Happy Holiday Season

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13 December 2011 Oslo, Norway [Geir Olav Lisle; tedNEWS] Nobel Peace Prize

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Happy Holiday Season

Dear Readers,

Once a year we have a sense of moving forward, leaving something behind and getting into something new - it's the time of Christmas and New Year and it is here now.

For us as Seventh-day Adventists the passing of time has always been significant. As we are now about to enter a new year, we realise we are getting closer to the time of God's mighty intervention in our history in order to accomplish his purpose with his creation, things that are so beautifully worded in Revelation 21:1-5: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"

And this fills us with joy, because we are longing for the Lord.

But let us bear in mind that the Lord is not only going to come. But he has come and accomplished his victory over death and evil through his death and resurrection, and he is coming to us through the Holy Spirit. It is this latter coming of the Lord that I wish will be your experience during the end of this year and the start of the new - a fulfilment of the promise that our Lord will be with us always until the end of time and especially where two or three are gathered in his name.

May the Christmas and New Year Season be filled with joy and light from the Lord and may we all sense his presence in a powerful and inspiring way as we move forward to a new year.

May God bless and fill you with His abundant joy,

Dr Bertil Wiklander, President

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Church Leaders Meet with Hungarian Ambassador on Looming Deregistration of Churches

13 December 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Bettina Krause/PARL/ANN; tedNEWS] Religious liberty leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church this week met the Hungarian ambassador to the United States in an effort to help officials from that country better understand the potential effects of a looming deregistration of churches.

The Law of Churches, set for implementation on January 1, would deregister all but 14 religious denominations in Hungary, including the Adventist Church. It could also potentially affect the church’s theological seminary.

Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, Gyorgy Szapary, met with officials from the Adventist Church’s Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department on December 12 at the Hungarian embassy in Washington, D.C. While the law is still set for implementation, Adventist representatives later described the meeting as “cordial” and “productive.”

“We expressed our deep concerns to Ambassador Szapary about Hungary’s recently passed ‘Law on Churches’ and its impact, not just on the Adventist Church, but on many other minority religions as well,” said Dwayne Leslie, the Adventist Church’s director of legislative affairs. Leslie represented the Adventist Church at the meeting along with Ganoune Diop, the church’s representative to the United Nations.

Diop and Leslie provided the ambassador with an overview of the international denomination and the history and scope of the Adventist presence in Hungary. They also explained the potential impact on the Adventist Theological Seminary in Pécel, near Budapest, which serves 66 students.

Adventist Education officials have previously said the seminary is key for providing theological and counseling education in the Hungarian language and cultural context. “Although it’s small, the seminary meets the needs of the church in Hungary for pastors and theologians, as well as for life style and family life counselors,” said Mike Lekic, an associate Education director for the Adventist Church.

Following Monday's meeting, Diop said the ambassador was gracious and receptive to the issues presented by the Adventist Church. "The meeting provided an excellent opportunity for dialogue -- we stated our concerns clearly, and heard the perspective of the Hungarian government," he said.

When the new law, voted in July, goes into effect next month, it will strip all but 14 “historic” religions of their legal status. Minority religions must then apply to the Hungarian parliament for re-registration.

Religious liberty advocates worldwide, however, have decried the law, calling it unnecessary state interference with religion and a setback for human rights in Hungary. More than 300 groups are set to lose their registration, including Hungary’s Methodists, Unitarians, a number of Islamic communities, and many smaller Protestant and evangelical churches.

In November, Diop and John Graz, PARL director for the Adventist world church, met in New York with Hungary’s ambassador to the United Nations to express the church’s concerns about the potential plight not just of Adventists, but of other religious groups in Hungary that will be affected by the new law.

Leslie and Diop said the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department will continue to monitor the situation in Hungary and will provide any assistance requested by local church leaders. [tedNEWS]
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..."

