

## NOTEWORTHY



### Saving the Children

By Bonnie Dwyer

The children in the Gisimba orphanage were starving. They had no water; kids were being killed and were dying from dysentery. It was 1994 and a massacre was under way in Rwanda. Foreigners were given a seventy-two-hour window to leave, but ADRA director Carl Wilkins had made the decision to stay and try to help.

"Probably the most incredible experience was [when] I had gone to the colonel [in Kigali].... He was out of town that day, but his assistant [was] eating down in the basement.... [He] said, '... you won't believe it—the prime minister's here.... Ask him.'"

Asking the prime minister seemed like the stupidest thing you could imagine, Wilkins told the PBS broadcast "Frontline" that featured his story on the anniversary of the genocide.

To ask the guy who was orchestrating the genocide seemed ludicrous, and yet Wilkins felt like he had no other option.

"Just go out in the hallway. He's in the next office. When he comes out, ask him," Wilkins was told.

"So I went out [into the hallway] ... and [a] door opens. Everybody snaps to attention, and here comes [the prime minister] and his little entourage. They're coming

down the hall, and I am, too."

"I put out my hand and I said, 'Mr. Prime Minister, I'm Carl Wilkins, the director of ADRA.'"

He stops and looks at me, and then he takes my hand and shakes it and said, 'Yes, I've heard about you and your work. How is it?'"

"I said, 'Well, honestly, sir, it's not very good right now. The orphans at Gisimba are surrounded and I think there's going to be a massacre, if there hasn't been already.'"

He turns around, talks to some of his aides or whatever [and he turns back to me and] he says, "We're aware of the situation, and those orphans are going to be safe. I'll see to it."

"So what's that mean? Now are they going to go and kill them? What's it mean? But there were certain times in this thing where you just [have to say], I've done everything I could.... I chose to go home. I chose to trust. You recognize that it's not about you. You're not it. There's bigger things happening again. So I went home and they were safe, and that was just a couple of days later that they were all moved to a safer part of a bad town. "

Wilkins concluded his interview by saying, "I'm thankful that people remember this ten years later, because there [are] people in Rwanda who will never forget it, and we need to have a connection. We need to live for each other."

### South Pacific Division Convenes Ellen White Summit

By Arthur Patrick

Ellen White continues to evoke hostile attack, intense study, and spirited support in the South Pacific Division, where a lively tradition of discussion about the prophet has evolved.

In 1999, the South Pacific Division (SPD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed a five-page "A Strategy Document for a Better Appreciation of the Ministry and Writings of Ellen G. White," and more recently held a summit on the prophet.

The summit convened February 2–5, 2004, on the campus of Avondale College, drawing 104 participants from the division's vast territories. Guest presenters from the United States were historian Gary Land from Andrews University; New Testament specialist Jon Paulien from the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University; and James Nix, director of the White Estate at the General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Local presenters included a range of specialists in biblical studies, theology, history, medicine, and



church leadership. A series of narrations by a woman and several men under the title, "My Personal Journey with Ellen White," was a heart-warming feature of the three evening programs. The Church intends to augment these testimonies with those of others and publish them as a book.

Topics included inspiration; Fundamentalism, and its impact on Adventism; biblical perspectives on prophets and prophecy; and the responsibility of a faith community to test claims that individuals have the gift of prophecy. There was discussion of why Ellen White's writings are not considered in the same way as the biblical canon. The Dammon affair, in which Millerite preacher Israel Dammon was arrested while leading a noisy meeting soon after the Great Disappointment of 1844 was also discussed.

In addition, Don McMahon, a medical specialist from Melbourne, reported on his comparison between lifestyle principles found in Ellen White's writings and those of other nineteenth-century health reformers. McMahon's analyses offered a fresh way to assess Ellen White's health writings.

The summit built solidly upon the foundation of the International Prophetic Guidance workshop of 1982, probably the most important event of its kind in SDA history relative to Ellen White. It demonstrated the value of biblical studies, systematic theology, and historical studies for those who would understand well and apply faithfully Ellen White's writings.

A twelve-page sheaf of responses from summit attendees now informs the ongoing work of the SPD Biblical Research Committee

as it seeks to lead the Church to implement Ellen White's legacy in a modern setting.

For a report of the summit, see the February 21, 2004, edition of the *SPD Record* at <www.record.net.au>. The Web site also includes an editorial, four interviews, and many letters on this topic throughout issues published in February and March 2004.

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## The Apocalypse at Carnegie Hall

By Stefanie Johnson

Virtuoso Virginia Gene Rittenhouse may have degrees from some of the most prestigious music conservatories in the world and a personality capable of defying dignitaries or border guards when necessary, but on Tuesday, March 2, she was visibly nervous.

"I worry that the music will not do the words justice," she told us. Perhaps anyone would sweat at the prospect of composing music for words from the book of Revelation, which include: "She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Particularly, if, as in this case, the piece was premiering at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

To be honest, we musicians were nervous, too. Like a difficult and well-loved book, our sheet music was blanketed with penciled notations. At the dress rehearsal, only hours before, dynamics were still being added, notes stripped, and harmonies rearranged.

While she worried about doing the words justice, we, as usual, panicked about living up to her expectations. She wanted us to be

her Aaron, to find a way to speak this vision—no small task.

The verbal spectacle of Revelation as manifested in Rittenhouse's oratorio, *The Vision of the Apocalypse*, is an equally challenging melodic montage of blistering brass fanfares, atonal woodwind gauze, and driving syncopated rhythms. The orchestration is epic. The contrabassoon, usually relegated to oom-pah obscurity, anchors a rare exhibit of orchestral possibility sprinkled with alto flute, harp, and E flat clarinet. Four vocal soloists join two choirs, one on stage and one in the first balcony.

At 7:30, Conductor James Bingham lifted his baton, and Rittenhouse spoke: "I am Alpha and Omega—the Beginning and the End." The Three Angels' message forms the core of fourteen movements, including "Babylon Is Fallen," "Here is the Patience," "No Night There," and "Resurrection." At the last note of the final Amen, the audience erupted into a standing ovation.

With the applause thundering in our ears, the first clarinetist leaned forward and said, "There are many kinds of fear. Some I like, and some I don't. I liked that one." He spoke for many of us. We have been with Rittenhouse to Soweto during Apartheid, to Communist China, to AIDS orphanages, to church floors all over the world, and we know what it feels like to step out in sometimes uncomfortable uncertainty, only to discover that the music is never inadequate when it sings the gospel.

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