

Discussed: mysteries, rumors, resignations, firings, missing money, eighteen-hour long constituency meeting, politics, investigations, audits

Things Fall Apart

By Bonnie Dwyer and Alexander Carpenter

On November 3, 2004, Pastor Getulio Rodriguez kissed his wife Alicia goodbye and walked out to his car. That evening when the police searched the vehicle they found his briefcase in the front seat and his keys still in the ignition. But the car had never moved.

A recent immigrant from Argentina, Getulio, age sixty-three, had pastored throughout South America, and had, two years previously, arrived in America with an R-1 visa obtained through the Lake Region Conference. Moving to be near his daughter and grandchildren, he and his wife settled in the College Avenue apartment complex in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

For five hundred dollars a month, Getulio served as a Bible worker and head elder at the Bethel II church, a recent Spanish language church plant, part of the exploding congregational growth among the immigrant-rich farmworker communities of the Midwest.

On the day that he went missing, his daughter Heidi stopped by the apartment and mentioned the car outside to her mother. Not worried about her husband, Alicia told her daughter that he was probably just talking with the apartment maintenance man, who was also an Adventist.

Both men enjoyed talking together and Getulio often offered his friend spiritual advice. Busy with her day care duties, Alicia didn't give the car another thought and returned to watching the children dropped off by area Hispanic families.

That evening, after all the children had gone home, she went outside and noticed the car still there. Worried, she called her daughter, who then notified the police.

When the officers arrived, they asked Alicia, who can't speak English, about changes in her husband's behavior. She mentioned that Getulio had seemed worried lately, which seemed to confirm the officers' assumptions. The police quickly formed a profile of a depressed, poor man, worried about the approaching holidays and their financial burden. Unable by law to begin searching for forty-eight hours, they left and Alicia began praying.

By the time the search began, both sons had arrived—Roly from Florida and Favio from Argentina. They hired a pri-



vate investigator, brought in a nonprofit search dog service, and distributed flyers throughout the city, offering a thirty-five hundred dollar reward for Getulio, who was last seen wearing a blue jacket, gray pants, and black shoes. But he remained missing throughout November.

On December 5, 2004, a couple of hunters discovered him hanging from a tree in a swamp, fifteen miles from home. The police declared it a suicide. However, for his family, mysteries remain.

Lake Region Conference Mysteries

The death of Getulio Rodriguez looms as one of many mysteries that have emerged during the last two years in the Lake Region Conference (LRC), which has seen the resignation of Norman K. Miles, the president; the reassignment of Gregory Baker, the treasurer; the resignation of Leroy Hampton, the second treasurer; the termination of Lillian Williamson, the assistant treasurer; the termination of Hugo Gambetta, the vice president; and the suspension and later termination of Vernice Shorey, the accountant.

In addition, four of the Hispanic pastors were put on administrative leave in July 2005. By August, there were more disciplinary actions: Miles was put on administrative leave, thus removing him from the pulpit as well as the administrative offices. In addition, the attorney retained by the conference was let go. The new attorney immediately began assembling papers for a court action against several of the officers in an effort to produce information about their activities.

There were significant questions to be asked, given the fact that there were rumors—of conference bank accounts being used to pay personal bills, unsecured noninterest-bearing loans to officers that never were repaid, R-1 visas being sold at a profit, fake documents being created for immigrants, money laundering, and financial accounts that were in such a disarray that auditors had not been able to form an opinion on them for several years.

Concerned constituents of the conference have tried to solve the mysteries, but it is not easy. What happens when things go wrong? As the people of the Lake Region Conference have discovered, it is ultimately their responsibility to insure that change is made, because the union and division levels above the conference do not have line authority over the actions of conference officers. Union and division officials can exert their influence, but ultimately, when things go wrong, it is

up to the constituents to elect different leaders.

Election Woes

The last election of conference officers took place during an eighteen-hour constituency meeting April 18–19, 2004, in South Bend, Indiana.

There was little public knowledge of any trouble within the Hispanic community in April. There were some rumors about a potential Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) investigation, and a flyer was distributed outside the meeting criticizing Vice President Hugo Gambetta, but most delegates had other concerns.

