
1990 and After: Visions of the Church's Future

Adventist members deeply involved in their church are increasingly turning their attention to the 1990 General Conference session—quite likely a watershed event in the history of Adventism. We invited several articulate and active members to share with Spectrum readers what they would say if they were invited to address the delegates of the 1990 General Conference session. Included are members from different parts of the North American Division, divided between men and women, including one student, two denominational employees, and three laypersons. Some concerns recur, but each person has a distinctive perspective.

Readers are invited to share their own ideas about the future of the church. These responses will be included, as space permits, in subsequent issues. Those who care about the church have an opportunity to shape its future.

—The Editors

We Need a New Era

by Charles Scriven

The Seventh-day Adventist church is coming to a crossroad. At the General Conference session in 1990 we will be electing leaders for the world church, and nothing can matter more, surely, than that this election mark the beginning of a new era of hope and accomplishment in Adventism.

For some 20 years now our church has been struggling, especially in its older strongholds, with profound change and a deepening loss of confidence and unity. We have met with difficult adjustments in our knowledge of Ellen White and our understanding of the doctrinal pillars. We

have faced disappointment over blunders and scandals in the church's financial dealings. We have seen energetic women and thoughtful professors stifled under the impact of unseemly fears in high places.

At the extremes, all this has engendered defensiveness or cynicism. Everywhere we have seen loyalties weaken, especially among the young and well-educated, and now we are having to cope with the ensuing troubles in our schools and other institutions.

We are at a crisis point. We need a new era.

To the church's loyal sons and daughters, the Adventist vision still speaks the truth; the Adventist way of life still moves hearts and hands and feet; the Adventist family still gives strengthening companionship. We must capitalize on this *now*; it is a mortal danger to think we have spare time. We must determine *now*, with both courage and farsightedness, to set this church upon a course of renewal under God.

No concern, aside from the quality of our faith, can matter more for this renewal than the selection of our leaders in 1990. It is true that reforms begin typically at the lower and not the higher levels of power. It is true that local leaders—those who energize and oversee churches, lay organizations, schools, and conferences—bear responsibilities of immense importance. Still, those we elect in 1990 will, by their influence and visibility, symbolize the direction our church is going to take in the new decade. The importance of the leaders who symbolize us is simply crucial, both for our morale as well as for our renewal.

No indictment upon our recent past is greater than the losses we are incurring among our youth and young adults. We all believe these losses can be reversed. But we cannot wish away the bore-

dom and cynicism that feed the losses. Success here can only come through imagination and courage fed by the indwelling Spirit. We must pray for an outpouring of such imagination and such courage in 1990. It must reach the ones who select our leaders and it must reach the new leaders themselves. If it does not, our prospects for the future will diminish, perhaps irreversibly.

What leadership qualities are fundamental to a healthy future for the church? What should those who select new leaders bear especially in mind? Surely the following points are fundamental:

1. Our leaders should be creative visionaries, people who are able to see and to articulate a revitalized future for the church. Management is not enough; we need dreams and dreamers.

2. Our leaders should have a dynamic understanding of church unity; without sacrificing the church's loyalty to Christ, they should acknowledge and celebrate the pluralism inevitable in a family that reaches across boundaries of nation, race, gender, and class. The journey to uniformity is a journey to death.

3. Our leaders should have demonstrated expertise in Bible study and in spiritual leadership; they should build our confidence through preaching and reflecting as well as through planning and organizing. We need fresh thoughts born of fearless, impassioned attention to Scripture; nothing less will do.

4. Our leaders should encourage the wider sharing of authority in both teaching and administration in the church; they should trust those who share in leadership, taking pains to give church administrators everywhere sufficient leeway and control for constructive innovation. Only thus can we benefit from the wealth of creativity and insight God has given us; only thus can the low morale that springs from repression become the high morale that springs from participation.

5. Our leaders should be open to reevaluation and restructuring of the role of the General Conference in the administration of the church. This body should not be the extension of the North American Division; today that is an affront to the dignity and creativity of North Americans. These matters are complicated; simple answers will mislead. Something, though, must be done, and

we must have leaders who are committed to doing it, doing it soon, and doing it well.

Everything good and excellent in human life stands always on the razor edge of danger and must be fought for. So it has been said, and so it must be said again, especially as we think about the church. What we have together is a good and excellent thing, but it must be fought for.

Leaders of excellent ability and potential do exist—at headquarters and in the divisions, the union and conference offices, the schools, the churches, and the hospitals. With this in mind those who *can* make a difference in 1990 *must* make a difference. You who will be the delegates, you on whom so much will hang—you must fight for our future. You must fight for it by finding leaders who can give us the new era we need. Your brothers and sisters in the Adventist family will be counting on you—and so will your children, your own sons and your own daughters.

