

Merit Pay for Ministers?

by Raymond F. Cottrell

The 1987 purchasing power of a pastor serving in Southeastern California Conference has dropped more than 30 percent since 1967, whereas in the United States as a whole, purchasing power of pastoral workers dropped only a little more than six percent over the same period of time.*

In a January 1987 meeting, the senior pastors of multistaff churches in southern California invited Jay Du Nesme, an Adventist investment banker, to meet with them and discuss retirement planning. It quickly became evident that no one's income was adequate even for meeting basic family needs, let alone having anything left for retirement.

As a result of that meeting, a group of pastors took their concerns to the conference administrators, who subsequently brought the matter before the conference executive committee. The conference committee established a Remuneration Task Force, consisting of six laypersons, three pastors, and the conference undertreasurer. With Du Nesme being asked to chair the task force, the laypersons included an attorney, a financial planner, an investment banker, a controller, a business owner, and a contractor. Since the last conference constituency meeting had already established an educational task force, one of whose functions was to study teacher remuneration, this task force only examined the finances of pastoral workers.

The task force set short- and long-term goals, spent several months in research, conducted two pastoral surveys, evaluated the responses, and prepared a formal report that included specific recommendations. The second survey, completed in June 1988, provided a stark profile of the pastors' financial plight. In order to provide for basic family needs alone, the average family's expenses exceeded denominational pay by more

than \$1,000 per month. Eighty percent of the respondents reported a spouse employed outside the home, with monthly spousal income averaging a little more than \$1,000, which they said was essential for financial survival. In other cases relatives and church members were providing financial assistance. Seventeen percent indicated that their children were in non-SDA schools because of the cost, even with the educational subsidy. Forty-four percent were considering the possibility of leaving the ministry, solely for financial reasons. Many respondents volunteered comments such as:

"Today I found my wife sitting on the kitchen floor in tears over finances."

"My sons would never consider the ministry because of the perpetual financial crunch."

The task force made a recommendation "That the wage scale recognize increasing levels of experience and responsibility."

"My in-laws are putting my kids through Seventh-day Adventist schools."

"Three-fourths of my girls' clothing comes from the local thrift store."

"I have not paid 1986 taxes and have no way of paying 1987's."

"Every month I have to dip into our savings to catch up."

Based on the information it accumulated, the task force formulated three recommendations to the conference executive committee:

1. "That the wage scale for Southeastern California Conference pastoral workers reflect the true cost of living in southern California."
2. "That the wage scale recognize increasing

levels of experience and responsibility.”

3. “That a ‘cafeteria plan’ benefits package, including the educational subsidy, be adopted, replacing the existing benefits package.”

The report provided detailed explanatory material for each of these recommendations. It also proposed a wage scale that would restore the purchasing power of workers’ salaries to where it was about 20 years ago. Under the “cafeteria plan” benefits package, a worker would select benefits to match his or her particular family needs, in most cases paying for those benefits with pretax dollars, thereby increasing take-home pay by lessening taxable income. The conference could also be helped financially, because it would be much easier to control the cost of benefits.

The task force did not think the church should or could compete with comparable wages paid in the business world. However, it recommended that the church provide its employees with a living wage that would allow pastoral workers “to concentrate their efforts on what they have been called to do.” “We have already lost valuable workers simply because of economic hardship, and we will be seeing many more leaving the ministry in the coming months and years if the problem is not corrected.” The fact that a majority of those now entering the ministry are relatively new converts rather than offspring of pastors and established Adventist families lends emphasis to this conclusion.

The conference executive committee discussed the recommendations, ways they could be funded, the impact their approval and implementation would have outside of the conference, the education of workers in personal finance, and the time required to phase in the plan. It then voted unanimously (by secret ballot) to accept the recommendations in principle, and asked the task force to set up a plan for funding and implementation.

Representatives of the task force and Southeastern California Conference participated in the North American Division Church Finance and Employee Remuneration Task Force that met in Washington, D. C., from July 11 to 15, 1988. This committee considered various aspects of church finance, including the Southeastern California

Task Force recommendations. Elder Neal Wilson chaired the meeting in Washington, which formulated a number of recommendations of its own, for presentation to the year-end meeting of the North American Division at Minneapolis in November. These recommendations largely consist of adjustments to existing policy that for the most part would have only minor effect on the situation in southern California.

However, it did recommend that a trial program be set up in three conferences and one General Conference educational institution. This pilot program would be modeled on the principles developed by the task force in Southeastern California Conference, which is requesting to be designated as one of the three conferences.

Southern California pastors await further developments with mounting interest and concern.

*United States Department of Labor statistics indicate that the cost of living in southern California has risen 420 percent since 1967, while the General Conference wage factor grew by only 322 percent. The cumulative national inflation rate over the same period of time was 343 percent. This means that in southern California it took \$4.20 to buy what \$1.00 would purchase in 1967. Nationally, it cost \$3.43 to purchase what \$1.00 would buy in 1967, while the church gave its employees \$3.22 to accomplish the same task. Obviously, the cost-of-living crunch on church workers in southern California is much more severe than in most of the country.

