

ADVENTISTS AND TITHE

NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

ADVENTIST TODAY

VOL. 5, NO. 5

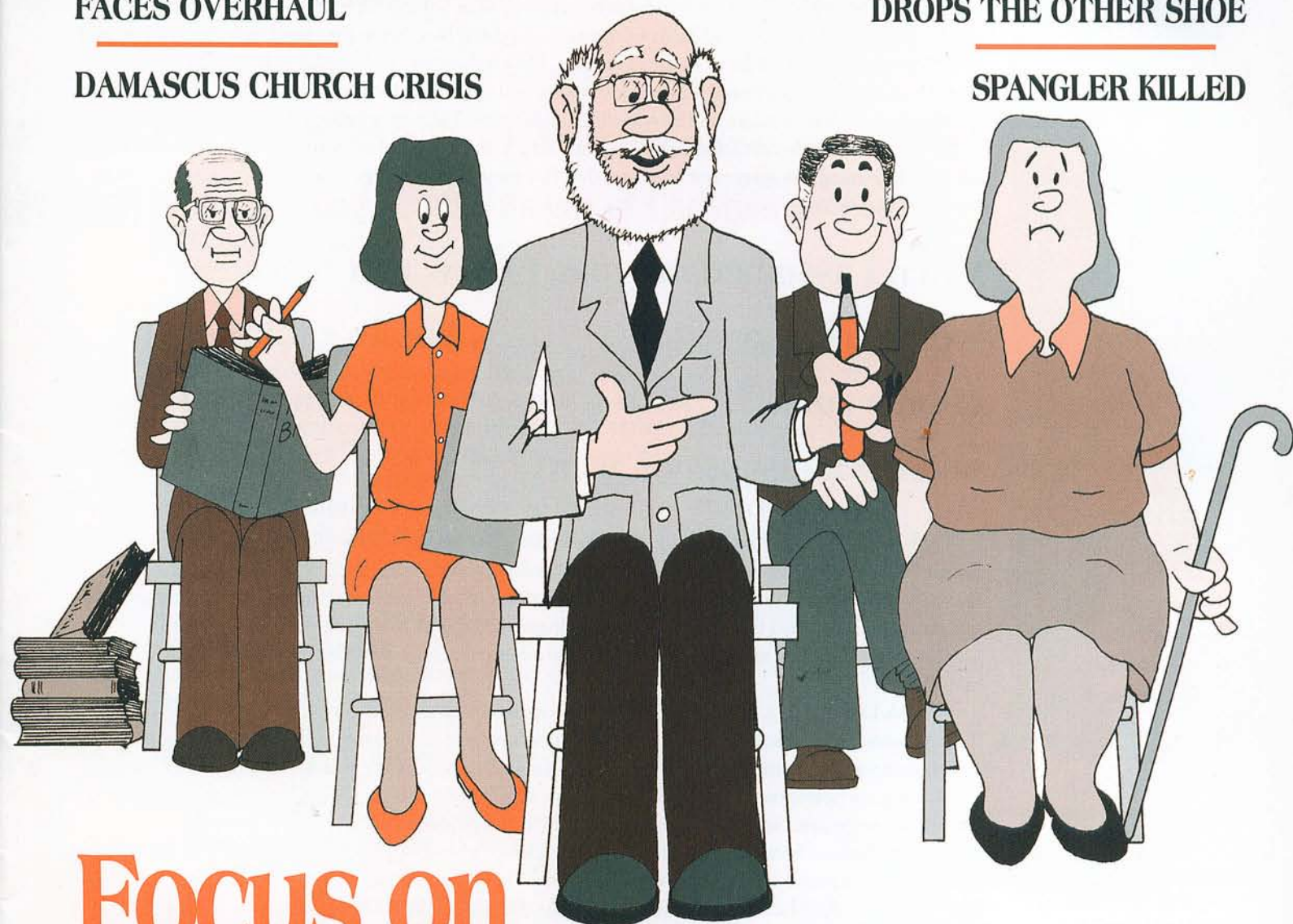
SEPTEMBER • OCTOBER 1997

**MINISTERIAL TRAINING
FACES OVERHAUL**

DAMASCUS CHURCH CRISIS

**ADVENTIST RETIREMENT PLAN
DROPS THE OTHER SHOE**

SPANGLER KILLED



**Focus on
Small Groups**

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Inside Adventist Today

Walters Turns Over Editorship to McLarty

With genuinely mixed emotions I write to tell of my stepping aside as executive editor of this publication. However, after five years of intensive involvement with helping to found and edit *Adventist Today*, I feel it is time to pass on this key editorial role to another person—John McLarty, but more on John in a moment. I will continue as an editorial advisor and a board member, and I will help to see that *Adventist Today* rests on a more secure financial footing.

I look back on the last five years with satisfaction. Although this 24-page publication must look to the general reader as easy enough to produce, it takes considerable work (which is happily done by a great staff!): the generation of ideas for articles, working with authors, line editing, copy editing, design, proof reading, printing, and mailing from constantly updated lists. Some personnel have burned out, and others have come close. When I assumed my role, I knew that “success” would mean a lot of work, but love for my church and its need for good journalism and open discussion were an irresistible lure. I am gratified I made that decision, and now I will help *Adventist Today* in another role.

Significantly, Raymond Cottrell will be continuing as editor emeritus. Although Ray is now 87, and from the beginning the agreement has been that Ray provides general guidance, he continues to actively oversee and write.

When I assumed my role, I knew that “success” would mean a lot of work, but love for my church and its need for good journalism and open discussion were an irresistible lure.

