Call to Think Differently … Think Possibilities…

21 November 2011 St Albans, England

[Miroslav Pujic, tedNEWS] Eighty-nine delegates from the thirteen Unions and three attached Fields, which constitute the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Trans-European region (TED), met from 13 - 16 November in Becici, Montenegro. The theme of the year-end executive committee meetings was “Revived by His Word: think differently … think possibilities.”

Dr Bertil Wiklander, President of the Trans-European Division, says, “Due to the realignment voted by the General Conference our meeting was carefully planned to refocus the mission of the church in Europe. The spiritual tone of the meetings, with prayer that flowed through the business sessions, beautiful music, excellent devotionals, and a wonderful group of committed Adventists made this meeting a delight to chair for me personally.”

General Vice President Pastor Artur Stele and Under-Treasurer Tom Evans attended the meetings as representatives from the Adventist World Church Headquarters, and to provide counsel.

In his keynote address Dr Wiklander used the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a model for “Being Renewed by His Word: thinking differently … thinking possibilities”. “Being a Seventh-day
Adventist is fundamentally a matter of longing for God”, he said, “and this longing finds its fulfilment in the vision of Revelation 21:1-5”. The little church family established in May 1863, was able to grow and spread itself to all countries in the world because they began to think differently and discover new possibilities. He pointed to neglected truths in the Word of God that may empower the church for God’s mission. His final appeal was: “Be renewed by his Word! Think differently and think possibilities! If we believe that ‘for God all things are possible’ we can be optimists because he is on our side! Then our eyes will be opened and we will see the opportunities for God’s mission in Europe today! This is the task God is giving us now... Read more

know is going bad and it's only going to get worse... Give them something they can hold onto. Give people Hope!'
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During four intensive days, the Committee listened to reports and the plans from administration and departmental directors, discussed numerous policy changes, processed various items of business, and discussed current and future major initiatives.

Reports

In a very significant and challenging report, Dr Wiklander outlined where the Division is and where it is going. Through the realignment voted by the General Conference, he said, “we are giving away our three mission fields – Israel, the Middle East and Pakistan – and we are reduced by about 35,000 members. This means that we become a genuinely European division”. He then outlined in detail what this means. He noted that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has never had so many members in Europe as it has now and that the Church is in a significantly better position than the pioneers in the church on May 20 1863, when the Church was first organised. Presenting a survey of the strengths and recent successes of the “New TED”, he then described the European people groups as recipients of the gospel and how they may be reached, while carefully noting the challenges that need to be overcome. He concluded with an impressive review of the mission plan of the TED for Europe and made an appeal: “Before us is a fantastic opportunity: We are about to experience how the mission of God meets man without God, as Seventh-day Adventist Christianity penetrates contemporary Europe! We need to think differently, outside of the box. We need to think possibilities, that is, to see that the crisis our societies face is not just a challenge but an opportunity, in which we can
Audrey Andersson, TED Executive Secretary, presented the division’s statistical report showing membership growth of 2,616 in the past year. “We give thanks to God for the growth in the past year. This figure only reflects those who have taken the step of baptism and it does not give any indication of the numbers attending every week”, said Andersson. An additional statistic was introduced to help get a clearer picture of attendance. Churches will be asked to count attendance on the second and seventh Sabbath every quarter from January 2012.

“No area where we can improve is retaining members. Currently for every 100 we baptize 27 leave the church. Looking after members is as important as soul winning,” concluded Andersson.

Jóhann E. Jóhannsson, TED Treasurer, reported about the financial situation and the plans for the next year saying that “tithes and offerings in local currencies have been relatively stable during the last year, despite the financial crisis in many countries within our territory, especially in Europe. Some of our unions and fields have experienced moderate increases, while in others tithes and offerings have decreased, and drastically so in some countries. The increase in the tithe sharing to the Division is so far this year 3.57% in Pounds Sterling. We give praise to the Lord for our members’ faithfulness during these financially challenging times.

Due to the economic challenges in the United Kingdom in general there will be no increases in salaries and allowances for Church workers within the UK area in 2012. This will also be the case in some of our other unions and fields, Jóhannsson reported.

Jóhannsson assured the members of committee that the realignment of the Division’s mission territories, the Middle-East Union, the Pakistan Union and the Israel Field will not significantly affect the Division’s finances. It is anticipated that the reduction in appropriations from the General Conference will be equivalent to the appropriations currently passed on from the TED to these territories. The Division has a balanced budget for 2012, which takes into account the territorial realignments.

