

Rising Above a Culture of Lies | BY BONNIE DWYER

In 2009, Marilyn Chandler McEntyre put on paper her stewardship strategies for those life-sustaining resources known as words, because “language can be depleted, polluted, contaminated, eroded, and filled with artificial stimulants,” she said. “Like any other resource, it needs the protection of those who recognize its value and commit themselves to good stewardship.” Her book, *Caring for Words in A Culture of Lies*, caught our attention and we used it for a series of discussion pieces on the *Spectrum* blog in 2014. Week-by-week we worked our way through her twelve strategies that spelled out things we each could do to take good care of words: practices such as telling the truth, reading well, staying in conversation, sharing stories, loving the long sentence, and praying.

I picked up the book again recently. “Strategy #3—Don’t Tolerate Lies” jumped out at me from the table of contents. What is true, she says, “is not a rhetorical question to ask while we wash our hands like Pontius Pilate. This is a homework question.

Any effort to find reliable reporting needs to start not with questions about the sources but with questions about ourselves. What are my responsibilities as a citizen? As a person of faith? As a consumer? As a leader? As a parent? As an educator? What am I avoiding knowing? Why? What point of view am I protecting? Why? How have I arrived at my assumptions about what sources of information to rely on? What limits my angle of vision? Have I tried to imagine how one might arrive at a different conclusion? How much evidence do I need to be convinced? What kind of persuasion works most effectively for me? How do I accredit or challenge authority?

After her list of questions for ourselves, she had another list, this time for news sources: questions about sponsors, who is framing the question, detectable partisan biases in the language, authorities, credentials, and allegiances. She admitted that these questions take time to address, perhaps more time than any one person has, so she recommends helping each other.

And here is where her thoughtful recommendations run

up against the current bifurcated climate in which we find ourselves. How can we help each other if we can’t talk to one another? This, also, is a homework question.

In this issue of the journal, we address several significant conversations within our community. Researchers at Andrews University detail how Seventh-day Adventists families talk with their LGBTQ+ children, and the effect of their words. The ongoing conversation within the denomination about how to relate to these brothers and sisters makes some uncomfortable, so it often takes place behind closed doors. The title for the art on our cover reminds us of Christ’s desire that His house be “A House of Prayer for All People.” Making that statement true is a homework assignment for all of us.

Prayer is actually one of the strategies that McEntyre proposes in her book. Prayer reminds us who God is, and who we are.

The language of prayer, then, works on multiple levels. It reminds, reframes, and re-awakens; it humbles us and also empowers us to claim and act on God’s promises; it brings our intentions into sharp focus; it engenders intimacy with God and also brings us into alignment, harmony, and unity with the other members of the Body of Christ and with the communion of saints and angels.

Prayer is also one of the strategies that is built into the ongoing conversation between the General Conference and the North American Division unions regarding the ordination of women. We have included the statement that the union presidents drafted for their February meeting with the General Conference president. We await the April Spring Meeting, to see how the prayers for unity may be answered.

In each section of the journal, there is an implied homework assignment in how we talk to and treat each other, a call to excellence, a call to rise above the current culture of lies. ■

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