Dwayne Leslie, legislative affairs director for the Adventist Church, was one of two church representatives who met with the Hungarian ambassador this week to explain the effects of the Law of Churches. Here, Leslie speaks at a religious liberty event in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. [ANN file photo]

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Nobel Peace Prize Winners Inspired by ADRA | TED Adventist

http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/nobel-peace-prize-winners-inspired-b-

13 December 2011 Oslo, Norway [Geir Olav Lisle; tedNEWS]

Nobel Peace Prize Winner Leymah Gbowee has provided ADRA Norway and ADRA Liberia with new perspectives on the loss of our people in Liberia back in 2003. Last Friday before the Nobel ceremony Leymah Gbowee and Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf set aside their time and met with ADRA Norway staff. ADRA Liberia Country Director Emmanuel George and the wife and daughter of Kåre Lund, who was killed in Liberia in 2003, Gbowee had a very special story to tell. She met Kåre Lund and the Liberian workers in the field on the same day they were killed. They met at the same checkpoint, with the same soldiers. That evening, when she arrived in Monrovia, she heard news reports that the ADRA workers were missing.

Sunday night was the Nobel Peace Concert and the three recipients of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize gave thanks for the recognition they had received from the Norwegian Nobel Committee. The Yemeni activist Tawakkol Karman gave the crowd in Oslo Spektrum a lesson in street protest: ‘Together We Shall Achieve all our dreams .... Fighting corruption, … … Becoming Global Citizens’!

ADRA Norway has a special history with Liberia and the peace movement behind the Liberian women who, this weekend, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. ADRA has been present in Liberia for decades. During the civil war in the early 2000’s ADRA Norway and ADRA Liberia worked together on an emergency operation for Liberians who returned home after being displaced in Ivory Coast. During a trip to monitor the progress of the project, ADRA Norway’s country director Kåre Lund, the Director of ADRA Liberia and their driver were shot and killed by “government soldiers”. The details of this incident remain unclear, but it is known that these soldiers without discipline, were looking for valuables for their own gain. The civil war in Liberia had thus claimed the lives of three people who had devoted their lives to save others. The families of these men - they were all husbands, fathers and brothers - suffered irreplaceable loss of beloved family members and ADRA lost some of our best employees.

Last Friday myself, along with the widow and daughter of Kåre Lund and country director of ADRA Liberia, had the pleasure of meeting the two Nobel Prize Winners from Liberia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee. Our request to meet the Nobel Peace Prize winners was not only to congratulate them but to offer them an opportunity to meet Christel Lund, Kåre’s widow, and insure ADRA’s support and continued commitment to Liberia despite the events of 2003.

As a board leader, I was prepared to present the ADRA work in Liberia and hear Nobel Peace Prize winners present their achievements, political victories and visions for Liberia’s future. But I was emphatically put in place by these women. The meeting turned out to be rather a close and personal encounter between women that in different ways had struggled for peace in Liberia. It turned out that both President Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee were well acquainted with the events that had shaken ADRA and the families of our men back in 2003.

In the meeting President Johnson Sirleaf explained that the killing of ADRA staff and other similar events was carried out by coked up-soldiers with neither money nor discipline. She told of a very difficult year for Liberia, affecting also all people who visited and worked within the country. Liberians killed their own people, raped their women and children, attacked those who tried to help.

But it was Leymah Gbowee who gave us new perspectives on the loss of our employees. Her amazing story was that she and her staff had met the three ADRA workers in the field the same day they were killed. They had met at the same checkpoint and had been addressed by the same soldiers. That evening, when she arrived in Monrovia, she heard the news reports that the ADRA workers were missing.

Gbowee then expressed that the horrible killing of ADRA workers was a direct inspiration that culminated her work as a social worker and caused her to sincerely devoted all her strength to work for peace and women’s rights. The killing of...
aid workers from ADRA gave peace efforts a new momentum and this inspired peace movement was recognized through the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo City Hall this weekend.

These loved ones will never be replaced. But the story of President Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee gave us a regained faith in the work of ADRA – that what we do is important! This past Friday we took confirmation knowing that they died doing meaningful work that meant so much to so many. "This does not make the loss less painful, but it creates a greater pride for the job he did," writes the daughter of Kåre Lund, Annika, in her blog.

Tawakkol Karman's lesson in street protest is real: 'Together we shall achieve our dreams'. It is simply a privilege that ADRA was able to meet these strong women. Those who change the world, one life at a time.

You can read more about the incident with ADRA-workers in Liberia in Leymah Gbowee's book 'Mighty ask our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayers and Sex Changed a Nation at War'.