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GC, 1990: The New President's "State of the Church" Address

by Fay Blix

This sermon presupposes an imaginary scenario where the General Conference of 1990 has taken official action to approve the ordination of women. Wishful thinking, I know, but fun nevertheless.

My church has made me very proud this week in its decision to be faithful to its belief in the priesthood of *all* believers by approving the ordination of women to the

gospel ministry. The light that has seemingly been “forever amber” has finally turned to green.

By taking this action, my church is giving a clear signal to its people that it intends to start keeping its promises in matters of justice and equality, that it is finally willing to truly acknowledge the presence of authentic ministry wherever it is occurring, regardless of gender.

While I am stirred by this historical decision within Seventh-day Adventism, I think it is appropriate to express regret to the public for so long misrepresenting the message of the gospel as meaning that women are unworthy of full partnership in the church. I feel it is absolutely essential that we in church leadership also make public apology to you, the women of our church, for the collective pain our exclusion and denigration has caused you over the decades.

We recognize that ordination will not be the panacea for all the problems endured by women in the church. The scars that have resulted from the continual rejection, criticism, and ostracism will not immediately disappear. However, we want you to know we are now committing ourselves to your growth, to your search for meaning. We ask you to hold us accountable for the education of all members regarding gender inclusiveness and for a systematic plan for the inclusion of women in all dimensions of church life and leadership. We will need every ounce of creative energy we can generate to develop the reality of equality.

The rigorous discussion, the paper missiles, the emotional roller coasting from apprehension to despair to euphoria I have observed this week are but a microcosm of the general climate of the church of the past several decades. I was jarred as I saw more clearly than ever before how often our clinging to the past had much more to do with fear than conviction.

A verse that I could not seem to shake as I reflected on what to say this Sabbath is Jeremiah 2:13, “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”

Our failure to take action on the women’s issue years ago, despite official acknowledgment that no biblical injunction deterred such action, is but

one example where we as a church have considered institutional preservation more important than the nurturing of individuals.

We have worked hard and contributed sacrificially to hewing out the broken cistern of our church structure. Year by year we have added more bricks, more scaffolding so that we have become more closed, more self-perpetuating; erecting walls that we claim to hold living water, walls that have instead served to insulate us from the heart cry of humanity.

The time has come to halt our frenzied attempts at patchwork repair of the cracks in our system. It is time to admit our brokenness. It is time to begin again.

In our attempt to preserve the truth, our waters have grown stagnant in our passion for doctrinal rigidity, where questioning has been seen as a mark of disloyalty, where the possibility of alternative views on traditional policy has been condemned as anarchy.

We, as leaders, as arch-preservers of the cistern/system, have behaved more like rulers than servants, and as if to legitimize our position, we have been eager to purge any highly visible sinners from our midst, to cast clouds of suspicion over any scholar who refused to employ old rhetoric, so as to more clearly reveal our sanctimonious dedication to the cause. Representative government has been more illusion than reality, leading to abuses of power, reduced accountability of leadership, and frequent financial scandal.

On this, the last Sabbath of this General Conference of 1990, you might expect me to highlight our Laodicean tendencies and sound the clarion call to repentance in readiness for Jesus’ soon return. Each General Conference and almost every camp meeting usually closes with such a plea to turn from our individual worldliness in the haunting likelihood that Jesus will return before the next such scheduled session.

Although I, too, want us all to be ready when Jesus comes, I choose not to place my emphasis this morning on measuring our lives by some exacting life-style standard, on our rule-keeping ability, on our fears of facing some ominous judgment event of the future, on frenetic witnessing activity so that the gospel can be spread throughout the world by this time next year.

Instead, I simply ask that we stand still in the tracks of our Harvest 90 labors, that we stop our well-intentioned busyness of cistern construction and maintenance and find our way back from the emptiness of our artificial official basins to the cool, refreshing fountain of living water. The time has come to halt our frenzied attempts at patchwork repair of the cracks in our system. It is time to admit our brokenness, our inability to shore up and preserve our little pool of truth. It is time to begin again.

This morning I make a call for drastic measures, for a dismantling of systems and programs, for a shifting of power bases and positions that will regrettably result in the pain of loss and security and influence. It is time for us to recognize that our broken cisterns have left us morally bankrupt, and we must ask for the Chapter 11 protection of a reorganization plan in order to survive.

Just as Scandinavian Airlines System in the late 1980s gave its employees the opportunity for direct involvement in the salvaging of their company, so I invite you, the members of this church, to have a more direct say in what happens, to have a more meaningful participation in church government. Rather than pressuring one another into building bigger and better protective walls around our system by catchy slogans such as, "We'll arrive in '95," I am announcing the appointment of a constitutional commission to design a church order that will keep our church government responsible, representative, and as participatory as possible; a new church structure where those in authority can be easily held accountable to the laity.