Newbold College continues to face financial challenges mainly due to reduced student numbers. There are various reasons for this drop in enrollment including external factors that are beyond our control, such as the new strict immigration regulations for non-EU students wanting to study in the United Kingdom. “During the first half of 2011 reasons for this drop in enrolment including external factors that are beyond our control, such as the new strict immigration regulations for non-EU students wanting to study in the United Kingdom. “During the first half of 2011 significant cuts were made in the staffing numbers and other expenses at the College”, commented Jóhannsson and concluded “There are, however, limits to how much costs can be cut. The focus now needs to be on new programmes and higher student numbers and there seem to be signs of improvements in these areas for the future”.

“Christians in Europe have reached 360 people groups out of a total of 644,” reported Pastor Raafat Kamal, TED Adventist Mission Office director, and continued “The 284 groups that remain are the challenge. In the year 2011 we operated 154 Global Mission projects involving $1,687,469. In addition to these we had number of evangelistic initiatives which gave us a total of $2,987,469 that we spent to support the mission in the local church across the division. For the period of fifteen years (1996-2011) the TED has spent over $29.5 millions contributing to over 60,000 accessions for the advancement of the Kingdom,” concluded Kamal.

Reports from individual Unions and Fields indicated the full commitment of the leaders, in mission outreach and evangelism. At the same time all of them recognised the challenges faced in postmodernism, secularism, materialism, traditionalism and a resistance to Christian beliefs. Each report pointed out the special role of the church, namely that the church is more than a social club, more than a group of men and women with common interests. Rather, it represents God’s activity in the world and man’s response to that activity with thanks and willing obedience.

The Executive Committee also voted new assignments: Clair Sanches-Schutte director for Family Ministries and Stephen Cooper director for Health Ministries.

**Evangelism**

In the past two years the TED granted support to creative outreach approaches within its territories. Pastor Janos Kovacs-Biro, TED Evangelism director, reported on the number of projects.

In Latvia “Baby School” project started two years ago. The idea of this approach is to work in the local community to provide educational programmes for families and training in early childhood education. Currently this doesn’t exist in Latvia. Through this initiative we have seen a positive difference in the community. Our co-operation with social services has given social risk families the opportunity to attend baby school classes, special worship services organised for families with children, outdoor excursions involving all participants.

“Messy Church” in England is another initiative for children that have an aim to reach out in the community and build families of faith through crafts/worship/food and fellowship. Programmes run once a month on Sabbath afternoons for two
and half hours. Over 50% of the attendees are community members with two to three new families coming every month. They aim to build on this very successful programme.

In Budapest, Hungary, "MentO (He Saves) - Mentaloffice "aims to create a mental health centre with Christian therapists. It offers the opportunity to organise seminars in mental health and healthy lifestyle. Many postmodern people living in Hungary suffer from serious mental problems. We invite them to the MentO office for personal counselling. The Mental Office also went out to the Sziget Festival one of the biggest Rock Festivals in Europe. They spent 10 days there, working 12 hours a day, mostly at night, where they offered counselling. They had more then 1,500 conversations.

In Reykjavik, Iceland, the "Summer on the Sea Ministry "aims to encourage people to enjoy fellowship through Bible reading/music and prayer whilst sailing. About 250 participants enjoyed the spiritual journey along with the sailing. They continue keeping in touch with those who joined this adventure inviting them to the Bible in 3D project which will start in February 2012 (see below).

New Initiatives

Dr Miroslav Pujic, TED Communication, Media and Publishing director introduced The Great Hope Project, which was enthusiastically supported by the committee. This initiative aims to engage members and pastors in witnessing to make people disciples of Jesus Christ. "The purpose of this initiative is to bring Hope into every home for today and for the future and to present the love and ultimate victory of God in the battle of good and evil" said Dr Pujic. He continued: "We want to connect with non-Adventist family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues at work in order to share with them the teachings of Jesus Christ and to invite them to follow Him." There are numerous resources which will provide support for this initiative such as: website, magazine, The Great Controversy book, animation and movie based on the theme of the great controversy, a message book Experiencing the Joy including DVD and curriculum. The goal is to distribute 2 million pieces of literature and to engage 80% of active members in giving Bible studies.

