



## Mr. Bussey Goes to Washington | BY ALITA BYRD



Barry Bussey, a Canadian attorney, is going to work on Capitol Hill about the same time as Barack Obama moves into the White House. He has been appointed to serve as the Seventh-day Adventist Church's liaison to the U.S.

government and as the new associate director for the world church's PARL Department. Bussey replaces James Standish, who earlier this year was appointed executive director of the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom.

**BYRD:** *When do you take up your new role and what will your primary duties be?*

**BUSSEY:** I am unsure as to when I will actually take the reins at the office but I anticipate being in Washington in the early part of the new year.

My work will be as the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) associate director of the General Conference under the leadership of Dr. John Graz. The primary duty is to act as a liaison between the world church and the U.S. government—not only Congress but other entities, such as the State Department.

The issues of religious freedom around the world, as it affects our members but others as well, require advocacy in—what is undoubtedly—the world's most influential capital. It strikes me that I will have a huge learning curve as to the issues the world church faces in this area.

Other areas of work will include the TV show *Global Faith and Freedom*; IRLA director for development (participating in congresses and meeting of experts around the world); and editor of the journal *Fides et Libertas* (one issue per year).

**Q:** *Presumably you watched the recent U.S. election with great interest, particularly given your new job. How do you think the make-up of the Congress will impact your job? In general, is it easier to lobby Democrats or Republicans on behalf of the Adventist church? How do you think the Obama administration will change things?*

**A:** Indeed, this was one election I watched closely. To be honest, not having any experience with the previous make-up of Congress, I go in with an unbiased opinion of what a particular configuration of Congress may or may not mean.

This is new to me—I have no expectations one way or the other as to who is or is not receptive to the Adventist interests to promote religious freedom. It would seem to me that religious freedom is a universal value that people from all political parties would espouse and cherish.

As to the Obama administration—I think it says volumes to democratic ideals for the American democracy to put an African American in office. It was a historic evening to watch. The American people have every reason to be proud of such accomplishment. I pray for his success.

**Q:** *What specific issues will you be dealing with and lobbying for or against?*

**A:** I have not got the “briefing notes” yet—but I understand one big issue is the workplace religious freedom legislation—that will be a high priority.

**Q:** *You are a Canadian. Do you think this makes it easier or more difficult to work with American politicians?*

**A:** When I was first broached about this position my first reaction was, “I am Canadian—still under the British Crown—what in the world are you thinking in asking me?”

I have no grand illusions. I recognize that I am the outsider here—but that is nothing new as my wife and children are U.S. citizens and I am the odd man out every time we travel stateside.

I am sure there are pros and cons to my status. Though I have studied U.S. history in school and out of personal interest, there is much for me to learn about the U.S. system. I have a lot to learn, no question, but by God's grace I will be keen to figure it out.



On the other hand, I expect my being an outsider is a good thing in that I have no preconceived ideas—I will plow ahead asking for the Lord's guidance (and that of others) as to what I should do.

I maintain that I will be speaking a universal language—justice, freedom, conscience, and human rights within the context of a liberal democratic society.

**Q:** *In 2004, you argued the position of the Adventist Church in a same-sex marriage case before the Supreme Court of Canada. What were your arguments and what was the outcome of that case?*

**A:** The case was unique in that it was a request of the Canadian government to the Supreme Court, in a series of questions, as to whether the government had the constitutional jurisdiction to decide the definition of "marriage" and whether it could redefine the concept to mean "any two persons."

Throughout the history of English common law countries, marriage has been defined by that law as "the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others." However, a number of superior courts in Canada redefined marriage: "for civil purposes, is the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others."

Under pressure from various groups the Canadian government decided to bring in legislation incorporating the courts' redefinition. Before actually bringing the legislation to the House of Commons the government sent a draft copy to the Supreme Court and asked the following four questions (my paraphrasing):

1. Does the Parliament of Canada have the exclusive authority to pass legislation defining marriage for "civil purposes?" (The Supreme Court of Canada said yes it does. The Adventist Church took no position on this question.)
2. If the answer to question one is Yes, is Section 1 of the proposed legislation, which extends the capacity to marry to persons of the same sex, consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? (The Supreme Court said Yes it is consistent and that such an extension "flows" from the Charter. The Church took no position on this question.)
3. Does the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Canadian Charter protect religious officials from being compelled to perform a marriage between two persons of the same sex that is contrary to their reli-

gious beliefs? (The Supreme Court held that the guarantee of religious freedom in the Charter is broad enough to protect religious officials from being compelled by the state to perform civil or religious same-sex marriages that are contrary to their religious beliefs. The Church did take a position—see below.)