President Norman K. Miles was in trouble at the constituency session because he had downsized the conference by laying off five senior pastors in 2003. Letters had been circulating among the constituent churches for a year asking questions:

For the past two years, we have been assured that we have paid off...debts and we are doing well financially. Now, like lightening falling out of clear blue sky, we hear that we must lay off five pastors due to our poor financial status. The question is: Why?...

At the meeting in Marion, the Treasurer explained that tithe for December 2002 was much less than that of December 2001. So low that it reduced an expected annual tithe increase of between 8 and 10 percent to only 1.2 percent. Thus the picture presented is: We have no debt. And we had a 1.2 percent increase in tithe, giving us the largest tithe in the history of the conference. In spite of this we are told it is absolutely necessary to lay off these five pastors. The question is: Why?

The treasurer, Gregory Baker, who had given the explanation in Marion, was officially reassigned in October 2003 "at his request" to a position that would allow him to travel less because of important family considerations. However, statements from the General Conference Auditing Service noted that he personally purchased a boat and trailer that he sold to the conference for thirty thousand dollars, even though auditors noted its book value as seventeen thousand dollars. The president did arrange to keep Baker on the payroll as his assistant.

Facing the constituency that held his re-election in their hands that April day in South Bend, Miles tried to

put a positive spin on the finances. He talked about a title gain of 6 percent in 2003 that brought the conference from a negative balance in 2002 to a positive one in 2003 and was the third highest title gain of all conferences in the North American Division. However, the audited financial report that was part of the delegate packet included information of serious concern, and a long, spirited debate took place after the president's morning report.

At 1:55 p.m. the nominating committee was seated, and the meeting finally broke for lunch. At 3:40, the afternoon session began with the audit reports. In the document prepared by the General Conference Auditing Service, there were several notable items, particularly the statement that it had not been able "to obtain sufficient competent evidential matter to afford a reasonable basis for an opinion regarding the 2003 and 2002 financial statements."

It also noted several things that were not in compliance with church policy, such as how funds were deposited: "We were unable to obtain evidence that the executive committee approved the opening of two accounts with TFC Bank during 2003."

Another finding that ran counter to church policy concerned noninterest-bearing, nontemporary loans made to employees for purposes other than (a) to secure real estate or an automobile, or (b) in connection with a move. The amount of such loans grew substantially each year, with a total at the end of December 2003 of more than \$274,000 to officers and employees. The organization had also withheld title of \$156,518 payable to the Lake Union Conference.

It was 6 p.m. by the time the auditing reports were concluded and the nominating committee began its work.

The first nomination for president came to the floor at 8:55 p.m., and it was not for the incumbent. Twice the delegation returned names to the nominating committee: both Ricardo Graham (currently president of the Northern California Conference) and local pastor William Joseph were rejected in a confusion of motions on the floor. There were delegates who argued that the vote be taken by secret ballot. That motion was defeated.

At one point, when Pastor Mack Wilson moved that the delegation vote to return Graham's name to the committee and come back with the name of Norman Miles, the chair (Walter Wright, president of the Lake Union) instructed Wilson that he could only move that Graham's name be returned. Neither he nor the delegation could instruct the committee to return with a specific name. Wright also refused to let anyone speak to the motion, so no one was allowed to say anything