Pastor Janos Kovacs-Biro, TED Evangelism director, introduced two new initiatives:

**Bible in 3D** - is a pilot project to reach postmodern people of Europe. Postmoderns love stories, they would like to experience the supernatural and they would like to see values of life upheld. For this reason we are setting up an exhibition in Harpa – the most famous building in Iceland - where we will present the story of the Bible (the story of Redemption) in nine sections. It will start with a culturally relevant approach reminding the Icelandic people that the survival of their nation and language is based on reading the Bible story during the evening family time. After entering into the booths with professional guides (pastors), the people will walk through the story of Great Controversy – from Creation to Restoration. This gives people the chance to grasp the story of redemption within about 90 minutes. In every booth visitors will receive information on that section of the story and a leaflet extracted from a relevant Ellen G. White book related to that section of the story. At the end of the tour visitors will receive an invitation for the evening programme. During the nine evenings we will highlight the main Christian values, addressing relevant social issues with the help of professionals, presenting excellent music organised by the director of the Opera in Reykjavik, and Biblical answers to the most compelling spiritual needs in the many crises Iceland finds itself in – helping people to live with confidence in God.

**Jesus7** – is a pilot project for reaching nominal Christians in Europe where people have a vague understanding of some Bible stories, but do not understand their implications. Jesus7 is based on the approach used in Health Expos. The series will last seven days and each day one story from Jesus' life is presented in a hall. People will be able to come, visit and ask questions from professionals who have visited Israel and explored the sites included in the series. During the evenings people will be invited to attend the presentations on the life of Jesus. During the Jesus7 series about the two thirds of Hungary will be covered with banners and advertisements beside the motorway. The twenty six pastors and districts involved are praying and working together to reach their countrymen to see Jesus in a new light. They are taking the council of Ellen White seriously: "Give them evidence that you are a Christian, you are desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the trust as it is in Jesus." (Gospel Workers, p. 120).

Dr Michael Hamilton, TED Sabbath School and BCS director explained that 2012 is the Year of the Bible Correspondence School (BCS) for the Trans-European Division. "The aim is to invite each member of the church in TED to become involved in the work of the BCS in their respective country by prayerfully inviting friends, relatives and neighbours to become engaged in the study of the Bible by enrolling for a course. A special Bible Course on the life of Apostle Paul has been written to commemorate the Olympic year, 2012. This course, along with others will be available on the LIFEconnect website and all are invited to participate. Church members should 'Never Miss an Opportunity to Pass it On', concluded Dr Hamilton.

The TED places a huge emphasis on cities within its territory. With the help of existing approaches like public evangelism, church planting, community services and with new and creative approaches such as the pilot projects presented above, and by the Great Hope Project we would like to establish centres of influence in every big city of Europe within the TED following the advice of the Spirit of Prophecy to "... establish in all our cities small plants which shall be centers of influence..." (EGW Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 115.)
**New Strategy: think differently ... think possibilities**

The TED has begun to develop a new strategy for mission in Europe based on the concept of thinking differently ... thinking possibilities. It is organised around the three concepts of the Tell-the-World initiative of the World Church, but these are defined with a view to the religious needs of postmodern and secular Europeans:

REACH UP – talk to God, worship God, experience God

REACH OUT – understand people, meet their needs, make disciples

REACH ACROSS – revitalise, nurture, and empower communities of believers

Dr Wiklander pointed out that a community focus is going to be very important in the work of the new TED and he described how the Church can positively impact society. Twenty-one specific actions and measurable targets have already been developed for the plan which will be reviewed and finalised in the next few months.

“I have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit among us,” agrees Artur Stele. “The attitude of the executive committee members is excellent. I learned a lot from my brothers and sisters in the TED. I know that this part of the world is very difficult for the preaching of the Gospel, but also I know that now we are sowing the seed for a great harvest through the work of the Holy Spirit. I praise God for the talents, great vision and commitment of the TED people to the Lord”, concluded Stele.

