September 1, 2015

Weekly News From Around the Columbia Union Conference

September 2015 Feature: Bringing up Boys
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Editorial: There’s no Plan B in Evangelism

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Some leaders and members of the CROP program. Photograph by Hayne Photography

**Bringing up Boys**

*Story by Tompaul Wheeler*
As many as 24 million children in the United States live in a fatherless home.* Without present or involved dads, boys especially are less likely to graduate high school and more likely to use drugs, be incarcerated and commit suicide, and generally struggle to succeed. Who can offer these youth a more promising future? Positive, Christian, male role models—and the Columbia Union has some you should meet:

In Newport News, Va., everything’s coming up roses—that is, focused, educated and spiritual young men, students of the Calvary Rites of Passage Program (CROP).

CROP sprouted out of Allegheny East Conference’s Calvary church as a way for dedicated male members to show young men the path to a successful future. Trevor Kinlock, Calvary pastor, and James Hiers, an elder, developed the program in 2007, and these two and their five-member CROP committee educate and invest in teenagers, from offering informal communication to monthly meetings, field trips to historical sites, and even a biannual mission trip to Tanzania to assist at an orphanage.

Each year the CROP team mentors between 25 and 30 young men aged 11-19. Participants are drawn from Calvary and other nearby Seventh-day Adventist churches, and, increasingly, the broader community. Of the approximately 200 participants since the program’s inception, every one has graduated high school and many have gone on to college or other vocational programs. Many of them have also been baptized.

“Our name represents a young crop being watered and fertilized in Christ that grows into a strong tree,” says Hiers, CROP director. “We’re very active and we make Christ the center of our approach to young men. We realize there are a lot of young men in destitute situations, from single parent homes to adolescent problems, delinquency [and] academic problems. Several of them just don’t have that Christ-centered foundation. We wanted to organize something that would stand in the gap between them and Christ. Our goal is that they become a product of academic excellence, spiritual young men who witness to other young people and draw them into the faith.”

The CROP group meets monthly on Sunday afternoons to tackle issues. “We make a yearly agenda and come together and discuss a topic, from conflict resolution to sexuality to gentleman etiquette,” adds Hiers. “We do Bible studies as well, in a relaxed setting. We have the boys go to the home of one of the men in the church and do an in-depth study and share views.”

CROP leaders work to ensure that participants’ thoughts and concerns are heard as well. “Rather than someone standing up and facilitating, we let them kind of own the program. It’s self-directed,” Hiers explains. “I’m 46, so for me to suggest what a 17-year-old needs, it may be very distant from what they really need.”

They also bring in community professionals, like a representative from the local police gang unit. “We give [the professionals] the opportunity to share with us and hear their views,” says Hiers.

Travel is another important part of the CROP program. Leaders have taken the boys to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, college visits from New York to Alabama, as well as professional football and basketball games, even amusement and water parks.

“Our some of our youth have never left the area, never left Newport News, and now they’re spending the night in Times Square and visiting historical [sites] like the Empire State Building,” says Hiers. “We just hope to form some mindsets to think more appropriately, [cultivating] more Spirit-driven, more purpose-driven lives.”

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September 2015 Feature: Bringing up Boys

Michelle Bernard

From Boys to Men

“I was one of the first to join the program,” remembers CROP graduate Curtis Herbert, now 21. “They wanted something that would teach young men, especially black men in our community, what it means to be a man—things like how to treat women with respect, how to manage your finances, the importance of education. We had a lot of in-depth discussions about education and we were able to ask questions about things like how to deal with young ladies and better ways to handle relationships.”

Herbert adds, “One of my favorite parts was the accountability. You could talk about things that maybe you couldn’t with your parents, and you wouldn’t be judged for it. You were able to get a lot of real answers, and a lot of the leadership staff would share their own personal stories with us. So, it was a lot more of a bonding experience.”

Herbert looks back fondly on his CROP trip to the “Big Apple,” particularly the New York Stock Exchange. He says the group prepared for the trip by discussing finances for several months. “We got to go on the floor there and talk to some of the brokers, and see where a lot of the money was handled and flowed through for our country,” he recalls. “Some of the people there talked to us about managing money. And, even though it was educational, they still made time for us to see [New York City] and have some fun too.”

A social work major in college now, Herbert credits CROP for helping him mature in his thinking, knowledge and faith. “We had talks about drugs and sex and what certain diseases are and what they look like, and what they do to you. They were very candid. No matter how serious the topic, they never tried to get us to do things or change out of fear,” he says. “A lot of people I know think the church just tries to use scare tactics to get people to change or make better decisions, but they never approached the subjects that way.”

Herbert says the CROP leaders see a need for this type of program in many more churches. “Several of our guys don’t necessarily have fathers or their dads aren’t consistent in their lives. Or, even if they are, some of this information you don’t necessarily get out of a conversation with your parents. They may not know how to go about it,” he explains. “I think our church wants us to grow up and be a lot wiser in our decisions, and come closer to Christ and each other. One of the biggest goals they had was to create a sense of brotherhood, with each other and with them as well. They wanted us to support each other. As men, we’re not always forthcoming with our struggles, and they wanted us to talk to each other and just lift each other up.”

