



From Unity to Poetry

NAD Union Conference Presidents Declare the Basis for Their Unity

BY BONNIE DWYER

When the NAD union conference presidents were summoned to a meeting at the General Conference on January 19 to discuss the governance issue surrounding women's ordination, they spoke in a united voice of their support of women's ordination, while acknowledging "a significant minority of members who oppose ordaining women."

The statement of unity they took to the meeting, begins with the ways in which they stand united with the world church, such as being fully committed to the Twenty-Eight Fundamental Beliefs. Their convictions on the governance issues of the church follow and the first item on that list is that, "We believe the Holy Spirit calls both men and women into ministry and we see no clear biblical mandate against ordaining women." They also acknowledge no consensus within the church on the issue. But they end by saying that the GC is dangerously overreaching its authority and potentially endangering the current and future unity and mission of the church.

In addition to the union conference presidents, those at the meeting included the North American Division officers and vice presidents, General Conference President Ted Wilson, Secretary G.T. Ng, Treasurer Juan Prestol-Puesan, and assistants to the GC President, Mark Finley and Mike Ryan. It was described as an informal meeting, a time to listen to each other and pray together. Future meetings are outlined in the process voted at Annual Council in 2016.

The full text of their unity statement follows:

Dear General Conference Leadership,
As union presidents, we have spent much time in individual and collective prayer over the future of our church driven by implications of governance revolving around women's ordination. We bring the following assurances of our strong personal and collective unity with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We are united with the world church in the following:

- a. We are fully committed to all of our 28 Fundamental Beliefs.
- b. Bringing our Remnant Message to a dying world is our top priority.
- c. The partnership of the North American Division with all our sister world divisions is important for both the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and for our own spiritual health.
- d. We affirm the recent TOSC "Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination".
- e. We affirm the necessity in finding the best spiritual/missional resolutions to the challenges of unity we face in order to remove challenges to our mission.

We as union presidents are unified in our convictions regarding the following governance issues of the church regarding the role of women in leadership and ministry.

1. We believe the Holy Spirit calls both men and women into ministry and we see no clear biblical mandate against ordaining women:
 - a. A vast majority of quality conservative Adventist theologians favor ordaining women.
 - b. After a lengthy study, two thirds of the General Conference TOSC concluded a way forward

to ordaining women.

2. We see no consensus within the church regarding women's ordination:
 - a. After 40 years of study and deliberation, we have not found agreement on this issue.
 - b. The 2015 GC floor vote over division options to ordain, while a small majority, revealed a very divided World Church on this issue.
 - c. Prior to the 2015 GC Session, nine of the 13 divisions' TOSC outcomes stated at least some openness to the option of ordaining women.
3. North American Division support for women's ordination:
 - a. Quantified votes in some unions and conferences and our personal general observations of the membership within our unions reveal a grass roots support for women's ordination. This ranges from strong support in some unions, modest majorities in others and opposition in a few conferences.
 - b. An inclusive NAD survey taken in 2014 of conference, union and division leadership revealed a 90%-plus approval of women's ordination.
 - c. The North American Division TOSC report was presented at the 2014 Year-end Meeting and was approved with a vote of 178 yes, 6 no, 8 abstaining.
 - d. While we acknowledge a significant minority of members who oppose ordaining women, we reject the validity of surveys taken by independent ministries that claim a majority opposition exists in North America.
4. Within the context of our Adventist Religious Liberty DNA we acknowledge the conscientious convictions of both sides of this issue and the need to find a way forward:
 - a. We reject the notion that women's ordination is a simple liberal vs. conservative issue. Many deeply conservative and loyal Adventists are convicted that women should have full parity with men in ministry.
5. Since the rejection of the E-60 request, we have been very distracted from mission and need to move forward.
6. We believe the GC is dangerously overreaching its authority and potentially endangering the current and future unity and mission of the church (see SOP below):
 - a. Authorized documents and processes leading up to and during the 2016 Annual Council revealed an

intent or openness to dealing with some unions with an extreme, punitive approach.