**Conclusion**

In his final remarks Dr Wiklander asked his audience to “look at our pioneers and compare what they had on May 20, 1863, when our church was organised:

- 125 churches (new TED: 1,168)
- 3,500 baptised members (new TED: 82,000)
- 1:373,143 ratio of members to world population (SDA: 1:407; new TED: 1:2,470)
- $8,000 annual giving (new TED annual tithe $57,243,132; annual offerings $3,208,739)
- 30 employees (new TED: 603 pastors)
- No institutions (new TED: Newbold and other union institutions)

He then added: “God can do the same through us as he did with the young Seventh-day Adventist Church, if we long for him as they did. He wants to use us as his agents of change, not because he needs us, but because we need him – being used as channels of his grace to others brings us closer to God than by any other means possible. Moreover, God is a God of fellowship and community and receiving the gospel through a fellow human being (us) builds community where God is able to reveal his grace in a fuller way than anywhere else in this world – he wants to make us ‘the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ’ so that ‘through the church will eventually be made manifest the final and full display of the love of God’ (Acts of the Apostles, 9).”

With effect from 1 January 2012 the Trans-European Division Executive Committee will be made up of church administrators, departmental directors, pastors and lay people representing each of the eleven Unions and three Fields of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 22 countries in Europe. [tedNEWS]

If you would like to see more photographs from the TED executive meetings, please click here.

To learn more about the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, please visit our websites:


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In 2010 the TED asked the General Conference a similar request to that posed by the North American Division regarding a variance to the policy to allow commissioned ministers to be conference or union presidents. In addition the TED asked for the study of the theology of ordination to be prioritised and permission to ordain women within its territories. Although no formal answer was voted at Annual Council this year we understand that an answer, if formally given, would have been negative.

The committee expressed sadness and disappointment at the response of the Annual Council and recognised the Bible-based conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a fellowship of the “priesthood of all believers” and that the Holy Spirit calls and equips men and women with various gifts, including that of leadership. For many within the TED it is an ethical and legal matter that strongly affects their consciences.

The committee prayerfully voted to affirm that each union can apply parity between male and female pastors within the framework of TED’s existing policies and guidelines for ordained/commissioned minister credentials.

As far as the North-American Division decision is concerned, to keep the variance they asked for in 2009 and then voted both in 2010 and 2011, we understand their need for this and regret that Annual Council was unwilling to endorse their decision.

Dr Bertil Wiklander, TED President says: “What works best for the TED at this time is to let all know where we stand and what we want regarding women in leadership, while doing all we can to promote women as pastors and leaders in our church within the working policy. We will continue to work with our unions to see how we can support and enable the many women who the Holy Spirit has clearly called to leadership.” To read full voted document please click here.

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The Great Hope Project...think differently...think possibilities! "The world is winding up! Jesus is well on His way and, yet, people still don't get it...
To Avoid Misunderstanding

17 November 2011, St Albans, United Kingdom [TEDNEWS] In order to avoid any misunderstanding in connection with the vote on Women in Leadership by the TED Executive Committee, on 16 November 2011, the Trans-European Division (TED) administration has issued the following statement:

“We wish to underline that the TED has not voted any changes in the GC/TED policies or model constitutions. The TED is granting unions permission to manage the matter of parity between male and female pastors on the basis of TED’s Guidelines for Commissioned Pastors as voted in the TED Executive Committee in 2009, based on consultations with the TED and an authorisation by the appropriate union governing body. The TED is not authorising ordination of women within its territory but is waiting for the General Conference to conduct its study of the theology of ordination.”

The Trans-European Division Administration

To read full voted document please [click here].
The Great Hope Project...think differently...think possibilities! "The world is winding up! Jesus is well on His way and, yet, people still don't get it..."
Women in Leadership

Preamble to the Motion on Women in Leadership

In November 2010, the Trans-European Division Executive Committee made four requests to the General Conference regarding Women in Leadership within the TED

(a) that the study of the theology of ordination is prioritised;
(b) that the General Conference would review and amend its policies so that the wording is gender neutral and all leadership pathways are open to male and female;
(c) that a variance to the model constitutions and bylaws be granted with the insertion of “conference and union presidents should be ordained/commissioned ministers” in its policy language;
(d) that the General Conference grants permission to ordain women to the gospel ministry within the TED.

We recognise that meeting these requests may take some time. Therefore we see each of them as standing requests from the TED while we wait for their implementation.

Concerning our request for a variance in the model constitutions and bylaws by inserting the addition that commissioned ministers may also be elected as conference and union presidents, the General Conference Annual Council voted in October this year to decline a similar request from the North American Division, and by common consent this was taken as a negative answer to our request.

