

## NOTEWORTHY



### A Report on the Annual Council

By Larry R. Evans

Well over two hundred delegates attended this year's Annual Council. Of special interest was the sharp increase in the number of women who attended—from twenty-four during the past quinquennium to forty-two the next. An intentional effort was made to add young professionals of both genders. Six were added to the section to which the General Conference could have direct input.

Some of the most significant issues, in my opinion, include the following:

#### Tell the World

The Annual Council opened with an emphasis on mission and the "vision" (not program) as to how we will share the gospel from 2005 to 2010. Specific goals include measurable objectives in areas such as: Spiritual Growth (a growing emphasis on the personal spiritual experience of our members); Community Involvement (members becoming more involved in community service); Personal Witness (encouraging five million members to bring at least one person to Christ and into fellowship of the Church); City Outreach (new congregations in more than twenty-seven large cities); Church Planting (plant and nurture twenty thousand new congregations in unentered areas); Evangelistic Programming (four hun-

dred thousand evangelistic outreach and discipleship programs, including one hundred thousand youth evangelistic series); Media Ministry (creative use of technology and communications to reach every person).

#### Commission on Ministries, Services, and Structures

In the previous quinquennium, a commission was established to look primarily at the effectiveness of departments at the General Conference. This new commission, though new in composition, with some members carried over from the previous one, will have a much broader scope. A serious look will be taken at "structures," which include the various constituency levels of the Church's governance. There is no particular bias other than the need to take a good look at ministries and structures and see if there is a better way to do it in conferences, unions, and divisions. A bit of humor emerged when one delegate suggested, "There must be a better way of doing Church, but turkeys don't vote for Christmas." The work of the commission will span the next five years.

#### Use of Tithes Study Commission

This commission will review and analyze current practices and policies on the use of the tithe. Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy documents will be reviewed. Questions have been raised over the years and these questions will be reviewed in light of the biblical and Spirit of Prophecy principles.

#### Annual Leave Provisions

For decades, missionaries were granted furloughs and optional leaves. Times have changed but not the desire to meet the need of our missionaries, who often serve in hardship areas and at long distances away from immediate family members. Long eight-week furloughs often present difficulties for the missionaries and their employers. A more flexible annual leave program was voted, with a phase-in period over the next two years. Annual leave provides a more flexible approach—hopefully with less red tape—to provide vacation time for our missionaries.

#### Organization and Administration

An essential element of this action has to do with church structures, such as local and union conferences. Previously, when local and union missions progressed to conference status they did it for keeps. However, now it is possible for local and union conferences to revert back to mission status. One significant difference between a conference and a mission (among others) is that the leadership of a mission is appointed by the next higher organization. This measure is not meant to be punitive, but to assist both the local field and the work of the Church in general.

#### Filling Committees and Leadership Positions

The General Conference has well over one hundred standing commit-

tees. During Annual Council, the nominating committee filled positions not filled at the General Conference Session and appointed committees that cannot be filled by ADCOM (the Administrative Committee). Some rearrangements with committees were made. For example, the Faith and Science Council was created to replace BRISCOE. This committee will continue to explore the interrelation between the biblical understanding of creation and scientific discoveries and theories that have an impact on the topic of origins. It is composed primarily of international biblical scholars and scientists, with a small number of General Conference administrators.

#### Final Report from the Commission on Higher Education

The lengthy report outlined numerous strengths of our world educational program. Our schools are making a difference. There are specific areas of concern that need to be addressed, such as compliance with existing educational policies; the large percentage of non-Adventist teachers and students in some institutions/schools; and the large number of Adventist youth not attending Adventist schools and the impact this will have on the Church in the future.

There was a good spirit throughout the council and multiple testimonies by various international world leaders regarding the vision and mission of the Church. The council observed a time of silence for those who have suffered or lost their lives in recent catastrophes around the world.