TIMELINE

Lake Region Conference Story

- 1994** *Norman K. Miles elected president.*
- 1995** *Hugo Gambetta named director of Hispanic Ministries.*
- 1996** *George Bryant elected director of Stewardship, Trust Services, and Religious Liberty.*
- 1997** *Gregory Baker elected treasurer.*
- 1998** *At 22nd Conference Constituency Meeting, unaudited financial papers included in delegate packets.*
- 1999** *George Bryant elected conference secretary.*
- 2001** *23rd Conference Constituency Meeting*
- 2002** *Auditors note inadequate records of plant funds, but issue opinion on financial statements of 2000 and 2001.*
Conference seeks private investigation into immigration irregularities.
- 2003** *Five senior pastors laid off.*
Private investigation reports problems with R-1 Visas.
Concerned constituents circulate letter with questions about finances and layoffs and suggest requesting a special constituency meeting.
Treasurer Gregory Baker reassigned to role of assistant to the president. Leroy B. Hampton hired as treasurer.
- 2004** **APRIL** - *24th Conference Constituency Meeting lasts for eighteen hours. Disputes emerge over reports and elections. Norman Miles is challenged in presidential election, but prevails in late night vote. Hugo Gambetta is elected vice president. Auditors report inability to form opinion on financial statements for 2002 and 2003. Auditors note bank accounts that have not been approved by the Executive Committee*
- NOVEMBER** - *Getulio Rodriguez disappears. His body is found one month later.*
- 2005** **FEBRUARY** - *Lake Union Executive Committee votes for in-depth financial investigation into Lake Region Conference.*
- MARCH** - *Norman K. Miles resigns as president, effective May 1, 2005.*
- JULY** - *Six officials terminated, resigned, or put on administrative leave. Special constituency meeting called by 20 percent of the churches. Dispute over how president is elected mid-term is resolved by requesting action from Bylaws Committee that will allow constituents to vote. Report from the Lake Union administration notes irregularities in 2001, 2003, and 2004 audits.*
- AUGUST** - *Executive Committee insists on electing president according to the provisions of the bylaws. Norman K. Miles is put on administrative leave from pastorate. Senior accountant Raoul Tejada is put on administrative leave. Virginia Shorey is terminated.*



about Ricardo Graham. Not until 11:15 p.m. did the name of Norman Miles come to the floor from the nominating committee.

"Elder Alvin Kibble called for a season of prayer before the vote," one delegate recalled in a letter urging each church to request a special constituency meeting.

He told the constituents, "this is a beautiful thing that you all are about to do here." Was it appropriate for Elder Kibble to call for a season of prayer and make a comment about the beauty of what was about to happen since he made no request for prayer or comment about the beauty of the process when the other names were recommended? After the season of prayer, delegates were asked to stand and vote on the motion to return the name. Approximately 250 people voted to accept [Norman K. Miles].

As the session continued, more delegates left. When it concluded at around 4 a.m. in the morning the remaining delegates had elected the secretary George Bryant, the treasurer Leroy Hampton, and the executive committee members, but had agreed to allow the executive committee to elect the departmental directors. [They had also made Hugo Gambetta a vice president.] Do we really want our church officers elected in the middle of the night by a relatively small group of exhausted delegates? Is this a reasonable way to conduct an election?

Miles, the President King

Norman K. Miles was first elected president of the Lake Region Conference in 1994. At that time, the conference had not totally recovered from financial losses that had occurred in the 1980s, when a shopping mall had been purchased by the conference as an investment. Instead of generating income, the strip mall had been a financial disaster. There were still loans to be repaid. Furthermore, the membership growth was stagnant.

Miles put together a leadership team that included Gregory Baker as treasurer and Hugo Gambetta as Hispanic ministries coordinator. The two played key roles in motivating change in the Lake Region Conference. George C. Bryant became conference secretary in 1999.

Under Miles's leadership, and with Gambetta's help, the conference began to grow—particularly within the Hispanic community. By 1998, five new congregations

had been organized—all Hispanic—three in Chicago, one in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and one in Berwyn. Tithe dollars were on the increase—by over a million dollars, according to unaudited financial statements shared with the constituents.

For pastors in the conference, Miles was known as someone who took care of those who supported him with generous housing and car allowances. For the pastor who had always wanted a Mercedes, the conference helped make it happen, and it included a built-in cell phone. If people needed advances on their salaries, they could get them. After all, that was something that Miles himself was known to have requested.

In May 2002, General Conference auditors told the administrative officers of the LRC, "The account due from the Lake Region president has grown to be very large as it more than doubled in 2001." Their recommendation: "This account needs to be analyzed to see why it is growing so rapidly and what steps can be taken to reduce it."