Motion on Women in Leadership

• We maintain our Bible-based conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a fellowship of the “priesthood of all believers” and that the Holy Spirit calls and equips men and women with various gifts, including that of leadership. Ministry in the New Testament is based on spiritual gifts. It is the fellowship of believers that recognises and endorses these gifts and sends out women and men for service.

• We express our sadness and disappointment at the decision of the Annual Council. We prayerfully and sincerely believe it will damage the work of God’s people in many parts of the TED.

• We find it difficult to understand why the election of a commissioned minister by a local constituency could harm other world divisions, since a commissioned minister serving as president only impacts the local organisation.

• We believe that ordination or the “setting aside” of members, regardless of gender, for leadership in the church is made by prayer and the laying on of hands in order to confirm the presence of the spiritual gift of leadership, as the Bible teaches, and not to convey a particular quality of “priestly holiness” or spiritual status.

• We recognise that the World Church has approved a timetable for studying the theology of ordination with a view to bring a proposal to the General Conference Annual Council in 2014. We regret the extended timeline as it places some unions/conferences/missions/fields in an ethical and legal dilemma.

• We recognise that while waiting for the World Church to establish the Biblical theology of ordination, there are unions/conferences/missions/fields within the TED where the issues of women’s ordination and their election to leadership positions are matters of ethical integrity and individual conscience which may challenge the church and undermine our sharing of the Adventist message with the vast majority of the population. After consultation with the TED administration and approval by the appropriate church governance body, such unions/conferences/missions/fields may apply parity between male and female pastors on the grounds of the TED’s existing policies and guidelines for ordained/commissioned minister credentials. [tedNEWS]
As a leader in God's church, you will probably be asked on some occasions to deliver a sermon to a different audience and/or congregation. Wanting to do your task well, you will inevitably ask: How do I do this well? What is a good sermon? As a member of a local church and listener to sermons Sabbath after Sabbath, you ask that question too.

Is a good sermon a matter of taste, similarly to a good meal or music? Is it that our personal upbringing, culture, taste, how we are psychologically wired and other things, determine which sermons we consider to be good and which perhaps bad and boring?

Any preacher who ever preached a sermon is aware of the enormous variety of different people's perceptions in his/her audience.

A lot could be said about what is a good sermon, good preaching. For this article, let me just highlight two.

**Good news not good advice**

In my last church, one of my members came to me and said: "Pastor Duda, I am so disappointed with you. You have been our pastor for two years now and you have not preached against women wearing trousers yet!" Obviously, her idea of a good sermon was that it should tell people what to do (and not to do).

However, from my experience as a pastor and administrator, most people know what to do; they are just not very good at that. My problem is that I already know that I am not what I ought to be; I know I am doing things that I ought not to do and that I am leaving undone things I ought to do. Like most people, I do not live my life crippled by moral indecision, paralyzed for lack of good advice. Our problem is not moral indecision, but moral impotence (Rom 7:21-25).

That's why the remedy cannot be just good advice about what we ought to do, but good news about what God has done – "What the law could never do, because our lower nature robbed it of all potency, God has done: by sending his own Son..." (Rom 8:30). Thus remedy and good preaching is not good advice about what we ought to do, but good news about what God has done. Ultimately preaching is about God, and what he has done, not just about us and about what we ought to do. Surely, our understanding of who God is and what he has done has implications for our lives. There will be some ethical imperatives based on that. But our self-understanding must flow from our understanding of God. When we speak of what we ought to do (and we must speak about it), these moral imperatives must issue from our knowledge of what God has done. Otherwise our imperatives become only pious moralizing, compounding in our hearers their burden of guilt.

If preaching is to be proclamation and not mere moralizing, the ethics of our preaching must be rooted in the theology of our preaching. We cannot make sense of who we are and what we ought to do, unless we first know who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ. Theology empowers the ethics; it does not just accompany it with an encouraging, heavenly-Father pat on the back.

There is a temptation for leaders (and not only for them!) to use preaching to tell people what to do and not to do and thus straighten them out and "force" them to follow what we consider good and useful. But this can easily border on spiritual abuse. A good sermon will inspire people and help them to do what is right and not just tell them what to do.