4. Is the opposite-sex requirement for marriage for civil purposes, as established by recent court decisions consistent with the Canadian Charter? If not, in what particular or particulars and to what extent? (The Supreme Court refused to answer this question. The Church did take a position—see below.)

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada was concerned about what effect the redefinition would have on religious freedom in Canada. It was a complex case. Our factum covered some 25 pages. Below is a summary of our argument.

#### **To the Third Question:**

The proposed "protection" is vastly under-inclusive and leaves unanswered many questions about the extent of religious freedom in a society that accepts same-sex marriages. The Charter protects against even indirect coercion by the state. Unless the proposed legislation is carefully crafted to impact only the secular aspects of marriage, the legislation will have a negative effect on the practice and beliefs protected under section 2(a) of the Charter.

Inevitably the state's new institution of "marriage" will conflict with the Church. For example, the Church may have to face state pressure over such issues as church membership, church employment, church school teachers, those who can and cannot hold church office, rental of church buildings and facilities, and freedom of expression of church members and clergy.

**Church Schools** The state's support of a different definition of "marriage" may well result in provincial curriculum requirements that church schools teach courses recognizing same-sex marriage. Church schools that would refuse may face de-certification from the provincial departments of education. Students would then face a problem with being accepted into postsecondary education without a recognized grade twelve diploma.

**Church Buildings and Facilities** The proposed legislation makes no provision for religious groups who are careful to ensure that the use of their buildings and facilities are in keeping with their faith. One can reasonably expect that



without protection, religious communities will be under increasing pressure to permit same-sex couples to use their church buildings for same-sex marriage ceremonies. Will protection be limited to human rights legislation? Will such legislation now be interpreted to require an accommodation of same-sex couples using church buildings for same-sex marriage ceremonies and receptions over the Church's protest?

**Freedom of Religious Expression** There is no provision protecting ministers of religion, or other religious persons in expressing their views on the morality of same-sex marriages.

#### **To the Fourth Question:**

The Church does not seek to restrict individual liberty by resisting the redefinition of marriage. Rather, it insists that individuals, whatever their sexual orientation, are free to engage in monogamous relationships of their choosing without re-defining marriage. To the extent that the law should protect and encourage such stable relationships, all are free to obtain such legal protections. The Church does not oppose the state recognizing such relationships, even though the Church's moral view may be distinct from the view of many in society.

The Church is not asking the state to promote the historical and existing definition of marriage as a religious institution. The Church, and its adherents, seek state protection of marriage as a religious institution. Such protection is not as against individuals, but as against the state redefining marriage that will negatively impact on the liberty of the Church and its members to freely express and practice their faith.

The Supreme Court of Canada gave us much-needed encouragement and protection in its decision, stating that it "seems clear that state compulsion on religious officials to perform same-sex marriages contrary to their religious beliefs would violate the guarantee of freedom of religion under. . . the Charter."

The Supreme Court also made clear that the state could not compel the use of "sacred places for the celebration of such marriages and about being compelled to otherwise assist in the celebration of same-sex marriages."

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court did not answer our concerns over church schools and religious expression. In essence, it was put off for another day, when there will be a "balancing and delineation" of the conflicting rights within the Charter on a case-by-case basis.

**Q:** *You are a former Canadian politician. Can you tell us about your political platform and about your political career?*

**A:** I cannot claim any fame as a "Canadian politician," but I did run for public office in 2000.

It was a very brief "career"—I forget how many days the election was on for, but less than two months, as I recall. (In Canada, our elections tend to be short.)

At the time, I was the secretary of the Ontario Conference, and a number of people in the city of Oshawa, encouraged me to seek the candidacy in the Canadian Alliance Party (which later morphed into the Conservative Party and is currently in power). I did. I won the nomination but lost the election.

I cannot recall my entire platform, but I do remember using the phrase, "Campaign of Respect."

I am not a person who seeks to rant and rave about the poor qualities of the opposing candidate, and so forth. It is just not my style. I earnestly sought to be respectful of the other candidates.

I remember the media making a heyday out of the fact that I was not only a lawyer but also a minister in the Adventist Church with "strange views."

Although the results were respectable—I came in second (28.8 percent of the vote)—we lost. Few people understand the exhaustion and sense of re-evaluation that goes on after spending such high energy days on the campaign trail, with TV and radio interviews, official openings, dinners, and debates. I was tired at the end of it.