A short excerpt from the book follows: "On the way back to Monrovia, we encountered three men who worked for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. They'd been in the field, too, and told us they were going to get something to eat before heading home. At the border of Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties, we came to a roadblock manned by Taylor's soldiers. Trucks like ours, that belonged to nonprofits, were supposed to get waved through, and we'd never had a problem before. But this day, they stopped us. "Come outside the truck!" one of them shouted. "Put everything down!" Music was blaring. The men were smoking weed and their eyes were red. "Everything out!" We had put our bags in the back of our pickup and covered them with plastic. We tried to hurry to untie everything, then open the bags, remove items one by one and spread them out on a large table. My heart was pounding. Thank God I didn't put the money in the car, was all I could think. We would be safe, unless . . . I was the only woman there; rape was always a possibility. Finally, they waved us on. At seven that night, when I was home, I heard a news bulletin: an Adventist car had been found burned near the border of Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties; the staff was missing. A few days later, the bodies of the men we'd met were found. We later learned they'd had money in the car. The last checkpoint they'd passed was the one where we'd been searched. The soldiers there reported that "rebels had attacked." I had come that close to never seeing my children again. How much more clearly could God have said to me, "This job isn't worth it—leave and do what you really want"? Within a week, I resigned from the Trauma Healing office. Occasional consulting work with other social service agencies brought in a little cash, and Tunde provided for the children. I would get by. My work with WIPNET was what mattered now."

Leymah Gbowee, Mighty be our Powers, kap 12, Kindle edition. [tedNEWS]

Leymah Gbowee, Mighty be our Powers, kap 12, Kindle edition.
Church Chat: Where did London's Majority White Church Population Go?

12 December 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Ansel Oliver/ANN; tedNEWS] Ian Sweeney says that within the more than 11,000 Seventh-day Adventist Church members in the London area there are probably less than 200 white British.

Like several world regions of the denomination, church growth there is mainly among immigrant communities.

That's causing Sweeney, the president of the Adventist Church in Britain, to assess how Adventists are ministering to the 70 percent majority white population in London, as well as throughout the British Isles. His advice is for Adventists to find better ways of impacting communities surrounding its congregations.

He plans to identify people who excel at conducting ministry across cultural barriers in un-entered areas, which may require financial support for those regions without an Adventist presence.

Sweeney, 46, a black British national, was appointed president of the Adventist Church's British Union Conference in July.

He spoke with ANN by phone from his office in Watford the week before a quarterly meeting with his five local field presidents. He discussed issues involved in creating a plan to grow membership across the board, regardless of race or culture. He also discussed his influences and which biblical character might offer the most relevant example for his situation. Some interview excerpts have been edited for length:

ANN: What's the demographic makeup of the Adventist Church in the British Isles?

Ian Sweeney: We're about 45 percent West Indian, and then slightly less than that is African and some from Asia. About 10 percent at most is white English, and I think I'm being generous with that.

ANN: What's your plan to build membership across the board, regardless of race and culture?

Sweeney: To start, we need to have the discussion, and we have begun that. My Communication director has started a blog on our website about this. It's also gone into the union paper, which comes out on a fortnightly basis.

Within the church there are people who can minister cross-culturally and cross racially. I look at Peter and Paul. Peter was a great guy, but God had to give him a whole vision of sheep and unclean things just to get him to do one Bible study. Paul, however, had an ability to minister to the gentiles. It's not without significance that Paul was the major contributor to the New Testament. So my call to the pastors is, let's identify the Pauls who can minister outside their own cultural context.

ANN: What role does leadership play in reaching all cultures?

Sweeney: To start, we need to have the discussion, and we have begun that. My Communication director has started a blog on our website about this. It's also gone into the union paper, which comes out on a fortnightly basis.

ANN: What does your plan to build membership across the board, regardless of race and culture?

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ANN: Why is outreach a big part of this plan?

Sweeney: I suspect -- and I can tell by some of the comments on the blog -- that sometimes the church is so internalized looking at our own issues that our board meetings, for example, haven't spent the time as our church manual says for our primary focus of evangelism.

In my previous church, instead of praying that people come in, we prayed about going out and we saw results. The figures weren't brilliant in context of big numbers, but the impact for me is not simply about how many accesses we bring, but about whether or not people know. Noah for example, was a useless evangelist if we look at him only by number of accessions. He reported zero baptisms for a century. But when the rain began to fall, everybody knew. Impact for me is about "Did somebody hear?"

ANN: How open are we to talking about race and racism in the church?