As part of the dismantling process, I think it is time to examine our passion for numbers, for adding one more notch on our baptismal belts, and

instead retrace our steps to the wounded and discarded souls we have rejected when their behavior didn't quite measure up to our blueprint model. For too long we have been too ready to stamp the mark of Cain on their foreheads, judging them unholy, unusable by God. I say they have been absent from our family table far too long, and although there's always room for one more plate on the table, a crowded table never fills the empty spot left by those who have been driven from our midst.

We also need to seriously consider those who have left or are on the verge of leaving, those who hang on only by their sociologically comfortable fingernails. So many of our children and youth, eager for life, have come to our cisterns and found nothing to quench the thirst within their souls. They have seen our priorities, understood that we have been more committed to image than to justice, that we have been obsessively compulsive about clean faces but have turned a deaf ear to the cries of broken hearts. They have felt the chill wind of our icy rejection of their creative alternative views and felt indicted by our suspicion of their honest searching questions. In our passion to preserve the purity of our tradition we have mistaken 19th-century cultural norms for immovable principles of truth, and thus we have rendered our church irrelevant to the daily experience of the lives of our youth. We have introduced them to a Christ who died for Seventh-day Adventism but not for them individually, and in their youthful intolerance they have summarily dismissed this apathetic anachronistic deity and all his trappings. Instead of forcing our vision of the kingdom, with all its corrective lenses and legalistic filters, upon our sons and daughters, it is time once again to see the kingdom of God through the eyes of children.

In addition, while it is true that we must be committed to the more meaningful participation of an informed laity, we also need to ask ourselves why the best among our clergy and our educational personnel are choosing to leave our employment, thus draining our church of its most creative resources. As our conferences and institutions are rocked with one financial scandal after another due to fiscal mismanagement, incompetence, or occasional bold-faced greed, does the

minimal remuneration given for priceless, dedicated, professional service (once acceptable in the spirit of mutual sacrifice) now seem to remind the recipient with each paltry paycheck that the sacrifice is only being given in one direction? Idealism can only endure so much. To have one's loyalty questioned, vocational gifts denied, motives suspected, simply because one has a different but honest perspective, erodes one's idealism more effectively than almost any other factor.

We need to awaken to the fact that Revelation Seminars are not the only way of reaching the masses; in fact, such seminars can sometimes block the very message we are trying so desperately to communicate. In addition to providing canned evangelistic programming, we need to tap the creativity of our people, to welcome fresh thinking, to be open to astounding alternatives. We need to consider the witness of our very organizational structure and procedures even aside from the message we feel it is our mission to convey.

Just as Jesus seemed to customize his approach according to individual need, so we need to be innovative in sharing the Good News. The imagination and uniqueness of each individual member's ideas could present such a dynamic and diverse vision of the gospel that we could change the world. The key is having members realize that their diverse, unique contributions are not only appreciated but also essential.

I recognize that my message this morning is unusual rhetoric from a General Conference president. My comments may seem to strike at the heart of an institution we all hold dear. I may appear to be undermining the very thing I have been commissioned to uphold. The changes I have envisioned could mean loss of jobs for many of you, the giving up of pet projects for some of you, and a crisis of truth for others. I am sensitive to the immense amount of pain and regrouping that will be engendered by these major shifts in philosophy.

However, for too long now, we have been insensitive to the pain being caused by our rigidity, by our readiness to judge one another.

Now, at the beginning of the final decade of

this century, it is time to turn back to the source of life, away from veneration of man-made organizational structure, to the fountain of grace in Jesus Christ. To refuse will doom us to die of thirst in a desert land, where the cistern we have so carefully constructed for ourselves proves to be an illusion and fails to hold life-giving water.

I recognize that many of the thought leaders of our church may be applauding much of what I have said this morning, and I welcome your support. But I would also remind you that the organizational and philosophical changes I am propos-

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ing will no longer allow you to sit around in places like Adventist Forum and Adventist Women's Institute circles lamenting the foibles of leadership, the blocking of gifts, the suppression of free thought. This morning I am giving you the challenge of an open door, an opportunity to act on your ideals, to transform your critic's corner into creative action. You may find that the solutions that seemed so simple and obvious from a spectator's perspective are not quite as simple to implement in practical reality, but I urge you to give us your best. We *need* your gifts, your ideas, your advice.

I recognize that it is difficult to change—whether you have given your life to this church and feel secure in its present structure or whether you have deep hurt, rage, or sadness from being judged or marginalized by its actions—I beg all of you, wherever you fall on this wonderfully broad spectrum of our church polity, to take the time for honest reflection, for careful consideration of the costs of failing to choose refreshment from the fountain of living water.