**Seeing yourself as part of God's story**

Preaching is kerygma, the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Preaching therefore must be biblical, or it is not preaching at all. The talk may be interesting or edifying, but it is not preaching. The sole source of our knowledge, of what God has done, comes to us through the text of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

However, the fact that a sermon is rooted in a particular text or passage is no guarantee that what we are saying is authentically biblical. It is not the frequency of quoting the Bible (or EGW) that makes it biblical. For a sermon to be biblical, it must be rooted not only in a specific Bible text or passage, but also the immediate and wider context of the passage and in the cosmic sweep of God's story as a whole.
I have been teaching Homiletics for over 20 years. In my enquiries with pastors, theology students and members about the sermons which they remembered after a year, 5 or 10 years, or even more after the first time they heard them, I found one common denominator – a memorable sermon was one that somehow “clicked” the Bible material with the current experience of the listener.

The Bible did not come to us as a collection of proof texts, system of fundamental beliefs, a recipe on how to know God’s will, or seven rules for successful leadership. It came to us as a story that has its beginning and its climax. Thus good preaching must recognize not just what God has revealed to us, but how he has revealed it. The gospel that we preach has come to us through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments telling God’s story. This needs to be connected to our story, which is part of the bigger story.

The stories of the Bible are not merely illustrations of the revelation of God, they are the revelation. Biblical truth is the Event (not just cerebral doctrine) and the Event is what God has done in our creation and recreation (salvation), in what He is doing now and in what he is yet to do before the story ends.

Good preaching is telling and retelling God’s story and our stories from creation to the Second coming (not in one sermon hopefully!). The Bible speaks about this special type of remembering (OT zakar, NT anamnesis), a remembrance which does not merely call to mind the things past, but makes them real, present, potent and demanding here and now.

The gospel is no longer the story of something that God did once for all, far away then and there. It is now also the story of our world, our society our culture, our individual lives in all the complexity and strange mixture of glory and shame.

That’s why we need to do not only the exegesis of the Bible text, we need to do the exegesis of life. If we have no idea where people are today, the complexities of their lives, the demands of their environment and allurements of culture in which they live, then even the most brilliant exposition of historical details of Ezekiel is not going to connect with them. However theologically sound, however exegetically accurate, however historically informative, however interesting and inspiring it may be, until the saving acts of God which He accomplished once for all then and there have become embedded in our experience, our culture, our history, our individual lives, we have not preached. We might have delivered a religious talk, but not a sermon, and certainly not a good sermon.

A good sermon is not just remembering His story, it is also the remembering of ours. And when our story becomes part of His story, His bigger story, we have a good and a memorable sermon. The two stories are not two anymore, they have become one as we begin to live, however imperfectly “in Christ”. As the apostle Paul put it: “the life that I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

We preach the good news that in Christ God’s kingdom has come, a new kind of life has been made possible here and now, a new kind of humanity has been born, a new kind of community has been established. The critical and decisive battle with the power of darkness has been fought and won, not by us, by what we do, but by Christ and what he accomplished on the cross of Calvary 2000 years ago. The war is not yet over, but the outcome is no longer in doubt.

Our personal future may be uncertain, but the outcome is not unknown for those who know the story of God. We know for sure how His story will end. Paradise lost has been regained and will be restored by Him. And we all can be a part of it. That’s what good preaching is all about!

By Pastor Daniel Duda, Education Director, Trans-European Division
How should we treat the newly elected leader?

In the build-up to the average constituency meeting – whether it be at conference, union or higher levels – you will always find at least three groups of people involved: the speculators; the agitators; and the orchestrators.

The speculators are a benign group to which most of us belong. The agitators are usually a smaller and more focused group who have an agenda they want others to share, thereby hoping that they will be able to influence outcomes towards their bias. The orchestrators will always have sinister intentions, backed by strategic plans designed to put their candidates into power.

Session delegates are very much aware of these things, and generally arrive at such constituency meetings with a touch of apprehension in the pit of their stomachs. The dominating question in the minds of most is: 'Who will it be?'

Once the vote is taken and the new leadership announced, that tension quickly dissipates and many delegates leave immediately, thinking that their work is done.

Does our responsibility cease once we've voted?

Do we discharge our obligations and responsibilities to church leadership with a cross on a piece of paper, or by waving a voting card?

Are we only there to determine who will lead us – or do we have responsibility to influence how they lead?

To my thinking, the real question that we should ask ourselves is: 'How should we respond to these new leaders, whether they are our choice or not?'

Do we adopt an aloof 'wait-and-see' attitude, secretly hoping that they will make heavy weather of their new responsibilities? Then, if they do, we can smugly broadcast that we 'knew it would happen'!