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## New Ministerial Credentials in Northern California

By Edward Fergusson

Beginning the third week of June, Jim Pedersen, executive secretary of the Northern California Conference, began to distribute new credential cards for ministerial personnel in the Northern California Conference. The new card differs from predecessors in three ways. First, it is the conference's first all-color credential. Secondly, it is the first to include employees' photographs. Most importantly, it is the first gender nonspecific credential for the conference.

The story of this development began at the last constituency session, which was held on May 16, 2004, when a discussion on gender equity occurred on the floor. Although no specific action was taken at that session, administrators of the conference pledged to have ongoing dialogue with the Executive Committee on this issue. Part of that discussion involved gender inclusive credentials similar to those issued in the Southeastern California Conference.

Since all credentials are generated from the office of the executive secretary, Pedersen led out the process to determine what a new credential should include. He and other officers consulted with administrators in the Southeastern California Conference, the Pacific Union, and the North American Division. They also studied the policies of the General Conference and North American Division. Finally, the Administrative Council of the Northern California Conference examined the proposed wording.

At a gathering on February 16, the conference's Executive Committee took action to "approve the wording of the Northern California Conference Ministerial Credential and License

Cards to include the wording *ordained/commissioned together.*" That action was the final element needed to produce new credential cards. The conference delivered them to its pastors at their summer meetings.

There has been little reaction to changes in the cards. Many pastors have expressed appreciation, but lay members—most of whom have never seen a credential card—have not reacted. Issuance of the new cards is a small, mostly symbolic move, but it means that male and female pastors in the Northern California Conference now carry identical credential cards.

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## Report on Southern Africa Union Conference Action

By Eric Webster

A momentous decision was made at the Southern Africa Union Conference session held in Bloemfontein, South Africa, over the weekend of November 18–20, 2005. The decision was made to amalgamate two separate conferences in the south and two in the north of South Africa: the Cape Conference and the Southern Hope Conference in the south, and the Transvaal Conference and the Trans-Orange Conference in the north. The motion passed by a vote of 163 to 28.

Historically, the Cape and the Transvaal Conferences have been "white" and have resisted suggested mergers with their fellow "black" conferences. However, let it be understood that for the past fifteen or twenty years these two conferences have had an open

racial policy that allows anyone to join. Many black members have joined white churches, and a number of black congregations exist in these so-called white conferences.

Transvaal Conference not only has an open policy toward black members, it also incorporates all the "colored" (mixed race) and Indian churches within its territory. In the south, the Southern Hope Conference caters to black and colored members in its area. At the same time, the Cape Conference has many individual black and colored members, and a few black congregations.

However, in South Africa, where segregation and later apartheid held sway for so long, many have continued to look upon the Cape and the Transvaal Conferences as remnants of apartheid. This is largely because their conference administration is predominantly white, as are their ministers (except that the Transvaal Conference has colored and Indian ministers, who care for some churches and districts).

During the past few years, the Cape and the Transvaal Conferences have consistently voted against merging with the black conferences. In the most recent conference sessions held in October 2005, the Cape Conference voted in favor of merging by 56 to 46 percent. Although this was a majority, the vote to merge needed to win with at least 66 percent. In the Transvaal Conference, delegates voted against merging by 56 to 44 percent. Here the merge was clearly voted down.

The Southern Africa Union administration has advocated and encouraged these mergers for a long time. This has been with the blessing of the division and the strong encouragement of the General Conference and the world church.

Perhaps in desperation and out of frustration with these two conferences, the union turned to General Conference Working Policy B 65 05 to imple-

ment its desired goal. This was presented as a basis for suggesting one new amalgamated conference in the south and one in the north, although the actual policy was not made available to the delegates.

The relevant policy reads as follows:

**B 65 05 Territorial Adjustments or Resizing of Territories.**

1. If it is proposed to make territorial adjustments between local fields or between unions, or to resize the territorial units, the proposal shall be considered by the executive committee of the next higher administrative organization, at a time when a full representation of the territories and organizations involved is present.