Sweeney: I think we're moving into a stage where we can speak more openly and honestly about issues that really face us. I'm not fully conversant on the history of the church here in Britain. I think there is [pain] and I'm sort of hesitant to think differently... think of that era of the 50s and the 60s. I was raised here but that all predates me. I don't want to open too much of the old wounds. When we have those discussions, I want it in the context of, "I hear where you came from, but this is where I think we all need to go." I know for some folk who are black they may say, what about the [historical] struggle? I'm not decrying the struggle. I'm simply saying let's never lose sight of what God has called us to do. I really want us to place our focus on the bigger picture, which is the 65 million or so in Britain who don't know Christ.

ANN: Where might repentance fit into how Revival and Reformation is expressed in UK?

Sweeney: I'm really glad for the whole emphasis that Elder Wilson is putting on Revival and Reformation and the Great Controversy Project, because to me it's about remembering our Adventist roots. One of the great challenges Britain has is that it isn't as God-friendly as the United States. Sure the queen is the head of the church in England, but believe me, this is not a Christian-welcoming society. Christians are often in the media under attack. Having said that, there is also in Britain a search for some sense of spirituality. There are churches that among the host community outside of Adventism that are growing. A lot of times Adventists think it's about the worship service and that you have to bring a band in. It's not about that. You have to be relevant to people's lives where they're at. Most of these growing churches do things that impact their community, whether it be childcare, mentoring, youth clubs, they are there visibly in the community saying, "We're here, we see your needs, how can we help you?" I think that's what we are to do as a church.

ANN: Who are your mentors and models of success?

Sweeney: One of the church leaders who has been an inspiration to me is Freddie Russell [president of Allegheny West Conference based in Ohio, United States]. He has a principle, "Hang around people who are successful." And anyone who I see is doing something [I admire] I'll call them so I can sit at their feet. I'm reading Ted Engstron, The Making of a Christian Leader, I'm sharing that with our staff. I'm also looking at a book by Nigel Rooms, Faith of the English, which talks about integrating Christ with Culture. And Ellen White of course. Right now my biblical inspiration is Jeremiah. It's a difficult example -- God tells him to go preach and says "No one's going to listen, but do it anyhow." That's [caused] me to re-evaluate success. Do we need people to listen, or is it a success that we do what God asks us to do? He asks us to preach to those people because He loves them, not because He's trying to waste our time. I really want folk to go and witness because they love Christ.

ANN: How are you going to integrate faith and prayer into an action plan?

Sweeney: Coming back to Jeremiah, he cried for the people, cried over Jerusalem. The one thing we as Adventist are not seen to do well, when last have we cried over the lost? And I ask that starting with myself. We cry for money, for jobs, for this, for that, but what [Jeremiah] was doing was crying for the people who have been lost. One of the things we're emphasizing for 2012 is that if you're not crying in prayer for the lost, you're certainly not going to be interested in seeing them saved and working for their salvation. [tedNEWS]
Newbold College International Business Studies Programme Expanding

11 December 2011 Bracknell, United Kingdom [tedNEWS] Newbold College of Higher Education, England has signed a five-year agreement with Southern Adventist University (SAU), USA to provide a Newbold campus-based “European Semester” for SAU’s undergraduate business studies students majoring in International Business.

“The purpose of this agreement is for Newbold to provide SAU International Business majors with a memorable cultural experience that is Newbold campus-based and academically rooted in Christian business values” said Dr Philip Brown, Principal, Newbold College.

Earlier this month Dr Brown signed a memorandum of understanding with Dr Gordon Bietz, President, SAU while visiting the SAU campus. The agreement, co-proposed by John Crissy, (School of Business, Newbold College) and Braam Oberholster (School of Business, SAU) provides for Newbold College to host a group of Junior/Senior SAU students majoring in International Business for the Newbold campus each Fall semester, commencing from the 2012-13 academic year.

From the students’ perspective, the Newbold College campus-based international experience will include “international business” field trips to a variety of well-known locations in London such as the European Bank of Reconstruction, the Bank of England, Lloyds of London, the ASI UK conference, visits to companies such as Siemens and visits to not-for-profit organisations such as World Vision International.

Additionally, while studying on the Newbold campus, SAU business students will be able to participate in “cultural experience” trips to a variety of well known locations in southern England such as the Globe Theatre, the British Museum, the National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, a walking tour of ‘Jane Austen’s Bath’, Winchester Cathedral, a performance at the Royal Albert Hall, Hampton Court and William Shakespeare’s Stratford-upon-Avon.