Or do we become more aggressive than that, creating complex issues that will put them to the test – so we can then 'put them to the sword'!

The 'saints' have had practice

This strategy is not new. Regular upstanding churchmen tried it on Jesus 2,000 years ago: 'After dinner the Pharisees and the lawyers attacked Him with all kinds of questions, hoping He would say something wrong. From then on, they acted more like His enemies than His friends.' (Luke 11:53, 54, The Easy English Clear Word.)

Ingratiation

Another approach to new leadership is ingratiation. Those who employ this strategy are often masters in the use of subtle compliments that gently caress the carnal nature. Suggestions that 'Things have never been so well-run before', or 'You fellows are a breath of fresh air', can create dangerous illusions of success for new leaders.

It is human to want to be close to our leaders and count them as our friends. But ingratiation slides easily beyond compliments to tangible favours, and favours build obligation, and obligation may cloud objectivity!

Beware of 'courtiers'

A 'courtier' was one of those people who once swarmed around the rich and the famous, especially royalty. The courtier couldn’t ‘buy’ the regent’s favour with gifts of money or land, but if he supplied choice information he gained a special status, and the protection of the king.

Some leaders have an insatiable thirst for certain types of information. They want to know about the latest alliances, what people think of them and their leadership style, the moral blind spots of their colleagues and counterparts – anything that may give them perceived leverage over those they lead! But the real ‘leverage’ is in the clever courtier’s hand. He may use information selectively, mischievously, partially, or in any way he chooses, to manipulate the gullible leader.

How does God want us to act?
God can't support aloofness, aggression, ingratiating, obligation or manipulation. So what does he expect from us?
Perhaps these ideas will be helpful:

Join them in 'Gethsemane' – Every leader is going to have moments of intense stress, or times when nothing runs the plan, and nobody seems to care. These are often very, very lonely moments – times when our leaders need to know there is someone else in their 'Gethsemane' with them – someone who is praying for them!

In Matthew 26 we see how much Christ would have appreciated the praying presence of Peter, James and John. Just listen to the sadness and raw human need in these words: "Then Jesus came with the disciples to a place called Gethsemane and said to them, 'Sit down here while I go over there and pray.' Then he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be in terrible pain and agony of mind. 'My heart is breaking with a death-like grief,' he told them, 'stay here and keep watch with me.' " (Verses 36-38, New Testament in Modern English, J. B. Phillips)

His vivid anticipation of the next day's legal charades, public humiliation and inhuman torture, and the burden of humanity's measureless iniquity, squeezed blood from his pores – but they slept. He was in severe turmoil – but they slept. Three times he urged them to 'watch' with him – but they slept!

So, loyal members and colleagues, let's join our leaders in their daily 'Gethsemanes'.

Hold up the leaders' hands – On the way to the Promised Land, Israel was attacked by the Amalekites, and this is what happened:

'As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, . . . Aaron and Hur held his hands up – one on one side, one on the other – so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.' (Exodus 17:11-13, NIV.)

Moses was holding up his rod, a symbol of God's power and grace, but he could not do it alone. He needed the ongoing support of Aaron and Hur, because victory is always a team effort!

So, when our leaders are holding high the symbols of God's power and grace, let's support them tirelessly!

Tell truth to power, but do it properly – Bob Stone, a management consultant, makes the following observations:

'Telling the truth to the boss is the first responsibility of an ethical subordinate. . . . Speaking the truth isn't just a matter of personal integrity; it's crucial for organisational success.'

And he is right on target. The one thing that our newly appointed leaders wish for is that we tell them the truth. We need to open with them about what we think should be stopped, fixed or initiated for God's work to be successful. But we must make sure that we have the truth before we tell: that our motives are pure, our facts accurate and our perspectives balanced.

'Telling truth to power' is never easy. It takes courage – but it also needs to be done in a gracious spirit and with due tact. Time and place are also important. Many a true word has been wasted because it was said at the wrong forum. The rule of thumb for 'truth telling' is simple: the smallest audience will usually deliver the best results! Nathan confronted David about his sin, not Israel.

'Tell truth to power' – our leaders are waiting!

So...

Do we discharge our obligations and responsibilities to church leadership with a cross on a piece of paper, or by waving a voting card?
Are we only there to determine who will lead us – or do we have responsibility to influence how they lead?


By Julian Hibbert

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