We can no longer afford to live in the past or to drain our energies in grieving over a history

that cannot be rewritten. We must move on, for many are waiting to know there is a place where wounded people are welcome, where the God who sustains our community is a God with open arms. We must move beyond the tallying of hurts and losses, beyond shattered dreams to fresh visions. We are able to move beyond because we have a God who has promised, "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten. . . You will have plenty to eat, until you are full. . . never again will my people be shamed" (Joel 2:25, 26, NIV).

Because we have taken a major step this week in recognizing the full equality of men and women we have deliberately decided to follow the example of Jesus in matters of justice and equality. We have opened the way for significant healing to occur within our midst, and provided God the opportunity to minimize the devastation from the locusts of our past.

The prophet Joel assures us that once we have committed ourselves to God and his community of justice, he will redeem our past. After these new commitments have been made, God promises, "I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people" (Joel 2:28) and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (verse 32).

Dear members of my church family, as this General Conference of 1990 ends and we go forth to face this new era of our history, it is my dream—and I like to think it is God's dream—that our decision to stand true for equality and our determination to radically reshape our focus will make it possible for this Indianapolis conference to be transformed into a true Upper Room experience; a moment when the Holy Spirit can come upon each of us, men *and* women, in full power. It is my dream that a church that admits its brokenness and emptiness, that responds to the invitation to be filled with life-giving water, will become a fountain of God's renewal.

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Confronting the "C" Word

by Susan Sickler

The one thing the General Conference officers would most like to accomplish in 1990 is to halt the spread of congregationalism in North America. Actually, if they knew just how broad and deep feelings among members really are they would be even more concerned. As a lay member of a local conference personnel committee I spend a fair amount of time talking with pastors across the United States. I have been amazed to find them every bit as concerned and frustrated as laypersons about what is happening in the church today. If anything, pastors are even more agitated. None of us thinks congregationalism would be good for North America or the world church. Then why are we rapidly heading down a road that no one really wants to travel?

The answer is that congregationalism is happening by default, as a reaction of members and pastors to the General Conference. Acutely aware that at higher levels of church structure their money is sought but their ideas are unwelcome, lay members and church pastors alike are retreating from involvement at the General Conference, division, union, and even local conference levels. Because they are still deeply committed to the Seventh-day Adventist church they begin to invest their time and money at the local church level. Exciting things start to happen. Laypersons and pastors begin expanding the expression of their gifts, they start making a difference, and they feel fulfilled. And there you have it—congregationalism—the perfect way to give up on a hierarchical church structure without giving up on Adventism.

Let me illustrate the problem. We frequently speak of the world church as a family. This is a good analogy. The divisions are adult children of various ages, personalities, and resources. North America is the oldest child—frankly middle-aged. The parental role in organizational structure is played by the General Conference. The

roles were set when the offspring were small. Now that the divisions are grown, rather than celebrating the opportunities this holds for the church, the parent refuses to let the offspring go, insisting that only the parent's firm guiding hand is "keeping the world church together." North America finds itself in the untenable position of being the oldest child, the only one living in the same town with the parent, the one providing most of the parent's financial support, but the one given the least autonomy. To put it bluntly, North America is the division most treated like a child.

The issues are definitely money and control. The people who give the money have major differences with the people who decide how the money should be spent. In a volunteer organization such as the church, that is a serious situation. The argument is not over money donated for missions. (One of the fastest-growing areas of giving in the United States is to independent ministries, which often bypass denominational channels sending the donations they receive directly to a specific need in the world field.) No, the argument is over money used for administrative costs. Everyone says the local church is the most important focus in the denomination, but spending decisions are made by administrators with only token input from pastors and laypersons. Consequently, General Conference, division, union, and conference administration is funded first, with only leftovers allowed to trickle down to the local churches.

All healthy organizations seek the stable middle ground between the extremes of opposite views. The opposite of a hierarchical system of church government is congregationalism. The more Adventist officials move toward the hierarchical end of the spectrum the more inevitable that, in order for members to regain balance, the pendulum will swing the other way. The church members' swing away from hierarchicalism was bound to start in North America because of its "special relationship" with the General Conference, and because hierarchical authority conflicts with the democratic values of America culture.

Neal Wilson's testimony in the Proctor case,

comparing the Adventist church to that of Catholicism in terms of structure and authority, also reminds us that Adventist church members in North America frequently relate to the General Conference in ways that closely resemble the way ordinary Catholics relate to the Vatican. However, the Pope has two distinct advantages over the president of the General Conference. The Pope doesn't have to live in North America, and his structure is consistent with his theology. Our attempt to pair a deep commitment to the priesthood of all believers and a hierarchical structure produces a very odd couple indeed.

We need a General Conference president who will encourage all parts of the world church family to interact with one another. We don't need a president who seeks to solve our problems for us by imposing his way.