2. If the proposal is approved by the executive committee of the next higher level of church organization, the proposal shall then be routed to the executive committee of the division, in the case of local fields, and of the General Conference, in the case of union territories, where, in each case, the final decision shall be made.

3. If the territory of a conference or union conference is involved, the administration of the next higher organization

shall use its discretion to examine constitutions and legal requirements to determine whether a constituency meeting should be called and, if so, at what point(s) in the procedure.

There are those who question whether this policy is applicable in this case. The policy speaks about "territorial adjustments between local fields," and those who question it feel that this recent action has made no "territorial adjustments."

The tussle might well be between the legitimacy of the conference constitutions, which require a 66 percent vote to disband, and this action of the higher organization, which is based on policy B 65 05.

After the vote at the union session there was a feeling of euphoria and a sense that God had led. It was quite remarkable that a white administrator from the Cape Conference had been voted in as the new union president.

It remains to be seen how the almost 50 percent of the membership of the Cape and Transvaal Conferences will react to this decision. Very few were delegates to the union session. Will they accept the action graciously or will there be pockets of resistance?



After two special sessions on March 19 and March 26, when these two new conferences are supposed to come into existence, we will know how many churches might choose to remain outside the conference fold.

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Eric Webster is editor of *Signs of the Times* in South Africa.

## Following the Money in the Lake Region Conference

By Bonnie Dwyer

Now comes Plaintiff Lake Region Conference Association of Seventh-day Adventists, by and through its counsel, Barclay and Dixon, P.C. and Hooks Law Offices, P.C., and hereby complains against Defendants Norman K. Miles, Hugo Gambetta, and Greg C. Baker." So begins a suit filed in the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, on October 4, 2005.

Given the positions of Miles, Gambetta, and Baker as former administrative officers of the Lake Region Conference, the suit is an unusual move by a church entity seeking to put its financial house in order. However, most conferences are not faced with officers accused of selling R-1 visas and using conference funds for personal expenses—as the suit alleges.

The conference seeks a full and complete accounting for each of the defendants' bank accounts, then asks for a return of any money they improperly gained, plus the costs and expenses incurred by the Lake Region Conference. It also requests that the defendants be ordered to forfeit and return to the Lake Region Conference all income and salary that the conference has paid to them since 2002, plus damages of fifty thousand dollars apiece. Exactly how much the confer-

ence would gain altogether is unknown—or whether it would be able to collect. But whatever money it recovers will be helpful.

In November, Jerome Davis, the new conference president, informed his constituents that the conference "treasury department has encountered significant challenges that have impacted the conference's financial ability to operate."

Rather than file for bankruptcy, the new treasurer, Theodore Brown, and his staff put together a recovery plan that called for mortgaging the conference office building and camp in exchange for a loan from the Lake Union Conference in excess of two million dollars. Both the conference and union Executive Committees approved the plan, "with the understanding that it should be brought before...the members of the Lake Region, for [their] approval as well," Davis told the constituents on November 30.

Four town hall meetings were scheduled in December to present the plan. Some members wondered if the constituents should have been given a chance to vote formally on the plan earlier in the process.

Meanwhile, the North American Division announced that Normal Miles would be the new pastor at the Trenton, New Jersey, Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the Alleghany East Conference.

Hugo Gambetta, whom the conference terminated on August 21, 2005, had his ordination revoked. He appealed the action, and on November 16, the Lake Union Executive Committee voted unanimously to void his ordination. A letter went out from union conference president Walter Wright to union and conference presidents and Hispanic coordinators in five world divisions saying that Gambetta is no longer recognized as a minister in the Adventist Church and that he is not eligible for invitation to any other field of service.

Eduardo Allen accepted the conference's invitation to replace Gambetta in the position of vice president of Multilingual Ministries. Presently, Allen is the evangelist and Hispanic ministries coordinator for the Upper Columbia Conference in the state of Washington.