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Passing it On

Herbert also credits CROP for fostering a desire to give back, and he now volunteers for the program. He’s shared his experiences in higher education with the younger participants and loves seeing a new batch of kids develop and mature, like 15-year-old Carrington Black.

Black has been a part of CROP since he was 12. “It helps us prepare for life,” Black says, referring to the professionals who visit and do presentations on life issues. “I can apply everything I’ve learned to my daily life and continue to trust in God. I’ll remember everything I was taught and it’ll help bring me through.”

Black especially enjoyed traveling to New York City. “We saw a whole bunch of businesses there, and I didn’t know they have a really old train museum about transportation,” he says. “I want to be an engineer, and I’ve been surprised that there are a lot of opportunities out there that we can take.”

While the Calvary church solely funds the CROP program, it has received Columbia Union Homeland Missions funds for the past two years. And now, city officials have taken note and are trying to find ways to provide financial support, says Pastor Kinlock. “Our local city councilwoman has her children in our program because she learned about it and has seen benefit for her boys,” he adds.

Everything CROP does is built around its motto taken from Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” But, when young men enter the program, they’re also required to learn the group’s pledge: “I am a man of integrity. I will rise to every challenge. With God on my side, I have no limitations. I will respect my past and embrace my future. I will acquire knowledge and value my education. My family is my priority. I will serve my community. I will submit to God’s authority. I am God’s man, a new crop for a new generation. I am the best that this world has to offer, so look out for me. I am a man of integrity.”

**Tompaul Wheeler writes from Nashville, Tenn.**

*U.S. Census Bureau

*Feature photo: Hayne Photography photographed Carrington Black and James Hiers*
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The Creation Debate: Why Does it Matter if it Happened in Six Literal Days?

Michelle Bernard

The Creation Debate: Why Does it Matter if it Happened in Six Literal Days?

Story by Edwin Manuel Garcia

A decades-old dispute within Seventh-day Adventism about when and how the Earth was developed may have been settled to the liking of the church’s top officials and a majority of its worldwide delegates this summer at the 60th General Conference (GC) Session in San Antonio. However, the intra-denominational conflict doesn’t look like it’s about to cease.

Supporters of the official Adventist tenet—that creation was a literal, six-day event that occurred roughly 6,000 years ago—claim that evolutionary teachings have been seeping into some of our universities, and they fear that these theories being taught as fact could further expand into academies and elementary schools.

Critics of the church’s view—those who side with the scientific community that believes Earth could be millions or billions of years old, and formed in time spans much longer than literal days—contend that the denomination’s stance isn’t backed by Scripture, isolates Adventism as an extremist religion and threatens to erode the confidence of young, intellectual church members.

Do you believe in a literal seven-day creation week or not? Join the conversation!

The divide has reached the highest levels of the General Conference, most notably when Ted Wilson, world president, last year urged hundreds of Adventist-school educators at the International Conference on Bible and Science to “be loyal to God’s biblical truth” by accepting the creation belief. If not, he said, they should reconsider having denominational jobs.

Most recently in July, GC Session delegates took two days to discuss and finally vote to modify the church’s creation statement known as Fundamental Belief #6. The edited section adopted words such as “recent,” meaning creation occurred not too long ago, and “literal,” to signify creation took place in six literal days.

Wilson prefaced the second day of discussion by saying a word could be interpreted in many ways, but “recent” was chosen because “we need to clarify that this process was not old.” He added that “recent” also acknowledges that Adventists are not uniform in their understanding of the exact age of the Earth.¹

The revision drew praise from supporters, such as Brandon Senior, a Bible worker in Chambersburg and Waynesboro, Pa., who preaches sermons on creation and is disappointed that all Adventists are not on the same page. “God the Creator is being attacked,” he says. “What I see inside the church is absolutely heartbreaking to me. I’ve talked to Seventh-day Adventist ministers that don’t believe in the seven-day creation week.”

But others, namely vocal, evolution-minded Adventists, say modifying the Fundamental Belief was a mistake that will damage the church’s image because the Bible, they say, doesn’t provide evidence of a 6,000-year-old planet.

“We have aligned ourselves as a church with what I would call extreme fundamentalism,” says Ervin Taylor, professor emeritus in anthropology at the University of California, Riverside. He frets that that will hurt the credibility of the church and prompt “even more people, young scientifically literate people, to leave the church.”
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Michelle Bernard

The Origin of the Controversy

The creation-evolution debate intensified at different points between about 2005 and 2009 when a few La Sierra University (Calif.) students and a larger group of influential outsiders took to the blogosphere to declare that some La Sierra biology professors were emphasizing Darwinism.