- b. Responding to violations of policy or voted actions with similar consequences to a doctrinal violation creates a dangerous precedent that is inconsistent with Adventist/Protestant beliefs and practices and undermines the sanctity of our 28 Fundamental Beliefs, which are the foundation of our missional unity.
- c. Non-doctrinal issues on which we have no consensus are not a basis for splitting the church.
- d. We further believe pursuing severe punitive actions against unions will stimulate additional movement toward embracing the ordination of women (there is significant pressure in additional unions to move forward).
- e. The North American Division is the entity that should work with any NAD unions considered out of compliance according to existing policy.

Principles from Ellen White

"We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ's school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls"

(Ellen G. White, Manuscript Release, 11, 266).

"The unity of belief in the church is not forced by the church coming together and the majority defining the creed to be believed. The church cannot define doctrine, nor make laws for itself or anybody else. The church of Christ is made up of all who obey the Lord's commands, not a body to issue commands. The Head directs, the body obeys. God speaks; each one must listen to His voice, for faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and no one can give faith to another. 'It is the gift of God'"
(PTUK, July 29, 1897). ■

Ray McAllister — Biblical Scholar, Poet, Coder, Massage Therapist, Doula — and Blind

BY ALITA BYRD

What inspired you to write the poem “The Modern Faithful Adventist”? Had you been listening to Gilbert & Sullivan’s work a lot? Listening to some particularly “thought-provoking” sermons?

I wanted to address the issues of how many Adventists major in minors, being really good with doctrinal and dietary issues but not necessarily up on matters like loving one another.

Many science fiction programs like *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5* seem to involve the “Modern Major-General’s Song”, and I got familiar with it through those. It just seemed like a match made in heaven for satire.

Have you written other poetry? Do you have a special interest in poetry?

I write lots of poetry. I published a book of poetry, *Journey of Passion*, in 1998, from Mellen Poetry Press. Mellen says its books never go out of print, so someone could contact the company and order one if it isn’t found anywhere else.

You are the first blind person to get a PhD in Hebrew Scriptures, which you earned at Andrews University in 2010. Can you explain why this was a particularly difficult subject for a blind person to study?

שלום That’s Shalom, in Hebrew. But, I had to handle that in Braille and use texts that weren’t converted into Braille.

The languages we were studying had more technical characters and markings than the standard Braille Greek and Hebrew original language texts provided.

I ended up resorting to using computer-code-style files that used letters, numbers, and punctuations to represent Greek and Hebrew symbols. I had a computer that would convert these symbols into Braille letters and show them on a Braille display: a device using something like magnetic pins that pop up in the shape of Braille.

I was grateful to have these resources, but I knew that other blind people would need



something that would appear more like Braille Greek and Hebrew, just with the extra symbols.

And now you feel a mission to help other blind people study ancient languages, is that right? You and your organization, The Semitic Scholars, were awarded a prestigious prize from the National Federation of the Blind last summer for your work in making Biblical language materials accessible to the blind. I understand you coded Braille in ancient biblical languages so blind people could study the original texts. How did you do that?

More and more blind people have dreams that involve studying the Bible in the original languages. For some, this study is a means to the end of being successful professional spiritual leaders. For others, there is a deep passion for more fully understanding the meaning and beauty of the Biblical texts. Whatever the reason, such a journey presents some difficult obstacles. Developing ways to overcome these obstacles has

Being part of

those births

was the

most amazing

experience.

The mothers

all reported that

I helped them

significantly

and that my

blindness

was not

a hindrance.

been the work of the Semitic Scholars group: three blind or visually impaired individuals.

I developed coding for the symbols not already set up in Braille. Hebrew has these accents which help one know when to pause when reading and which also can be used to know how to chant, or sing, the text. Most of these symbols were not already coded in Braille Hebrew. Since chanting is a task a blind person can enjoy, I felt the need to prepare Hebrew Bibles in Braille for the blind with all these symbols. Once I developed these symbols, I needed to have them peer reviewed.

That was where Sarah Blake LaRose, one of the other two Semitic Scholars, came in. Mrs. LaRose is a professional Braille transcriber and professor of Hebrew. In 2007, she developed a Braille table for JAWS screen reader for Biblical Greek, with all its technical markings, and Hebrew. JAWS, then, would enable a computer to show Biblical Hebrew in Braille for blind users.