However, the culture within the conference was such that the president was rarely challenged. Pastors from within it described Miles as functioning like a king, and said that the Executive Committee seemed to support him no matter what he did or how much it cost the conference.

Within the American Black Caucus, as the group of presidents from the regional conferences is known, his stature grew. He was one of the architects of the Regional Retirement System voted into existence by the North American Division in 2001.

That same year at the Lake Region Conference constituency meeting, eleven congregations were received into the sisterhood of churches, and again the majority of them were Hispanic. What helped make the growth of the Hispanic churches possible was that pastors for the congregations were often listed as part-time employees of the conference. That way, the conference could add two congregations for the price of one.

However, finances continued to be problematic. The work of a blue ribbon committee had not lifted the conference out of the cycle of recurring losses and the corresponding decrease in operating assets.

In February 2003, the Executive Committee took action and voted a series of staff reductions—of senior pastors. The reaction from church members was immediate. An elder from one of the churches suggested that his congregation would consider pulling out of the conference. The town hall meetings scheduled around the conference seemed to generate more questions, rather than answer

them. By June, constituents were writing letters to the union and the division asking for an investigation.

Miles did not tell the constituents, or anyone else at that time, that an investigation was under way—of alleged illegal activity within the Hispanic community regarding its relationship to conference finances. When the private investigation uncovered questionable activity, Miles's response was not only to ignore the implications of the findings within his own conference, but to disavow them publicly in a meeting with leaders of the Hispanic work in other parts of the country.

The Pacific Union Conference, however, took the findings seriously, and it barred Hugo Gambetta from speaking in any of its pulpits. A report of the committee's voted action was sent to both Gambetta and Miles.

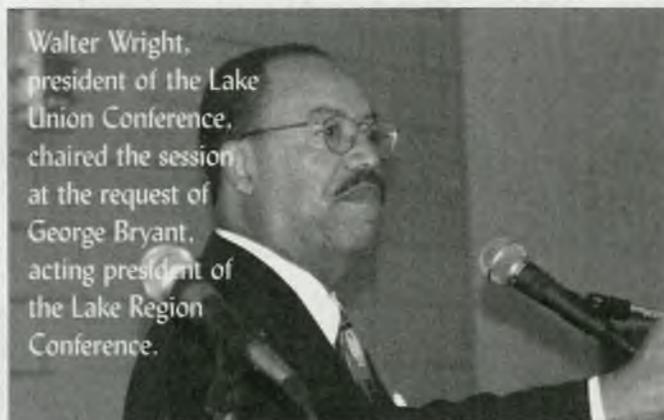
Gambetta, the Charismatic Shepherd

Two years before he died, Getulio Rodriguez had contacted Hugo Gambetta about getting an R-1 visa into the United States. Gambetta consented and didn't charge Getulio his usual fee, which was sometimes as high as five thousand dollars. An Argentine himself and a former theology teacher in Costa Rica, Gambetta joined the Lake Region Conference in 1995 as its Hispanic Ministries director. He was known for his energetic evangelistic campaigns and for helping immigrants who wanted to come to the United States.

Gambetta is a controversial figure throughout the South and Inter-American Divisions. There are Web sites that tout his interpretations of Daniel 17, and others that herald the bans put on him to prevent him from speaking in Argentina and Paraguay. His own independent ministry, *El Eterno Evangel*, promotes his 2004 crusade in Mexico, where more than a thousand people were baptized. The site also features a "Frequently Asked Questions" section easing fears about the independent flavor of his ministry and pointing out that criticism arises wherever the truth is preached.

"All the people talk about Gambetta," mentioned one Argentine familiar with the South American Adventist scene. That seemed to be true in the Lake Region Conference as well, where Gambetta ran all things Hispanic. He hired and moved pastors, preached many evangelistic crusades, and the Hispanic work flourished. With rapid Hispanic immigration into the United States, the evangelistic fields were ripe to be picked.