When North America tried to communicate its concerns, the General Conference produced the usual flurry of study commissions, white papers, polite conversations, and lack of action. The next step was increasingly confrontative constituency sessions at the local and union conference levels. There the basic underlying issue has been, "How will we choose to divide up the pie of power?" The General Conference appears increasingly convinced that only its firm controlling presence is keeping the world church together. Reduce our authority, the General Conference seems to be saying, and Adventism will split in every direction.

The more the hierarchy asserts its presumed prerogatives the more the laity and their pastors react by immersing themselves in their local churches—the cycle of congregationalism.

How is the cycle interrupted? The first step is to recognize that unity is not an organizational achievement but a spiritual quality. The person ultimately responsible for unity in our church is not the General Conference president but God. It is our love for God that binds us in love for one

another. God is not only tolerant of a good bit of diversity, he created people that way. He does not perceive diversity as a threat to his power.

The next step is to admit that adult children must have a different relationship with their parents if they are going to get along well with each other and openly celebrate the opportunities this opens for the church. Our greatest need in a General Conference president in 1990 is someone who will nurture relationships and delegate authority. We need someone who will encourage decision-making at the level where the problem exists, rather than elevating all problems to the General Conference level. A classic example of the decision-making process run amok was spending a whole day at the Annual Council debating wedding bands in North America. (Even many of the North American administrators came home disgusted and muttering under their breath about "fiddling while Rome burns.") The ordination of women is another good example of an issue where insisting that the General Conference legislate for every part of the world church will do far more to destroy unity than to preserve it.

We need a General Conference president who will encourage all parts of the world church family to interact with one another warmly and openly, sharing their failures and their fears as well as their successes, engaging in joint problem-solving without getting caught up in self-defeating struggles over power. We don't need a president who seeks to solve our problems for us by imposing his way. Instead, we need someone who can create an atmosphere in which we can solve our own problems. Once we get decision-making down to the level of the people who have the problem we will include far more pastors and laypeople in our decisions. This will produce two very positive results: Our chances of seeing the solution actually implemented will increase and we will need fewer administrators. The money saved can go to local churches and schools all over the world.

A concern for genuine denominational unity dictates that a full and equal North American Division must be established in 1990. By 1995 it will be too little, too late to reverse the trend toward congregationalism.

The way to get North America to give to missions is not to elect North Americans to the General Conference, send them around the world, and then put them on a committee to allocate ever-decreasing dollars. Rather, we desperately need exchanges among pastors, students, teachers, and institutional administrators throughout the world divisions so members, not merely the denominational hierarchy, realize that they need one another. More than all the overseas trips of American General Conference leaders, the best thing to happen to mission awareness in North America has been the student-missionary program and Maranatha Flights International.

The ultimate irony is that by its own actions the General Conference is creating the very thing it fears most—congregationalism in North America. Unless we make major changes in 1990 the pace will quietly but rapidly accelerate. Pastors, laypersons, and administrators must work together in integrated teams to use the principles of servant leadership to invert the pyramid and fashion a structure that actually does what we say a structure should do—serve the needs of the local church all over the world.

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Seize the Day: The Church's Opportunities in Society

by Herbert R. Doggette, Jr.

During the remaining years of the 20th century, America will undergo such significant and rapid changes that children born in the year 2000 will enter a society that in many ways will be unrecognizable.

As the economist Kenneth Boulding says, almost as much has happened since we were born

as happened before. These changes will provide tremendous challenges and opportunities for the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Let's look at just a few of the changes coming that by the year 2000 will bring major challenges to the church.

- Many of the technologies just beginning to emerge will become fully mature (speech recognition systems, smart cards, optical disk storage, artificial intelligence/expert systems, etc.)

- Most households (60-65 percent) will have two people or less. Since 1950 the divorce rate has doubled and the percent of people living alone has tripled. Today, there are six million more women than men, and more than 50 percent of mothers with children under the age of six are working outside the home.

- It is quite probable that more than 25 percent of all women currently in their late 20s will remain childless.

- There will be 10 million more people over the age of 65 (35 million vs. 25.7 million today).

- Fully one-third of the population will be minorities.

- Service industries, as opposed to manufacturing industries, will create the new jobs.

- The number of people entering the workforce will continue to decline and the workforce will become older, more female, and more disadvantaged; many workers will be functionally illiterate.

These trends suggest that the Adventist church must become increasingly focused on the changing role of women in our society and our church; the dramatic increase in the active aged—a largely untapped resource for the church; and the rapidly increasing numbers of minorities and foreign-born members in North America—groups that should be properly represented in leadership positions.

A change with which I am directly familiar is the use of increasingly large and powerful computers to bring about *efficiencies*. If misused, these could result in a completely controlled society. My government agency, the Social Security Administration, is moving in this area. This administration touches the lives of nearly all Americans. A few facts will illustrate this point.