Allen's election refills the positions in the executive team vacated during the purge that followed the financial review ordered by the Lake Union Conference in April 2005.

## Banners of Hope for Adventist Girls

By Bonnie Dwyer

Come October 22, Adventist history of the Great Disappointment in 1844 is likely to be the topic of discussion in Adventist churches and on Adventist campuses. It is a day to remember from whence we came. In 2005, it was the date of "Women and the Word," the regularly sponsored conference by La Sierra University's Women's Resource Center.

Biblical preaching by women has always been the hallmark of the conference, and 2005 was no different, but there was more, too. This time, the program covered all the elements of Advent hope-remembrance of things past, imagination of newness, and intention to transform the world. (see page 26)

The remembrance of things past came in several forms. Bert Haloviak, archivist for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, reported on his study of documents dealing with Ellen White and Australasian ministers, 1893 to 1901, "The history of the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the nineteenth century and Ellen White's perception of it in the early twentieth

century illustrates that, indeed, women served as priests and ministers of the Lord in her day," he said.

There was also much remembering of the ordinations of women that took place in 1995 at the Sligo, La Sierra, and Victoria Churches. A panel of fifteen of the participants shared their memories of those events.

On Sabbath morning, it was time for hope and transformation as a parade of young girls, dressed in their Sabbath best, carried banners of the seven churches of Revelation down the aisle of the La Sierra Seventh-day

Adventist Church (see covers). The banners had been used in all of the ordination services of the women in 1995, and one carried the initials of all the women pastors at Sligo Church, where the banners were created and first used. Many an eye shed a tear as the young girls walked proudly to the front, and took their places. The imagined newness of the church as represented by the girls brought applause that lingered. And in the sermons of the weekend there was hope for the girls.

"Can God trust you to bless others? Can He count on you to leave

blessings in your path so that those who come behind you will be able to pick them up?" Pastor Andrea Trusty King asked in her sermon on Naomi.

The newly commissioned/ordained pastor of the Marantha Adventist Church in San Diego said she had heard Kamala Harris, the first (and only) female African-American district attorney, recount the wisdom her mother shared with her. "She said, 'You might be the first to do a lot of things, but just make sure you are not the last.' We need to make it a habit, to pave the way for those who will follow. We need to



## Growing Old Adventist

By Richard Rice

Getting old is never easy, but for Seventh-day Adventists it brings special challenges. One is the fact that since we are living so much longer than everyone else (see the latest *National Geographic*, for example), we are getting older longer than everyone else. Like others, I suppose, getting old came as quite a surprise to me. Don't get me wrong: I always expected to live this long. But I never thought I would be this old.

I was born just ahead of the baby boomers. My father went into medical school instead of the army, so I didn't have to wait until he got back to be born. So, as a pre-boomer, I get to contemplate the passing of the years before the great rush.

Actually, I'm in the sandwich generation. Just as my wife Gail and I reached the point where our kids

were getting launched in life, we found ourselves having to look after our parents. In fact, I've heard that Americans can now expect to spend more years caring for their parents than they did raising their children. And it is amazing how much alike these two jobs are. A few years ago, our kids complained that we were meddling in their lives. Last week, my folks complained that we were meddling in their lives.

Of course, some people live a lot longer than others. Take my wife, for example. She's just getting started. Two years ago, we sold our house after twenty-nine years and moved into a larger place so we could live with Gail's parents. Gail said she wanted to enjoy her parents' company during her last years. But the real reason is that she wants somebody to keep her company after I'm gone.

At the rate they are going, they'll easily outlive me. They are certainly expecting to live forever. Gail's father is ninety-one; her

mother just turned ninety. Last year, I bought her mother a Golden Retriever puppy and gave her a book on the breed. The next day she said, "Rick, I'm concerned. This book said these dogs live only about ten years. I want to have him a lot longer than that."

With parents in their nineties and grandparents who lived into their nineties, Gail calculates that her life expectancy is 105. She tells me she's keeping in shape for me, but I know that's not true. She is keeping in shape for husband numbers two, and three, and four.