Pastors loved having him do crusades at their church-



Walter Wright, president of the Lake Union Conference, chaired the session at the request of George Bryant, acting president of the Lake Region Conference.

es. They would distribute DVDs of his preaching in the communities and then he would personally come to town and baptize up to fifty people at a time. And the pastors never had to draw up a budget or pay his expenses. Current LRC pastor Juan Rivera states that Gambetta is responsible for planting at least thirty-five churches.

But not all the Hispanic constituents were happy. Due to the bifurcated cultural mix of the LRC—with both Hispanic and African American churches—the leadership had formed a section within the youth department for Hispanic youth. Called the Hispanic Youth Federation (FEHJA), its president, José Romeo Sosa, and Gambetta did not get along.

Adventism in much of Central and South America is the faith of early missionary Adventism. It is a church that often defines itself in opposition to the two dominant and competing faiths of its milieu: Catholicism and Pentecostalism. As a result, it is a church defined primarily by its doctrinal difference.

Juan Rivera, current pastor of the Bethel II and Blue Island churches, says the Hispanic immigrant membership is conservative and overwhelmed with mainstream Adventism and American ideas. Thus, he adds, "they want the old gospel preached." He paraphrases what he hears. "They say to Adventist pastors, 'if you just preach Jesus Christ, then go be a Pentecostal.' They want to hear the Three Angels Message." Gambetta knew that world. And he preached it straight and true.

Compared to Gambetta, José Romeo Sosa, the head of the Hispanic Youth Federation, seemed like a big-city liberal. Mostly working with second- and third-generation urban Hispanic youth, some of whom don't even speak Spanish, he ran programs that appeared barely



Adventist to Gambetta's newly immigrated pastors. They complained that instead of Bible study, the youth played volleyball and listened to rock music. In addition, many of the pastors objected to Sosa's direct style and refused to help fund Youth Federation programs. Plus, they felt that the youth outside of Chicago were neglected.

As the tension increased over ideology and money, Sosa became a polarizing figure, especially in opposition to Gambetta. Things came to a head between the two at the LRC constituency meeting in April 2004. Sosa circulated a letter that brought several complaints against Hugo Gambetta. He stated that Gambetta had hired at least six pastors who had been fired in other countries due to adultery or other reasons, three of whom were on Gambetta's advisory committee. He suggested that Gambetta had "abused his position by bringing in hundreds of persons from different countries, but especially of Argentina and Dominican Republic." Sosa added: "these persons entered the United States with the famous Visa R-1."