- In 1988, 125 million workers will pay \$248 billion in Social Security taxes.

- In 1988, over 38 million people—about one out of every six—will receive checks totalling over \$217 billion.

- About 43 million people do business with the Social Security Administration every year.

- The Social Security Administration has issued and maintains active records on more than 205 million Social Security numbers.

The church should strengthen its ministry to ministers by making completely confidential counselling available. In addition, the church needs to explore the needs and concerns of ministers' wives.

In 1988, the Social Security Administration developed and published a "Strategic Plan for the Year 2000." One item in the plan called for negotiating voluntary agreements with all states to include a request for a Social Security number on all applications for birth certificates. This means a new parent would merely check a block on the application for a birth certificate, the state would notify the Social Security Administration, which in turn would issue a Social Security number to the newborn infant. This project is called Enumeration at Birth.

The Social Security Administration is moving rapidly to implement this project, and has already received a favorable response from 46 states. By the time the General Conference session begins in 1990, almost all of the newborn children in America will be issued Social Security numbers at birth.

Behind the scenes, many other so-called efficiencies are being implemented. Massive computer data bases are being routinely matched to deter/detect fraud in government entitlement programs, to locate parents who are delinquent with child-support payments, and to ensure compliance with the laws of our nation. The potential implications of these efficiencies are enormous.

None of these changes in society should come as a surprise to Seventh-day Adventists. Rather,

they should inspire us to move even more rapidly to finish the work while we can. Thank God, the church has produced leaders equal to the task, and with God's help, the 1990 General Conference session will produce leaders who will accelerate the advancement of this work.

As a church, we have many strengths. However, there are a few areas that need some focused attention if we are to successfully meet the challenges beyond the 1990s. As a concerned layman I offer these suggestions as to how we can move aggressively to shore up some long-standing weaknesses.

Incidentally, I have been thoroughly impressed and extremely pleased with the way our church paper, the *Adventist Review*, has modified its approach to meet the current needs of our constituency. I would like to see every department in the General Conference go through the same process. My suggestions can be seen as part of such a process of reexamination.

First and foremost, our ministers must be better prepared to deal with the pressures and temptations confronting them. Most of our pastors are strong, God-fearing Christians. However, far too many are being overwhelmed by the pressures of their responsibilities and submitting to temptations that bring disrepute to the church, disgrace to their families, and disillusionment to some members.

The church should strengthen its ministry to ministers by making completely confidential counselling available. Ministers are reluctant to reveal this need to their "bosses" for fear it will jeopardize their standing. In addition, relevant seminars where peers can communicate freely should be routinely conducted.

Second, and related to the first point, the church needs to explore the needs and concerns of ministers' wives. These women have served with great distinction as unpaid members of the pastoral team. Many have had to bear the "burdens of the ministry" along with their spouses. In addition, they have been expected to run the home, raise ideal families, and supplement the family income by working outside the home. In some cases, this has resulted in almost unbearable pressure and created serious problems. The church should

develop seminars and written materials specifically designed to help ministers' wives. A first step would be a national survey of ministers' wives, to properly identify these concerns.

Thirdly, Christian education has continuously proved its value. However, the cost, at all levels, is causing parents and students to seek alternatives. The church must find a way to subsidize the cost of Christian education, particularly at the elementary and secondary levels, so our youth can be given the strong foundation they need. We should reexamine using the tithe to pay a reasonable salary to high quality teachers.

Fourthly, the evangelistic program of the church has resulted in large numbers of new converts each year. Unfortunately, large numbers are also leaving the church and some who attend regularly are not fully committed. Specific programs need to be developed to improve the spirituality of our members. Positive, encouraging messages need to be promulgated from our pulpits and through our publications.

Our leaders today must bear awesome responsibilities, and be totally dedicated. We, the laity, must provide them with the support they need to develop and implement the programs of this great church. Working constructively together, we can successfully meet the challenges of the 1990s and hasten our Lord's return.

Herbert R. Doggette, Jr., the Deputy Commissioner, Operations, of the federal government's Social Security Administration, is responsible for the management of over 60,000 employees in some 1,300 offices around the country, distributing more than \$200 million of Social Security benefits annually.

Doggette, who has served as a deputy assistant secretary in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and as acting commissioner of the Social Security Administration, has received the highest awards given federal executives, including the rank of Distinguished Executive by President Carter and Meritorious Executive by President Reagan, bringing awards of \$20,000 and \$10,000 respectively.

In 1987 Doggette was named Alumnus of the Year by Oakwood College, which he attended for two-and-one-half years. He received his B.A. from the University of Maryland and an M.P.A. from George Washington University. Doggette has lectured on public administration at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale Universities. An active church member in the Allegheny East Conference, Doggette has served on several church committees and panels.

