

# An Expression of Sorrow and Apology

By Alfred C. McClure

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Speaking from his heart as the Race Relations Summit was drawing to a close Friday afternoon, October 29, North American Division president A. C. McClure addressed the gathering. Following is a condensation of his remarks. - [Adventist Review] editors

I want to talk with you for a moment or two as *your* president. Then, I want to share some words with you as a pastor. And finally, I want to speak as a friend, as a person.

First, as your president: We're not perfect, but the [NAD] leadership team has tried with some success to become a truly diverse staff. We have excellent leadership in various cultural groups. But I want to also say that we need it equally at every level of our structure.

I have something else to say to you as your president, and I want to speak specifically to my African-American brothers and sisters with whom I and all my Anglo colleagues have assumed a special relationship because of that abominable scourge of slavery. I want to say to you, I apologize. I'm sorry. [Prolonged applause.]

I'm sorry for the way you've been treated by our church, almost from the time of its birth. For example, here in Washington, as was recounted yesterday, where we had the unique opportunity to exercise leadership in race relations, to take a lead in desegregation, we ran away from it.\* I don't know all the circumstances. But I want to say on behalf of our church, I'm sorry. I don't know if any other president has said that publicly—it doesn't matter. But I do want to say it today.

Now, I've done my best to launch this conversation,

and I pledge to do all that I can to see that we do not lose the momentum of this event. I want to see the ship sail so far out to sea it cannot reverse course. [Applause.]

As a pastor my heart is with the [local] congregation—that is the true body and soul of the church. When it's all said and done, all that is of great importance happens in the local congregation. Thus, as a pastor I want to say that I'm going to seek in every way possible to press forward the agenda. And through my prayers, preaching, and whatever other influences I may have, I, along with you, want truly to promote harmony and understanding in every congregation in North America.

Now, in order to do that, I'm going to commission all of our staff here in the NAD office to make race relations a top priority. I'm going to ask them to develop a curriculum of understanding and make it available to all congregations in the NAD. [Applause.]

Finally, I want to offer a few words just as a person—stripped of title, role, position. Just as your brother, your friend, Al McClure. I've been moved emotionally, as well as intellectually stimulated, by the conversation of these few days. And I've been impressed that once again we're changing our church's racial environment.

But I'm persuaded that change cannot be a mandate, because it takes people to will the change. It cannot happen by mission statement, for only people can transform print into life. And it cannot happen by a strategy, for the most beautiful and comprehensive document voted by the most enthusiastic committee has to be implemented by people.

Change needs me in my personal life to show love, honesty, understanding, empathy, and acceptance in every interpersonal contact I have every day. The change will happen through me as a person, and through you, and you, and you.

Mine, I know, is a very small light. But by God's grace, this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine as we collectively strive for unity and harmony in anticipation of the Lord's return.

\*McClure was referring to an incident in 1943 when an Adventist woman died after being turned away from an Adventist hospital in Takoma Park, Maryland, because of the color of her skin.