are proceed-

ing to perform baptisms and marriages: Margaret Hempe and Diane Forsyth at the Loma Linda University Church; Delores Robinson at the Arden Hills, California, church; Halcyon Wilson at the La Sierra Collegiate Church, and Marsha Frost, at the Fairfax, Virginia, church. Conference committees in Southeastern California and Potomac are convinced that other women will soon be performing baptisms and marriages, not only in their own areas, but in other North American conferences as well.

Lori Kuehnert, an English and history major at Columbia Union College, is an editorial assistant for *Spectrum*.

Adventists Lead in California Battle vs. Tobacco Companies

by David Larson

Adventists are in the forefront of the current political battle in California against tobacco interests. Loma Linda University has formally endorsed California's 1988 Tobacco Tax Initiative and pledged its support for the measure which would increase by 25 cents the tax on each pack of cigarettes sold within the state. The Coalition for a Healthy California, which includes California's Heart and Lung Association, is headed by James Nethery, a professor in the Loma Linda University School of Medicine. He is simultaneously chairman of the state's American Cancer Society. Although not a church member, another leader of the coalition is a senior member of the medical school faculty, Philip Gold, chairman of the California Lung Association. Between September and June the coalition organized the collection of more than a million signatures on a petition requiring the state to put the matter on the November presidential election ballot.

In a May 31 letter to Nethery, Norman J. Woods, president of Loma Linda University, wrote that "We wish to pledge our support of the tobacco tax initiative and, therefore, authorize your group to use our name in support of this important cause." Woods also commended Nethery for "the work of your organization," and expressed the university's pleasure that it is "to be involved in support of this initiative." David Hinshaw, president of Loma Linda University Medical Center, also pledged the official support of the hospital.

These commitments resulted from a proposal presented by a task force of the Loma Linda University Ethics Center. Professor Charles Teel, Jr. (ethics), chaired the task force assisted by Professors James Nethery (prosthetics) and Carroll Small (pathology). This task force of almost a dozen Loma Linda University faculty emerged from a recommendation to the Ethics Center's Executive Committee by Dr. Bruce Branson, chairman of the university's department of surgery. The task force recommended that Loma Linda's largest institutions take the following actions:

- Endorse the initiative at the highest appropriate administrative levels.
- Encourage employees of the institutions to vote in behalf of the initiative in November.
- Authorize the formation of a larger task force that would draw upon the resources of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda University Medical Center, and Adventist Health System/Loma Linda.
 - Permit appropriately previewed use of institutional resources such as meeting rooms, press releases, chapel services, and faculty and student involvement.
 - Utilize in judicious and effective ways Loma Linda's current visibility to support the initiative.
 - Cooperate with other organizations and agencies that support the initiative.

By responding affirmatively to these recommendations, Loma Linda University joined the California branches of the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, and the American Lung Association, plus dozens of other medical and civic organizations, in the Coalition for a

Healthy California.

This state-wide coalition was orchestrated in September 1987 by Loma Linda professors James Nethery and Philip Gold (pulmonary medicine) and others when it became clear that all attempts to increase California's tax on cigarettes would be defeated in the state's legislative bodies because of strong opposition from the tobacco industries. The son of missionaries to China, Nethery, who views his 20 years of volunteer efforts with the American Cancer Society as "my form of missionary work," concluded that there was no remaining option but to take the proposal directly to the citizens of California. "The big selling points," according to Nethery, "are that the tax will pay for anti-tobacco education in the schools, and the 25 cent tax itself will discourage tens of thousands of people from beginning to use tobacco products."

Recent polls indicate that Californians favor the initiative by nearly a three-to-one margin. The political challenge before the coalition, therefore, is not so much to generate support as to maintain it in the face of the \$16 million media campaign the Tobacco Institute has already launched in California against the initiative. In July alone tobacco money bought nearly \$4 million of television advertising in opposition to the initiative. These TV commercials portray the additional tax on cigarettes as a way to enrich medical professionals and other wealthy citizens at the expense of less prosperous Californians who choose to smoke. Jack Nicholl, the coalition's campaign director, anticipated the media blitz. He had predicted that "the tobacco companies will ignore the health issues. They won't mention the recent Surgeon General's report, *Nicotine Addiction*. Instead, they will focus on issues like cigarette bootlegging and the unfairness of the tax to low-income groups." But Nicholl expects that the heavy spending by tobacco companies "will work against them, and create a backlash by voters who do not trust the tobacco industry to tell the truth."

The truth appears to be that the additional tax of 25 cents is only slightly more than a tithe of the \$2.17 it costs the people of California in direct and indirect expenses every time someone in their state smokes a package of cigarettes. This tax will

generate about \$600 million a year. One hundred and twenty million of this is earmarked for educational programs that will inform California's young people and adults of the danger of smoking. Thirty million will fund research regarding ways to cure diseases caused by tobacco use. Two hundred and sixty million will be used to cover the hospital and medical costs of treating people with such diseases who have no other form of medical insurance. Thirty million will be used each year by the state to improve its parks, fisheries, and wildlife areas. The remaining \$150 million per year can be used for any of the above purposes, as well as for fire-prevention programs, as determined by the state's legislators. The initiative envisions a constitutional amendment in California that will permit these funds to be spent in these ways.

The Loma Linda University task force is planning a number of events for the university campuses in support of the initiative. A special weekend of activities cosponsored by the Loma Linda University Church and the Ethics Center will highlight the risks and costs of smoking tobacco, as well as Adventism's historic and continuing commitment to physical health and healing as spiritual responsibilities. The weekend will be climaxed by a fund-raising dinner for the initia-

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tive, featuring prominent community leaders.

Financial assistance is needed because even the most optimistic scenarios portrayed by the Coalition for a Healthy California concede that it will have at its disposal less than a third of the amount the Tobacco Institute will spend in California. The various corporations that fund the Tobacco Institute are taking the initiative very seriously because they correctly understand that if this measure passes in California, similar initiatives will probably be approved by the citizens of other

states as well. Researchers confirm that increasing the cost of cigarettes by as little as 25 cents per package will significantly decrease the sales of such products, especially among the young and other first-time smokers. It is estimated that in California, where only 25 percent of the adults smoke tobacco, the additional tax will markedly diminish the number of teenagers and children who start smoking and subsequently find it very difficult to stop.

To help, the coalition urges all Californians to vote in November in favor of the initiative. Secondly, the coalition needs contributions, which may be forwarded to Coalition for a Healthy California, 5858 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90036. The coalition's telephone

number is (213) 937-6464. "We think this time we're going to win," declares chairman Nethery with quiet determination. "We're confident. And if we succeed here maybe Adventists in other parts of the country will also organize nonpartisan coalitions against the tobacco companies."

Seventh-day Adventists are already leaders in this nonpartisan political campaign because it expresses their Christian values, because it reflects the actions of the One who came that all might have life and have it abundantly.

David Larson is an associate professor of Christian ethics and the director of the Ethics Center at Loma Linda University. He is a frequent contributor to *Spectrum*, most recently "The Moral Danger of Miracles," Vol. 18, No. 4 (April 1988).