Adventism's Common Ground: Human Need

by Tom Wehtje

A smile of recognition broadened his face: "Oh, I know who they are! They don't eat nothin' but fish and chicken, right!?" Well, sort of. What is an Adventist? That's not an easy question, neither for the United Parcel Service driver inquiring during my last day of summer work what kind of college I would be attending, nor for the born-and-raised Seventh-day Adventist, like myself. It wasn't an easy question on Ingathering Day in fourth grade when a young mother answered my sales pitch and expectant pause with a pledge to contribute something if I first told her what an Adventist is.

"Well, um, we are *Seventh-day Adventists*. We keep the seventh day, Saturday, as Sabbath, and we believe that Jesus' second coming is soon." She unexcitedly kept her side of the bargain by giving me an offering, but I was not so sure that I had kept mine. Something about that answer lacked urgency, warmth, and real conviction. It lacked personal relevance. The Adventist message must be something more than a marketing of doctrinal differences, a "shop around, but we've got four-wheel drive, bucket seats, and bumper-to-bumper protection."

Like the Democrats and Republicans at their party conventions this summer, Seventh-day Adventists will need to establish an identity anew at the 1990 General Conference. And, as at the political conventions, "unity" will undoubtedly be essential for a clear identity. If political parties can find what Jesse Jackson calls "common ground," certainly the Seventh-day Adventist church can. Unity is a positive concept, not merely the absence of differences. The church may have many differences and maintain strong unity. As the variety in our cultures, geographical locations, and traditions expands—our unity can grow.

Unity cannot be imposed. Nor is it an end in itself. Unity is not tied to static conditions; it is not

opposed to development and change, but the channel for it. Our common ground is our common vision—union in Christ, celebration, hope in the Second Advent. Our common ground is not merely adherence to or profession of a common set of minimum requirements but a common experience. We move from our past to a disparate present, ahead to a common vision of the future, rooted in, but not constricted by, our past. From a common emphasis come unity and identity; from a relevant, consistent message, purpose.

On a Friday night this August I stood alone, shivering, on the pristine coast of Maine, breathless under splashes of Milky Way stardust. Imagining the Atlantic to be the Galilee, I wondered about Christ, under the same speckled dome, asking God about his mission—asking the Father what he wanted for his Son. I doubt that the answer he received differs much from that for the church today: Be joyful, overflowing with the vibrant fullness of life, and meet the whole range of human needs, both physical and spiritual.

Jesus responded by being a radical, a reformer. He shook up the establishment. He did not have institutional, hierarchical authority, yet showed such power he was asked by what authority he

Jesus responded by being a radical, a reformer. He showed such power he was asked by what authority he acted. He answered by proclaiming the gospel of Christ.

acted. He answered by proclaiming the gospel of Christ: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

The mission of meeting people's needs must form the unity of the Adventist church. With that vision, the church, united, can move aggressively, even radically, to confront the needs of humanity. The Seventh-day

Adventist message must be relevant because it addresses the common ground of our humanity. We all experience death, despair, guilt, hurt, love, hope—life. It is our mission to respond to the spiritual needs of people with the same love and pity and urgency with which we must care for the physically hungry, poor, and sick.

People need consistency. For a church professing to believe in Christian principles and the priesthood of all believers, it is an outrage that we are dragging our heels about allowing women an equal place in their own church. Just as Adventists once championed racial equality, we should now be in the vanguard of those advocating sexual equality for the whole of society.

If health is the motivating principle behind alcohol abstinence, why isn't obesity or sugar use likewise condemned? How does losing one's temper compare with wearing jewelry or drinking a glass of wine in Adventism? The comparison shouldn't suggest a lowering of standards. It does suggest that we have misinterpreted our rules of social conduct as being spiritual emphases.

People need to be able to ask questions freely. We must not just tolerate, but promote study, debate, and a spirit of discovery. Everyone has doubts; that is basic to our common human experience. But there is no such thing as a heretical *question*, not even asking if God really exists. That is a helpful question. If we think such questions, why not voice them? Rather than repressing them in private, where they can fester, let's share them on the way to a stronger faith. Many (including ministers and teachers) admit that what they express publicly about Adventist practices or beliefs, and what they believe privately are sometimes two different things. We can't condone hypocrisy. Monuments of inconsistency in enforcing behavioral codes distract from basic Adventist principles and a spirit of love and needs-meeting. The church needs to hear the candid views of its members, the open exchange of ideas—*Glasnost*.