With her guidance, I completed a system I could use to prepare texts that the blind could use. One notable text is the Aleppo Hebrew Bible, available in the public domain. Using “search and replace” in MS Word, and a lot of other technical tricks, I converted that entire Hebrew Bible, accents and all, into Braille, and, yes, I have chanted Hebrew from it fluidly.

I also converted many other Hebrew documents, Semitic inscriptions, and many Greek documents into Braille using “search and replace.” Then, in 2014, I wrote a Hebrew course for the blind.

I began collaborating with Duxbury Systems, a company that produces software to convert documents of various languages into Braille, where I began working closely with Matthew Yeater. Mr. Yeater is the current president of the National Federation of the Blind of Michiana and is the third member of our Semitic Scholars group. He had been working with Duxbury to set up a system for converting Biblical language documents containing many languages, with English included, into Braille. This would allow grammars, articles, and

dictionaries to be easily Brailled. Mr. Yeater and I set up the code for Syriac in Braille, and I coded Coptic. (Syriac is similar to Hebrew but uses a different alphabet. Coptic is a late form of Egyptian but has letters based on Greek.)

It is now possible to use Duxbury to convert many ancient texts to Braille without having to use “search and replace.”

Recently, I have begun converting public domain Greek works of Plato and Aristotle into Braille. It’s definitely a lot easier relying on Duxbury to do most of the translation into Braille.

My dreams for the future of this project are simple: I wish to have more texts in these and more related ancient languages in Braille formats for the blind.

It is my prayer that this award will give me the recognition I need to negotiate with scholars around the world so I can access the text materials I need.

The prize came with \$20,000. How will you use this money to further your goals?

I used my portion to fund the down payment for a house in which I have more space and a central point to work from in anything I do.

How did you become interested in studying Hebrew scriptures?

I just wanted to. I find Hebrew and Jewish roots fascinating.

You teach religion classes for Andrews via distance education on an adjunct basis. Would you say it is easier for a blind person to teach online?

Easier than doing other things, easier than teaching face-to-face, or easier than a sighted person teaching? With my screen reader, I’m able to manage just about anything a sighted person can do, and there’s no commute time or transportation issues.

You are also a licensed massage therapist. Do you currently work as a massage therapist? What led you to this work? It seems very different from working as a biblical scholar!

My main historical mentor is Leonardo da Vinci, who did just about everything well. My mind, to be satisfied, must do many things. I've always enjoyed massage as a hobby, and when I wasn't succeeding as planned in academia, I decided to make massage a profession. Now I don't want to give it up.

And even more unusually, you are also a certified doula, helping women in childbirth! A male doula is very unusual, and maybe a blind doula even more unusual. What inspired you to become a doula? When did you become certified? Do you actively work as a doula? How many women have you assisted in childbirth? Do you have children yourself?

I was turning forty, and my wife and I had no kids. Yet for years I had dreamed of experiencing the miracle of birth.

Since I'm totally blind, sitting in the back of a delivery room wouldn't be helpful. So, in 2014, a year after I became a licensed massage therapist, I began training to become a certified massage doula. (I have never heard of any other blind male certified doulas.)

I had to complete theoretical and practical training to first become a certified prenatal massage therapist. Next, I read all the materials (with my screen reader) for becoming a massage doula. Learning the theory was easy, and I passed the academic test for the doula course.

But then I had to find three pregnant women who would accept a blind man as their doula. That turned out to be a challenge even though I was offering free prenatal and postpartum massage care. Finally, I reached out to a homeless shelter where I had done infant massage previously. A pregnant woman there decided she wanted me as her doula, and she referred me to another pregnant friend of hers, who in turn recommended me to another friend.

I helped those three mothers as they went into labor and supported them through pushing. Being part of those births was the most amazing experience. The mothers all reported that I helped them significantly and that my blindness was not a hindrance.

Later, I was able to serve as a doula for three more women.

How did you lose your sight?

Peter's Anomaly is the condition. In 1987, when I was twelve years old, the degenerative birth defect climaxed, and I lost the limited vision I had in my one somewhat good eye.

Where are you from originally?

California.

Would you describe Michigan, where you now live, as the heartland of the "modern, faithful Adventist"?

They're everywhere.