We did get some news from our financial planner the other day. He said we have plenty of money to retire at sixty-five and maintain our current lifestyle...provided we die at seventy. By then, all the money will be gone. So next time, Gail's going for money.

Gail and her parents aren't the only Seventh-day Adventists with extended life plans. Adventists are living so long it's creating problems



make it a habit to help those who can not help themselves, a habit to help those who can not pay us back, because when you do, God says, if they cannot pay you then I'll pay you. And I don't mind being on God's payroll."

Kendra Haloviak took the pulpit on Sabbath morning, after the parade of the banners, and preached on Sabbath justice and equality. Using the Sabbath commandment from Deuteronomy and the story of Jesus healing the bent-over woman on Sabbath as told in Luke, she concluded, "If Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath-keepers: we must embrace Sabbath justice, we must embrace equality, and freedom from all that oppresses.

We must embrace economic restoration, we must help bent-over women and men and children stand up straight, we must hear their voices. If Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath keepers: we must embrace Sabbath justice now," she said.

Her stirring words on justice included thoughts about ordination, "During the last decade, I have occasionally heard people say: 'I'm so tired of the debate over women's ordination. I'm just tired of hearing about it.' But, the debate will continue until the church we love is true to itself," she said. "As long as we have policies of inequality, we will be in conflict with ourselves, with our own convictions as Adventists, because the ordina-

tion of women issue is a Sabbath issue. Will we be Sabbath-keepers? Or will we continue to have policies of inequality? Policies that keep women bent-over, bound on Sabbath and every other day? Will we be Sabbath-keepers or not?"

With seven young girls carrying the banners of the seven churches, the answer sounded like a trumpet: "If Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath keepers we must embrace Sabbath justice now—even as we anticipate the eternal Sabbath, global Jubilee. If Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath keepers, we must embrace Sabbath justice."

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for the Church's retirement program. I know a family whose members all worked for the Church and all of them lived into their nineties. Some of them are almost one hundred today. You have heard about decades of service? Well, they gave centuries of service. With all that time in retirement, they pretty much bankrupted sustentation. Now they are threatening Social Security.

If you ask me, the cause of the problem is health reform. It's not only been amazingly effective, it's been too effective. Seventh-day Adventists are living longer than the Church ever expected them to. Not that we are the only ones doing that. I saw a cartoon not long ago that showed two old people sitting in rockers. One says, "In my day, people died."

You want to live long enough to see your grandchildren, of course. That's reasonable. But not long enough to see their grandchildren. That's ridiculous. But someone I know has a solution to this problem. Don't worry, it's not as drastic as you think. He's not suggesting we send all our retirees to



Oregon. What he proposes is this: term limits on health reform. That's right, let's think of health reform as a temporary measure. It's good for a while, but it's not meant to last forever. So, here are his revisions.

When you reach sixty years, eat anything you want. Meat, desserts, whatever. Enough with dietary restrictions. Six decades of vegetarianism are enough. You've paid your debt to the animal kingdom.

Then, when you turn seventy, drink anything you want. You grew

up hearing familiar verses about drinking: "Wine is a mocker. Strong drink is raging." But now it's time to read the other verses about wine, like "don't drink water only. Take a little wine for your stomach's sake."

OK, at sixty eat anything you want. At seventy, drink anything you want. At eighty, the big change: smoke anything you want. That's right, why not go out in a blaze of glory...or exit on a high note, so to speak.

My friend believes he has denominational support for these suggestions. George Knight is an influential Seventh-day Adventist author, and his most helpful book for our concern is titled, *I Used to Be Perfect*. That's the spirit, George. There's a motto for our retirees: "I Used to Be Perfect." So, you spend the first sixty years of your life moving toward perfection, and then the rest of your life moving away from it.

Why have too much of a good thing?

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ILLUSTRATION BY MAX SEABAUGH