Up to seven students are expected to comprise the first “pilot” group of Southern Adventist University international business studies students to arrive at Newbold College in September 2012. Feedback from this “pilot” group will ensure further improvements and/or refinements to the offering with the first substantive cohort of Southern’s international Business students mandated to attend Newbold College for a semester from September 2013. The “European semester” offering will also be extended to the wider SAU student body as well from 2013. [tedNEWS]

1 Photo: (l to r – seated) Philip Brown, Principal, Newbold College & Gordon Bietz, President, Southern Adventist University (SAU) (1 to r – standing) SAU’s Bob Young, (VP, Academic Administration), Braam Oberholster, (School of Business), Don Van Ornam (Dean School of Business) & Volker Hanning (Associate VP, Academic Administration)

2 Photo: Dr Philip Brown (Principal, Newbold College) with Dr Gordon Bietz (President, Southern Adventist University)
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..."
Evangelism Symposium Urges simpler Gospel Presentation

05 December 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Elizabeth Lechleitner, ANN/teDNEWS] Top administrators, evangelists and Ministerial secretaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are reprioritizing the role of God's spirit and simple Bible truths in public evangelism.

Rather than complicating the gospel or endlessly repackaging it, leaders are advocating a simpler approach. They say preaching basic Bible truths is the most compelling way to present the Adventist hope.

This approach requires admitting one's own vulnerability, said Shawn Boonstra, associate director for the Ministerial Association of the church's North American Division. "The world is tired of religious know-it-alls," he said, citing a New Testament story in which the apostle Paul identifies with his audience to make a point.

"It's OK to be a sinner saved by Christ. If your audience doesn't see that you need Jesus, they'll never listen to your message," Boonstra told members of the world church's Evangelism Symposium last week.

The symposium is a broadening of the church's Council on Evangelism and Witness to include more regional evangelists and Ministerial secretaries in the discussion. About 40 leaders from each of the church's 13 divisions met at Adventist world headquarters November 28 to 30 to share resources, exchange ideas, address challenges to evangelism and pray together.

"Jesus' mission is to seek and save everyone who is lost, so the number one priority of the church should be to win people to Jesus," said Jerry Page, secretary of the world church's Ministerial Association.

In an increasingly secular world, evangelists can no longer assume their audience is either familiar with Christian principles or Biblically literate, said veteran Adventist evangelist Mark Finley.

"I would say my preaching has become more Christ-centered, more biblically basic, and certainly ministering more to the felt needs of people," Finley told ANN during a symposium break.

This message of simplicity seemed to resonate with church leaders and evangelists who attended.

"I think maybe we'll need to accept the idea of just submitting ourselves to the Lord and just preach the simple gospel truth and leave the rest to Him. I think we need to get out of this trap of always thinking we must invent something new or sophisticated, and just use the Bible," said Mikhael Kaminskiy, director of the Office of Assessment for the church's Euro-Asia Division.

Church leaders said a clear, authentic message of truth can even connect with world's growing postmodern population -- a group of 1.8 billion people worldwide, according to Miroslav Pujic, communication director for the church's Trans-European Division.

"We are realizing that Jesus' message is exactly what this generation is looking for -- the real truth, transparency and an alternative to the systems and churches they don't trust in," said Robert Costa, an associate secretary for the world church's Ministerial Association.

Fundamentally, postmodernism is despair and disenchantment with humanity's failed attempts to explain, order and better the world through logic and reason, Boonstra said. "Instead of understanding, logic and reason brought some of history's worst disasters -- two world wars, genocide, religious scandal and economic crisis."
Evangelism Symposium Urges simpler Gospel Presentation | TED Adventist http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/evangelism-symposium-urges-simple...

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...

Postmoderns are seeking an authentic, meaningful answer to today's unsettled world, Boonstra said. The Adventist truth provides a compelling one, he added. The church's understanding of history and interpretation of the Bible "can offer clarity and set the table for understanding," he said.

"God has put a longing for eternity in the human heart. Somewhere inside they know that they were not meant to be severed from their Creator. They might come at it from a different frame of reference, but it's there," Boonstra said.