Where do you picture yourself in five years? What would be your ultimate job?

Well, that's the beauty in all of this. I threw away the "script" a few years ago, turned off "autopilot," and now my mission is at my discretion. I haven't a clue where I'll be. I'm just trying to follow God's lead. I like the adventure better this way. ■

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Modern Faithful Adventist

BY RAY MCALLISTER

Based on the "Modern Major-General's Song" from Gilbert and Sullivan's The Pirates of Penzance.

Adventist:

I am the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist.
All 28 beliefs with 20 prooftexts I will gladly list.
I know the GC presidents and quote their works historical
From Byington to Wilson, all in order categorical.
I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters theological
I understand all arguments both founded and illogical.
I can discuss Christ's nature and the pre and post-lapsarian
Post-lapsarian?
Ah, yes.
And I can shoot down heresies both docetist and Arian.

All:

And he can shoot down heresies both docetist and Arian.
And he can shoot down heresies both docetist and Arian.
And he can shoot down heresies both docetist and Ari-arian.

Adventist:

I know the books by Ellen White and their abbrevia-tions

And quote them very effortlessly in all situa-tions.
In short the 28 beliefs and prooftexts I will gladly list.
I am the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist.

All:

In short the 28 beliefs and prooftexts he will gladly list.
He is the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist.

Adventist:

I cook with TvP and tofu, never any meat or cheese.
I'll die before I use unnatural remedies to treat disease.
I've never tasted alcohol or tried to smoke a cigarette.
I don't wear jewelry, and I tithe the half of everything I get.
Then, all day Sabbath I'm at church and gladly sit on every
board.
I help out with the Pathfinders, and never do I crave reward.
I know all 700 hymns and never miss a syllable.
Syllable? Ah, yes.
I make all strive to reach my goals however unfulfillable.

All:

He makes all strive to reach his goals however unfulfillable.
He makes all strive to reach his goals however unfulfillable.
He makes all strive to reach his goals however unfulfill-
ifillable.

Adventist:

I make sure everybody knows their place in bible prophecy
And, then, I know they'll face God's wrath if they resist
or scoff, you see.
In short the 28 beliefs and prooftexts I will gladly list.
I am the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist.

All:

In short the 28 beliefs and prooftexts he will gladly list.
He is the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist.

Adventist:

I kick out all the apostates so they can't infiltrate the church
And on all dark conspiracies I rightly concentrate research.
Each day I check the news to see if Sunday laws are being
passed
And if they are it's fine because the End we will be seeing
fast.
So Jesus will come sooner, all perfection in my life I seek.

I think that I am sinning now, at most, just once or twice a
week.
I'm careful to do everything as done 200 years ago.
Years ago...
Years ago, weers ago; schmeers ago?
Ah, yes.
I'll criticize all who won't follow my example here below.

All:

You'll criticize all who won't follow your example here
below.
You'll criticize all who won't follow your example here
below.
You'll criticize all who won't follow your example here be
here-below.

Adventist:

I feel there's something missing still; I don't know its identity
And so I'll just go on as usual in this blessed insanity.
And still, the 28 beliefs and prooftexts I will gladly list.
I am the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist.

All:

And still, the 28 beliefs and prooftexts he will gladly list.
He is the very model of a modern, faithful Adventist. ■

Dr. Ray McAllister is passionate about his relationship with God. He



enjoys spending time in prayer and Bible study, writing po-
etry, and serving others. In August, 2010, he received a
PhD in Hebrew Scriptures. Dr. McAllister is totally blind, so
he's the first blind PhD from Andrews University's seminary,

and the first totally blind person in the world to get a PhD in Hebrew
Scriptures. He teaches distance-education religion classes for Andrews
University and works as a licensed massage therapist in Michigan. In De-
cember, 2014, he became the first totally blind, male, certified birth
doula, trained to assist a woman during childbirth. In July, 2016, Dr. McAl-
lister, and two other visually-impaired Biblical scholars, received from the
National Federation of the Blind the top-prize Jacob Bolotin Award for
their work making Biblical language materials accessible to the blind. Dr.
McAllister sees his blindness as an opportunity to more deeply see the
beauty of God's love and guide others to do the same.