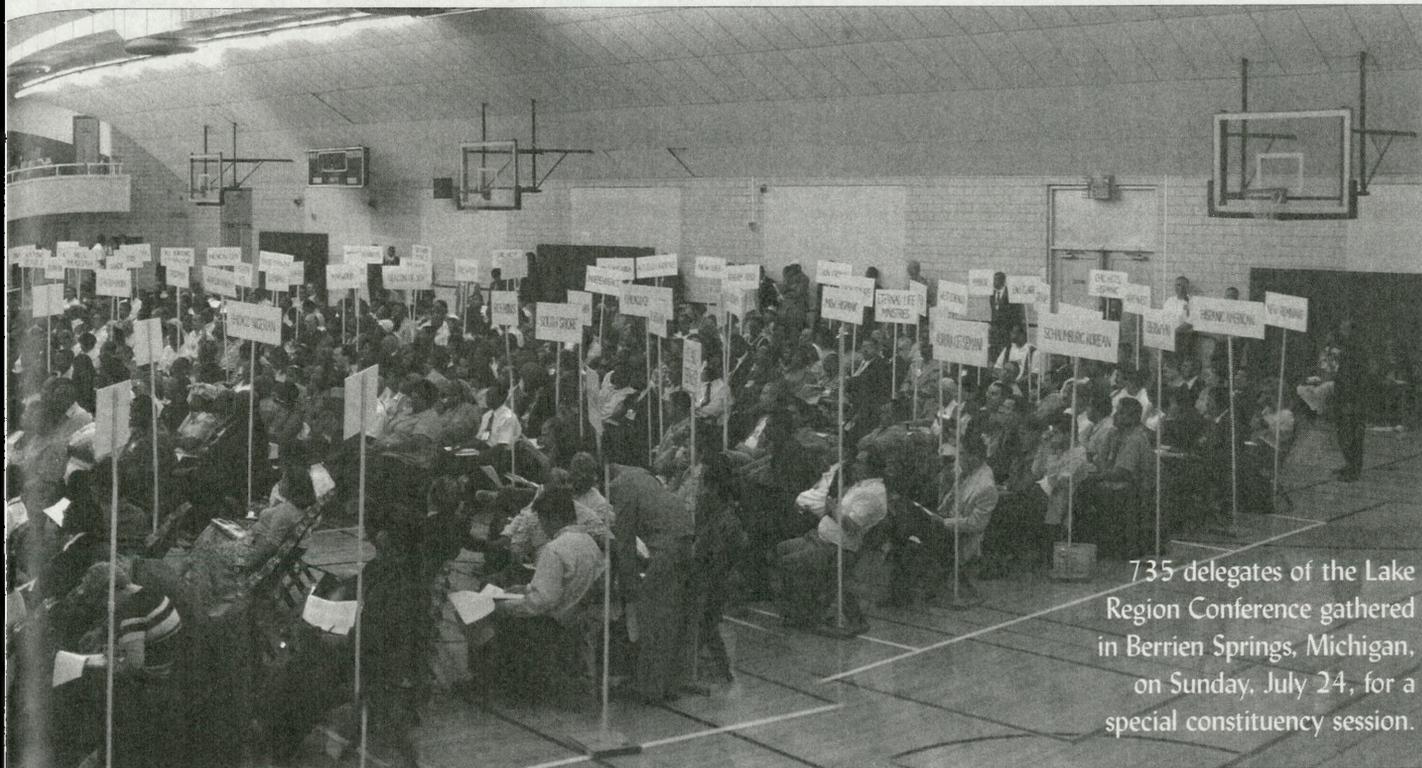
Sosa suggested that, although brought in to work for the LRC, they didn't actually end up being employed by the conference. Those who had, though, were distributed to key churches to support Gambetta. Sosa also stated that Gambetta and a relative of his had offered support for the Youth Federation and a job at an Adventist academy if he would back Gambetta. Sosa objected to the job, pointing out

that he only had two years of college. Gambetta, he says, told him not to worry, that was something "he could fix."

During the disruptive constituency meeting Sosa left early—before the re-election of Gambetta in the early morning hours of April 19. Shortly thereafter, the eight- to nine-hundred member strong Youth Federation was reorganized into four separate sections—Michigan, Wisconsin, Chicago Suburbs, and Chicago Downtown. Sosa no longer works in the conference.

Things have not gone well since then for Gambetta, either. On July 11, 2005, Gambetta was put on administrative leave, and on July 22 he lost his credentials and was terminated. At the same time, the four members of his advisory council were also put on leave. His wife's Spanish language Adventist book store had already been closed before the last conference audit.

At the beginning of August, news releases from the Lake Union Conference said, "the union is still not aware of the timing or nature of any investigation by local, state, or federal authorities or if any investigations exist." But Carl Rusnok, regional communications director for U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, said that there is an on-going investigation and that the Church knows about it.



735 delegates of the Lake Region Conference gathered in Berrien Springs, Michigan, on Sunday, July 24, for a special constituency session.

PHOTO FROM THE LAKE UNION HEADQUARTERS WEBSITE LUC-ADVENTIST.ORG/ARTICLE

Investigations and Audits

By July 2005, trying to understand who was investigating whom, for what, and when almost required a diagram.

The General Conference Auditing Service was doing the annual audit of conference books as required by conference bylaws. But (as noted above) accounting records were in such a disarray that it was unable to form an opinion regarding the 2002 and 2003 financial statements. That the records continued to be in disarray was significant because the auditors had informed the conference in 2002 that major steps needed to be taken to reconcile bank statements on a timely basis, insure correct postings in the general ledger, complete an inventory of plant fund accounts, insure that offerings were passed on for their intended purposes, reconcile the many outstanding accounts receivable, and put into place checks and balances to manage the risk of fraud, among other things.