It was then I began a self-evaluation of "where now?" Everything was up for review, including my prospects of working for the Church again.

A couple of my friends offered me positions in their law firms. It was tempting, however, I could not shake the sense of God's call on my life and was hired again by the Ontario Conference as Legal Counsel, PARL, and trust services director.

As I look back, I am thankful for the experience. It has made me realize how important it is to know personally my stand on issues. For instance, I was challenged on my views on abortion and the death penalty. I had people on both sides seek my support for each issue. In the end, I had to go with my conscience—I supported a pro-life stance on both. When faced with a reporter's microphone and camera, you better have your mind made up—or the lights will show an uncomfortable blush.

Equally important was the realization that the campaign



trail is not for intellectual debate, considering the many shades of gray that issues present themselves in. It is a rhetorical game. A game of strategy and one-up-manship. As a result, one has to be careful about what is said during a campaign.

Working for the Church, I realize that I need to be apolitical. By virtue of my position, each time I say something about a political issue, people assume, rightly or wrongly, that I speak the Church's position. That puts significant pressure to keep my mouth shut unless I make it absolutely clear as to whom I am speaking for—myself or the Church. Even then, I am reticent to speak my view for fear of it being misconstrued.

**Q:** *Do you find that the Adventist Church covers a multitude of viewpoints across the political spectrum, thus making it difficult to lobby on behalf of any particular political belief? Or do you find the Church to be relatively homogeneous, with specific beliefs and political hot topics largely agreed upon?*

**A:** Elements of our Church's message to the world can fit nicely with most political parties to one degree or another. For this reason it is not difficult to see how a political apparatus may stress one or more tenets of our faith while out on the campaign trail to get the "Adventist vote" as it were.

However, we are such a small proportion of the electorate that we do not have as much influence as other, larger, church communities. In any event, we have to ask, "To what end do we seek influence?" Is it not to allow us to live in accordance with our conscience—to serve our fellow man in whatever forum we have around the world—all in preparation for his return?

**Q:** *Has the Adventist Church's political viewpoints changed over time? Are we more liberal or conservative than we used to be?*

**A:** This depends on a number of factors. First, how do we determine the Adventist Church's political viewpoint? Is it the organized church as we know it or is it the opinions of a group of members in a given locale?

I am not sure there is an "Adventist Church political viewpoint," but I have noticed that wherever I have gone throughout the world, our members tend to reflect, by and large, the prevailing opinion in the given area. For example, I would suggest that the Adventists in Europe have a different political view than in America (on any number of given issues)—so which is the "Adventist political view"?

From my perspective, it is not whether we are more lib-

eral or conservative. Rather it is having an understanding of who we are despite the labeling. What is it that we believe, and espouse as values, or principles we live by?

Personally, I am of the view that the Adventist Church is comprised of a group of like-minded individuals who follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, waiting for his return. In the meantime, they seek to follow his will for their lives as best they know how. That is not meant to be trite, but a serious response to a very serious question.

**Q:** *How involved should the Adventist Church be with politics? Where should the line be drawn to separate church from state?*

**A:** Following on from my previous answer, which I think responds to this question as well: as a church it is not our place to be involved in "politics" (politics being the party machinery of seeking to get particular individuals elected or not). That is not our purpose. What we are about is plain for the world to see: our teachings of faith.

I have opinions, you have opinions, we all do—we come to these views based on any number of indicia of evidence—some rational but others irrational.

The same is true of the Adventist Church—our official views or statements of belief come from a long historical pedigree of biblical research, experience, and blessings of God. They represent the teachings of Scripture and Christ, whom we seek to emulate, as best we understand at any given point in time.

Given a particular context, those statements of belief may or may not be "political." Consider our emphasis on health. We maintain we should avoid tobacco and alcohol. Preaching a sermon in Canada in the tobacco region of Ontario against the ills of tobacco may be considered "political" by some. Opinions would vary over the efficacy and legitimacy of preaching in a tobacco region—but if the sermon was preached elsewhere it may not be seen as politically offensive. So where is the line? Can we speak to our faith only in areas where it is not controversial?

At the end of the day, what are we to do? My thinking is to be ourselves. We cannot base our faith on an opinion poll—we carry on as the great Christians did before us—emulate the Messiah. Controversy will be inevitable, as it was for him. The line of demarcation will be different for every situation, but what is not acceptable for us, in my view, as Adventist Christians is to deny our Lord and Savior. ■

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**Alita Byrd** edits the Interview section of the *Spectrum* Web site.