Raymond Cottrell served as a missionary in China for several years, as associate editor of the *Adventist Review* and the *SDA Bible Commentary*, and as book editor of the Review and Herald Publishing Association. Now retired, he writes and preaches extensively, and serves on the Southeastern California Conference Constitution and Bylaws Committee.

Changing of the Guard at the SDA Seminary

by Wendy Ripley

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary faculty recently chose a search committee at its August 1, 1988,

meeting for the purpose of selecting a new dean for the seminary. At the request of Dr. Richard Leshner, Andrews University president, recommendations were made to fill the position left vacant by the recent resignation of Dr. Gerhard Hasel. It is expected that a new dean will be selected and assigned responsibilities by the summer or fall of 1989. Hasel's resignation becomes effective December 31, 1988. Dr. Raoul Dederen, present associate dean of the seminary, will serve as acting dean until the new dean assumes responsibilities. Dr. Hasel will continue as a professor in the Old Testament department of the seminary.

The seven-member search committee began with 51 names suggested in response to letters sent from seminary faculty and students, union presidents, and General Conference officials. The committee reduced the list to 32, contacted each person, and requested résumés of those interested in the position. Dr. Norman Miles, secretary of the committee, predicts the list will be further reduced by half.

These vitae will be reviewed by the search committee in light of 18-20 specific criteria drawn from suggestions made by the seminary faculty. The ideal candidate will be ordained (ensuring the gender of the new dean), hold a Ph.D., give evidence of scholarship, teaching, and administrative experience, and be under the age of 62. Other criteria such as an open, healing personality, a willingness to decentralize, and a solid conservative stance on theological issues reflect the concerns resulting from the circumstances surrounding Hasel's resignation.

When asked for reasons for Hasel's resignation, Dr. Leshner replied that the dean resigned "because he was asked to resign." Leshner declined to elaborate stating that, "One reason a person resigns is so that the question 'why' does not have to be answered." Hasel also gives no reasons for his resignation, saying "There are plenty of other people who will say why."

Many of the seminary faculty anticipated a change of dean because of a growing concern over what some regarded as Hasel's "purging" of faculty members perceived as liberal and by his increasing interest in the seminary's autonomy

from the university. One evidence of this was the recent establishment of the Seminary Executive Committee, a move viewed by some as taking power away from the faculty and giving more control to the union presidents and General Conference officials who make up the committee. Hasel's desire for seminary independence was also shown at a spring 1988 faculty meeting in

Many of the seminary faculty anticipated a change of dean because of a growing concern over what some regarded as Hasel's "purging" of faculty members perceived as liberal and by his increasing interest in the seminary's autonomy from the university.

which he proposed a change in the mission statement of the seminary. (The mission statement was being revised for the self-study accrediting committee.) Attendance at seminary faculty meetings had steadily declined throughout the year; at this poorly attended meeting the sentence stating the seminary was a school "of Andrews University" was voted to be changed to read a school "at Andrews University." This same sentence, however, was discussed again at the next faculty meeting and restored to read a school "of Andrews University" following Leshner's explanation of the seminary's historical relationship to the university.

Hasel's resignation leaves in its wake a divided faculty and a confused student body. While the students rose to their feet in a standing ovation when Hasel approached the podium during this past August graduation, they are frustrated and concerned by the lack of information and the rapidity of recent events. Even the faculty who agree that it is time for new leadership within the seminary maintain that what was needed was a lateral move for Hasel resulting in an "all-win" situation.

While opinion is divided on Hasel's performance as dean, he is generally credited during his

post from 1981-1988 with successfully gaining the support of the conservative constituency during a time when confidence in the seminary was at a low following the events of Glacier View and the defrocking of Desmond Ford. He has also been a positive influence on skeptical attitudes toward the value of higher education.

Meanwhile, the search for Hasel's successor continues. According to Norman Miles, chairman of the search committee, all names currently on the list are well known within the academic community. The committee does not anticipate any kind of theological inquisition. Miles adds that there is no front-runner at this time.

The search committee will interview those candidates whose rèsumès meet the desired criteria and develop a short list to be approved by the

seminary faculty. This list will be submitted to the university president following the Annual Conference in October. The final names, however, will not be taken to the full Andrews University board until the February 1989 meeting. The new dean will assume the post sometime during the summer or fall of 1989.

When asked about his plans after December 31, Hasel stated, "My plans have already been laid out for me by the university. I will begin teaching in the Old Testament department beginning January 1, 1989."

Wendy Ripley teaches in the Andrews University English department and serves as the director of Academic Support and Advisory Services. She received her B.A. from Atlantic Union College and her M.A. from Andrews University.