Within the Executive Committee of the conference a financial subcommittee headed by Donald Gothard, a retired General Motors executive, was putting pressure on Norman Miles. As a result, he resigned from the presidency in March 2005, according to one of his friends.

Word of concern about immigration violations had reached the Lake Union by 2005, and the union Executive Committee had voted to instigate an in-depth financial audit of its own. This investigation led to the

July action of the Executive Committee, in which six people found their employment status changed: among them, Lillian Williamson, assistant treasurer, terminated; Leroy B. Hampton, treasurer, resigned; Hugo Gambetta, vice president, terminated; Vernice Sorey, accountant, suspended. Also, four pastors were put on administrative leave: Ciro Aviles, Osmin Hernandez, William Rojas, and Alfredo Solis.

Special Constituency Meetings Begin

On July 24, 2005, the constituents got what they had wanted for a very long time—a special constituency meeting to elect a new president, duly called and posted by the required 20 percent of the churches.

However, by the time of the meeting, a close reading of the conference's constitution and bylaws called into question the ability of the constituents to elect the president between regularly scheduled meetings. Instead, there was a provision for a special committee, made up of the Executive Committee and remaining active members of the Nominating Committee from the previous session, to elect a president and bring a recommendation back to the delegates at a future session.

For the church members who questioned the way the election had been handled in 2004, there was great discomfort with having the same people responsible for another election.

A motion was made and passed to have the Bylaws Committee meet and propose changes in the constitution that would allow the constituents to be responsible for the election at a second special constituency meeting to be held in October.

The session concluded with a report on the union's investigation into the internal activities of the confer-

ential man. He points out that hard times are nothing new to South American pastors and that the pressure of the holiday season is different for his Adventist Hispanic family culture.

Roly thinks that his father knew something about illegal activities surrounding Gambetta and his men. He points out that the dogs, provided by a nonprofit search organization (the police never used dogs), didn't go down to the railroad tracks behind the apartment building where Getulio and Alicia lived and where the police think Getulio walked for fifteen miles before hanging

Create a new organization-wide conversation about honesty, integrity and trust in the conference with increased credibility and trust among constituents and workers.

—Strategic Action Plan

ence and the serious irregularities found in the handling of accounts. A delegate asked how many people were being investigated. Lake Union president Walter Wright responded that they were not investigating people, but accounts and records; the appropriate people were then being held accountable for the irregularities found.

There was no mention of any investigation regarding Getulio Rodriguez.

A Son's Lament

Getulio had arrived in America via Gambetta. But he was paid his five-hundred dollar salary by the Bethel II church. According to Roly, Getulio's older son, his father and mother supplemented their income through odd jobs like temporary factory work and child care. Apparently, a few months before he went missing, Getulio had taken all their earnings and sent them to the Lake Region Conference. The conference had then sent back a check, minus some money—a system devised to satisfy visa requirements. Getulio apparently felt that the amount he received back wasn't right. He had sent more money, but the return check did not arrive until after he had disappeared.

Apparently bothered by the financial situation, Getulio had mentioned to his wife that he was going to look for another side job on November 3. But that day he also took along his Bible study guides and had forthcoming sermon dates penciled into his calendar, both of which were in his briefcase. Roly wonders how his father's behavior fits with the police profile of a sui-

himself. Instead, they immediately followed a scent through an open and unfinished building that provides access to the street on the side of the complex and away from the cameras at the apartment complex entrance. At the middle of the street, the dogs stopped.

Andres Abreu, the editor of the Michigan-wide Spanish newspaper, *El Vocero*, doesn't think that Getulio killed himself. He interviewed one of the hunters, who agrees, citing the branch height and cleanliness of the still-hanging body. The tree is about 150 feet away from a road and the railroad tracks, in the middle of a swampy area.

However, Lieutenant Paul Warwick of the Grand Rapids Police Department, echoes the police report, stating that Getulio was depressed about making ends meet and thus hanged himself. As quoted in an article published in *El Vocero*, written a few days after her father was found, daughter Heidi counters, suggesting that there is a difference between being worried and depressed.