Adventist evangelism should focus on people aware of this void, Boonstra said, not those who refuse to "budge spiritually." A close reading of the Bible indicates that there were "no cold conversions in the New Testament," he said.

"The disciples watched for interested hearers, which is a lot different than trying to interest hearers," he said.

This approach requires "doing a lot more homework and a lot more listening," but it's the only method of evangelism modeled in the Bible, Boonstra said. Even during Pentecost, the outpouring of God's spirit on the early Apostolic church, the Bible says "devout men from every nation" (Acts 2:5) were converted. "God has already been there every time. God wakes up the human heart, and then sends us," he said.

A symposium presentation by Ernestine Finley reminded church leaders what to do after they've welcomed new believers to their congregations. Her "spiritual friendship plan" for nurturing fledgling Adventists connected with Johnny and Poppy Lubis from the church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division. "Sometimes we do evangelism and 500 come in, but 500 more go out the back door," Poppy said.

As the church embraces a focus on urban evangelism, nurture will be crucial in ministry to large cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Johnny said. [tedNEWS]
The Message of Hope in Slovenian Prison

01 December 2011 Ljubljana, Slovenia [tedNEWS] Wintley Phipps, Seventh-day Adventist pastor and singer, visited prison facilities in Dob, Slovenia. Invited by EU parliament member Lojze Peterle, Phipps performed in front of prisoners, their families, prison personnel and invitees from political and church domain.

He started the programme with a rendition of The Lord's Prayer then included some well known worship songs and negro spirituals and finished it majestically with "the sinners anthem" - Amazing Grace. Through the messages of songs and his short presentations between them, Wintley truly "brought hope to all of us," as Mr. Joze Podrzaj, prison director, said in his thank-you speech. Inmates thanked Wintely Phipps with heartfelt applause and a hand-made beehive panel - traditional Slovenian souvenir. "It was truly inspiring visit of a special person who invests his life in encouraging those who need encouragement most," said Mr. Peterle in his statement to AdventPress.

Phipps arrived to Slovenia together with his wife Linda from Brussels where he sang at the annual Prayer Breakfast for EU Parliament Members. During his short visit he met also with Robert Friskovec, a coordinator for chaplaincy ministry in Slovenian prisons, and Zmago Godina, president of Slovenian Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church.

[tedNEWS]
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...

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Newbold College Deputy Principal Receives Key Community Engagement Award

25 November 2011 Bracknell, United Kingdom [Philip Brown, tedNEWS] Dr John Baildam, Deputy Principal, Newbold College, has been presented with The Paul Clark Award – a special award for 2011 Governor of the Year at nearby Garth Hill College. Charlotte Edwards MBE, English cricketer and current captain of the England women’s team presented Dr Baildam with his award. Charlotte was guest of honour at Garth Hill College’s Celebration of Success last Thursday evening, 24 November.

Dr Baildam’s citation acknowledged his proud community service record of over 17 years as a governor of Garth Hill College, including the last 12 of these years as the Chair of the school’s Governing Body. John’s tenure as chairman has coincided with a period of huge improvement for this local public school and his role in this has been highly significant. The citation also affirmed John for his “resolute commitment to education and his capacity to handle difficult situations with intelligence and sensitivity”. He was also acknowledged for his “boundless enthusiasm and ambition to see the school continue to improve and for managing governors’ meetings with an unswerving attention to detail and endless good humour.”

Dr John Baildam’s sustained community engagement has been a feature of his service to Newbold College since commencing as a Lecturer in 1982. Dr Baildam has served in a variety of posts at Newbold since that time, including Director, School of English; Director, Summer School Programmes; Director of Admissions & Records; and since 1997, Director of Academic Affairs.

At its most recent meeting in Montenegro earlier this month, the Newbold College Board of Governors voted to accept that the senior management position of Director of Academic Affairs be now known and referred to as Deputy Principal.
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."

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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.

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- We recognise that changes to the bold print in the model constitutions in the TED Working Policy must be approved by the General Conference. We have maintained this position within the TED when unions or conferences have been tempted to walk an independent path. However we request the General Conference to understand that for many this is an ethical and legal matter that strongly affects their consciences.

- 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. Our self-understanding must flow 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 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 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 sublimecompliments 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 to 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 be 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

- Pastor Julian Hibbert is the Editor of MESSENGER, the British Union Conference journal, and this article is an expanded version of an editorial he wrote in the issue of 22 July 2011.