Ironically, the sermon of a defrocked Adventist minister most vividly showed me the Advent message's relevance for meeting the needs of people. The very experience of losing his ministerial credentials made this preacher all the more

qualified to minister. Through his own experiences he addressed my haunting questions and emotions: disappointment, loss, joy, doubt, despair, suffering, the mystery of faith, the existence of God, the fear of inevitable death, and the hope of resurrection. The testimony of a man no longer welcome in most Adventist pulpits bolstered my faith, and strengthened my commitment to a church that is not perfect, but which has an enormous responsibility to share a message humanity needs desperately.

What is the Adventist message? Hope for humanity. God with us, with our needs. That is our "common ground."

Tom Wehtje is a junior English and mathematics major at Atlantic Union College and editor of *The Lancastrian*, the campus newspaper.

Discovering Our Future by Affirming Diversity

by Alyce Pudewell

Recently a letter to the editor was printed in a union conference paper that attempted to explain why women should not be ordained into the ministry. It said:

I am surprised no one has mentioned the obvious—whether or not women have the mentality to function in said capacity. . . . Whenever and wherever women have involved themselves in "causes," without exception such causes have suffered. . . . In all areas of denominational service, the women use their positions to use and abuse authority in the typical manner that females are noted for. Adventist women are not really wanting their so-called "rights;" they are desiring power. . . . Ordain if you will, but suffer the consequences!

The flood of letters responding to this reader's opinion was the greatest of any issue printed in the union conference paper.

But to me the issues raised by the letter was not the ordination of women. The issue was whether an official church paper should publish a letter that insults an entire class of members in the church. If the Adventist denomination is to survive into the 21st century, it will no longer be just

a harmless “exercise of free speech” to publish a letter defaming a group of the church membership. It will be a violation of Christian ethics.

Indeed, if the Seventh-day Adventist church is to not only survive but grow and flourish into the next century it must go beyond respecting its members; it must rely on its members for leadership. Unfortunately, as conferences and unions have set up committees to study such urgent topics as the slow growth of membership, decline in the paying of tithe, the disenchantment of the youth, the disinterest of young adults, and the members’ perception of the Adventist educational system, church officials have too often overlooked laypersons and limited membership on these committees to church administrators. This is an exercise in futility, for church administrators are not leaving the church from lack of interest, do not constitute the tithe base of the church, or decide whether or not to send their children to Adventist schools.

Other committees do include loyal, lay workers. Their excitement in problem solving can be contagious. Even then, certain relevant groups are never asked their opinion. I know of no committees that include, for example, non-tithe-paying, non-church-attending members.

As tithe is on the decrease, the giving to independent ministries and missions is on the increase. Adventists still want to give, still care about others. But they want to give to causes that do not discriminate against race or gender. They want to give to ministries that have a small administrative overhead; causes with which they have an emotional bonding and over which they have some control. The membership is sending a strong message to leadership: Do not patronize us; do not act paternalistically toward us.

Outside North America, for example in some Pacific Rim countries, indigenous church leaders are still not invited to lead. And yet Adventist laypersons are part of societies and cultures that can out-perform, out-bank, and out-trade America. The Adventist denomination is still slow to realize that members in these booming countries are capable of self-rule in church administration.

Where indigenous leadership has emerged, as in Inter-America, South America, and Africa, abundant, quick growth has often resulted. Because it is unruly, does not conform, and because it sometimes appears uncontrollable, fast growth can be frightening. But should we settle for slow, controlled passivity when assumptions of greater responsibility by lay leaders can lead to increased dynamism?

Paternalism robs the church of the energy, enthusiasm, and talent needed to create an Adventist church for the 21st century. After 1990 we need church leaders who understand their role is to empower the members to become the true leaders of Adventism.

Youth in the church also deserve greater respect. The degree to which an institution takes its youth seriously—including inviting them to serve as leaders—determines the future of that institution. The fact that today the highest exit rate in the Adventist church is among the young people is a sign that they do not feel the church trusts its youth enough to include them among the leaders of Adventism. This kind of paternalism robs the church of the energy, enthusiasm, and talent needed to create an Adventist church for the 21st century.

An increasing number of Adventists, in North America and worldwide, are becoming professionals. That changes the kind of expectations Adventists have of their leaders. As we mature in this way as a church, we need to remember that the goal of professionals is to eliminate the need for their services. Doctors heal so the patient no longer requires a doctor. A teacher educates so the student no longer depends on a teacher to learn. A minister enlightens so members can themselves become ministers. In each case, professionals respect others so much they adopt the goal of creating and nurturing self-sufficient persons to the point that they are no longer dependent, but are themselves capable of giving, creating, growing, and building others.

Disrespect for one another in the church is unethical; paternalism is not only offensive but counterproductive. After 1990 we need church leaders who understand their role is to empower the members to become the true leaders of Adventism. If after 1990 we become a community that has the common goals of enhancing one another's cultural diversity, and affirming one

another's value, Adventism can become known as that community that follows a servant leader. We will deserve to be known as Christians.

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