Choking back tears, Roly says that Getulio was always a good father to his three children. Heidi and her husband and children have moved to Arizona. Alicia has gone to Florida, near Roly. They wonder what Getulio knew on November 3, 2004.

Driving from Grand Rapids to Chicago to cover Hernandez's Blue Island church, Pastor Rivera dismisses the rumors. "You hear a lot of crazy things," he says. In defense of Gambetta, he points out the church growth and evangelistic success. "Everything we have is from Gambetta," he notes. Then he recalls talking with his old boss after his termination. "He was sad, but didn't sound apologetic. Why do you apologize? He was working for the Lord."

The Last Sabbath

On a rainy Sabbath this August, it was after 11 o'clock at the Hyde Park Seventh-day Adventist Church when the organ segued into the opening processional for the elders. Making his way up the center aisle, Norman K. Miles stood out from the rest because of his white robe, striped with rich African fabric. The first four men took their places on the front row. Miles, the academy principal, and another minister climbed the stairs onto the platform and sat with the choir tightly around them.

The Scripture lesson for the day came from Ezra 9:5-9: "O, my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. . . . And now for a little space grace hath been shown from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. . . ."

Miles offered the pastoral prayer, the prayer of David at his darkest hour: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness. . . . Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Blot out all my iniquities. . . . Amen. There is nobody here that doesn't need to pray that prayer," he said.

Children's story, the *Steps to Christ* mission project, comments from the academy principal, prayer for the students leaving for college, special music, offering—it was after 12:30 when Elder Miles rose to preach his sermon titled "A Nail in His Holy Place," based on the Scripture reading. He began with the Israelites and their repetitive problems with sin, then made the application to the congregation.

"Everybody here has done something wrong. Oh, you said you wouldn't do it again, and you did. That's the nature of sin to come back." Another aspect of sin, he noted, is how it affects everyone. It is not an individual thing. It has a ripple effect, like a rock in a lake. Naturally, this discussion of sin led to the need to repent.

"There is a power that comes in confession," Miles boldly proclaimed. "There is nothing weak about saying I was wrong, I didn't do right, and I need to talk to you about it." Then he stepped out of the pulpit and walked down the stairs to stand in front of the audience.

"God has a plan for every life here. Repentance is what we have to do." The organ began to play. A woman stepped to the microphone and with tears in her voice sang, "How many times does it take for us to learn?"

As she concluded her song, Miles made his call for

the congregation to repent of their sins, to come to the front and stand before their God. The organist played softly as he finished his words and then filled the room with music, but no one moved. Miles looked across the silent audience; the organist played on. Finally, one man rose and with head bowed walked to the front. Miles thanked him and acknowledged that this brother had requested baptism. The music from the organ continued. Miles waited, but no one else came forward. When the song ended, there was prayer. The service concluded.

A week and a day later, the Lake Region Executive Committee voted to put Norman K. Miles on administrative leave.

The People and Their Plans

The action taken by the Executive Committee to put Miles on administrative leave—after he had already resigned as president—was seen by some as a move to prevent him from being re-elected president, because his name had been mentioned as a possible candidate. It was just one of the notable actions of the committee in August. Consideration of possible court action against Norman K. Miles, Hugo Gambetta, and Leroy Hampton was also on the agenda.

The Executive Committee also went ahead with the procedure spelled out in the bylaws on the election of a president between sessions by the formation of the special committee. This happened in spite of the action taken by the constituents in July to convene another special session of the constituency specifically for the election of a president on October 2. In September, this special committee (Executive Committee plus the old Nominating Committee) intends to meet to act as a search committee. It plans to put together a list of potential presidential candidates.

Whoever is elected, job one has already been spelled out in a strategic action plan drafted by an advisory team for the July 24 constituency meeting. "Create a new organization-wide conversation about honesty, integrity and trust in the conference with increased credibility and trust among constituents and workers," it said. "Demonstrate open and honest communication."

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