Not everyone was surprised. Supporters of the church’s official position say PhD candidates who attain their advanced degrees in biology from secular institutions are apt to receive a heavy dose of evolutionary theory. And, when the newly minted biology professors accept teaching jobs at the denomination’s campuses, some may struggle to reconcile their new views with biblical belief and introduce the evolution concepts into the Adventist classrooms.

“I think the constant bombardment from the scientific community is having an effect on our educators, unfortunately,” says David Byrkit, who ministers in the Chesapeake Conference churches of Chestertown and Rock Hall, Md., and who presents evangelistic series on creation versus evolution from a scientific perspective.

Despite the newly revised Fundamental Belief, pro-literal creation adherents continue to express concern that church leadership lacks authority to censure professors who push an evolution agenda.

The North American Division Education Department, led by Larry Blackmer, seems to favor professors being allowed to teach evolution only so students understand both sides of the issue, but expects educators to strongly emphasize the church’s own fundamental belief as fact.

And, it would also help if universities carefully screen job applicants, Blackmer says. “I truly believe with all my heart that we have every right to ask candidates what they believe about Adventist beliefs.” That way, he adds, universities can root out candidates who favor evolution over creation.

The Significance for the Church

While Adventists can agree that the Bible doesn’t provide a date of creation, church co-founder Ellen G. White stated in numerous writings her belief that Earth is about 6,000 years old, and that time frame has been widely accepted.

Among the reasons church leaders were compelled to revise Fundamental Belief #6 to more clearly state that creation was a literal, six-day event is because of its connection to the denomination’s stance on the 24-hour Sabbath. If the creation belief erodes, they say, then the church’s prominent view of the Sabbath doctrine—and a core component of the denomination’s own identity—could be jeopardized.

Or, as Franke Zollman, pastor for Chesapeake’s Williamsport (Md.) church, puts it: “If the days of creation are not literal days, then our emphasis on the seventh-day Sabbath is misguided.” Zollman, who will give an evangelistic series on creation at his church this fall, adds, “The doctrine of the Sabbath and creation are bound up together.”

Zollman says he understands some of the arguments propagated by evolutionists, but implores Adventists to accept the church’s view of creation because the Spirit of Prophecy and authority of Scripture must outweigh science. “I am
not anti-science, but we have to remember that all scientific data is based upon interpretation,” he says.

If church members can’t accept the literal creation week as fact, says Sean Pitman, a physician in California who runs the conservative Educate Truth website, which posts developments in the intra-denominational squabble, then the rest of the Bible is open to interpretation in a way that could oppose Adventist beliefs. The creation story, Pitman continues, gives validity to the rest of the scriptures, which is why the church supports it. “The Bible is very clear,” he insists.

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1Source: July 07, 2015, Andrew McChesney, Adventist Review/ANN

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There’s no Plan B in Evangelism

Michelle Bernard

There’s no Plan B in Evangelism

Editorial by José Cortés, president of the New Jersey Conference.

A preacher friend of mine shared this allegory of Jesus:

Forty days after his resurrection and ascension to heaven, as Christ entered victorious through the gates of heaven, angels surrounded Him and asked, “Tell us Lord, how will the good news of mankind’s salvation be carried to all of humanity on Earth?”

Jesus said, “I gave a Great Commission to my disciples: ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned’” (Mark 16:15, 16).

“But, Lord, how will that work in practice?” the angels asked. “Will they accept the message?”

Jesus answered, “I left them with an example of how to accomplish it. I looked at the multitudes, and felt great compassion for them! In dealing with human beings, I knew that reaching them is both an art and a science, yet quite simple to understand and very effective if done correctly, following these steps:

1. Humans must be treated in such a manner that they understand that we mean them well.
2. We must show sympathy.
3. We must meet their needs.
4. We must win their trust.
5. And, only then, say, ‘Follow Me.’"

In wonder, the angels questioned with concern, “What will happen if that does not work? What is plan B?” Jesus replied with love and authority, “No! There is no plan B! This is the plan!”

Christ’s Method Alone

I can imagine the deep sadness on Jesus’ face and His frustration at observing His disciples developing plan B’s for turning the work of evangelism—sharing the good news of salvation—into a complicated equation with many rigid and legalistic rules.

Some have believed their plan was better than the way Jesus did it. I say we need to wake up and change our ways if we are to finish the mission and go to our heavenly home!

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. Our Savior mingled with men as One who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow me’” (Ministry of Healing, p. 143).

Our secularized and secularizing society needs the pressing and loving action that comes from a ministry of
compassion. Compassion must precede the task of proclamation. When the world sees the actions of a compassionate church, they will see Jesus in us and will follow us toward the kingdom!

Unfortunately, many have replaced compassion with legalism, which keeps the church tied to a stake, stifling it and putting it in reverse. Compassion is the missing link if we desire to remain faithful to the mission!

My plea, dear brothers and sisters, is that we return to Jesus' plan, the plan! Remember, there is no plan B!