The basic editorial team continues with one major reassignment. Cherie Rouse, who has served with creativity and minute attention to detail, has stepped aside as managing editor, and Colleen Tinker has taken up this role. Cherie, who has requested to work on specific assignments rather than doing general management, has joined the ranks of assistant editors. The role of managing editor is not new to Colleen, as she has ably served in this capacity for other publications. Hanan Sadek continues as office manager.

John McLarty, 45, is a particularly apt choice for current editorial leadership at *Adventist Today*. He is a pastor/writer who possesses a passion for our announced goal of focusing on a “robust spirituality for the contemporary Adventist” (p. 2, March/April issue). Pieces he wrote which *Adventist Today* recently published got a hearty reception from many of you. His “Divine Uses of Doubt” in a recent issue got readers’ attention, and another Adventist publication has requested permission to reprint it.

After graduation from Pacific Union College and the Adventist Theological Seminary in Michigan, John served as a pastor in New York City. Since 1992 he has worked at the Voice of Prophecy where he now is the writer/producer of the Sunday Broadcast. He and his wife Karin and three children—Bonnie, 13; Garrett, 11; and Shelley, 8—live in Thousand Oaks, a suburb of Los Angeles.

Adventist Today is maturing, and a sign of strength is the ability for key roles to be assumed by others. Readers, thank you for your continuing support of a publication that speaks to issues which feed both mind and heart.

Jim Walters

Co-founder, Adventist Today



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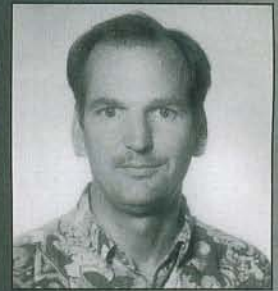
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ABOUT THE COVER:

Ellis Jones, cartoonist, captured the essence of small group members in these light-hearted drawings. Ellis works for Loma Linda University, School of Dentistry.

ADVENTIST TODAY

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EDITOR EMERITUS:
Raymond Cottrell

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John McLarty

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Telephone: (800) 236-3641
Fax: (909) 884-3391
E-mail: AToday@aol.com

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FIRST CLASS

Letters to the Editor
Adventist Today
P.O. Box 1220
Loma Linda, CA 92354-1220

Ratzlaff Book a Wake-up Call

I have just completed reading *Sabbath in Crisis* by Dale Ratzlaff, about which Colleen Moore Tinker stated in her article, "Book Plays Role in Church's Reform," (AT 5:3, pg. 8-9) that it was a "significant" contributing factor to the absolving of many of the Worldwide Church of God's dearly held beliefs. As I read the book, I was impressed by Dale's sincerity, yet I was also surprised at his methodology of analysis.

He failed, time and time again, to examine contexts according to the Bible; he failed to do word analysis; he drew parallels that were not relevant to the text—only to his point; he promoted certain presuppositional statements that were not biblically valid; he tried to do verbal analysis without the help of a Greek Bible; he made "logical" assumptions based off of "proof texts;" he utilized certain current Jewish ideas to color his understanding of Old Testament Jewishness... etc., etc., etc. Other than that, Dale did a splendid job of eisegesis [theological slang for reading meaning into instead of out of the text].

In reality, this book is a good wake-up call for those of us who call ourselves People of the Book. We need to teach our people (fellow Christians as well as SDA's) how to responsibly read the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to confront us with all 66 books—yes, even the "Old Covenant," to use anti-Semitic nomenclature which is, by the way, biblical in Paul's language. May God in His love send us His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth.

Joshua Lizarraga
LaPorte, Indiana

Winn on Spirituality

Dick Winn's article on spirituality was superb! If there was not one more good piece of journalism before or after this year I would feel I have received my sub-

scription's worth! He has put organized religion and church membership in clear perspective. Anyone who cannot see the truth in his many statements about organized religion has not experienced the freedom God intended for us to have.

His 1987 devotional book *His Healing Love* was instrumental in developing a new and more acceptable picture of God for me. It's obvious to me that Dick Winn has grown in his understanding of God and he is very much in touch with his own spirituality. Thank you Dick. We need more articles like this one!

Morris Arnold
Monmouth, Illinois

Bob Bretsch and the Sunnyside Church

Editor's Note: Although AT has run editorials and articles detailing the situation at the Sunnyside Adventist church in Portland, Oregon, there remains a reservoir of grief and resentment that the affair was not given a hearing before the whole congregation. We are including excerpts from letters written to AT, and open letters written to others, which reflect these feelings.

Getting the Facts Straight

After reading your article about Bridge City Community Church (BCCC) and Bob Bretsch, I have some questions about your information gathering process. Please get your facts straight. Bob Bretsch is the least angry of anyone I know, I am personally surprised out how little anger he has shown. Secondly BCCC was not formed as a reaction to the firing of Bob Bretsch as pastor of Sunnyside. The bylaws were written and the church organized before he was dismissed at Sunnyside. In fact the founders had decided to pursue a congregational church regardless of what he decided to do. We concluded that we could no longer work within the SDA

denomination, each of us for individual reasons.

We are grace oriented and our goal is to make the gospel our main theme and let the Spirit lead in our decision making process. We are sabbatarians and will be; we concluded that we could all go to a Sunday church that fits our own individual likes otherwise.

Our goal is not to act out of anger and to not separate ourselves entirely from the activities of the SDA church i.e. church schools etc. Things that have destroyed former SDA's who have formed congregational churches are: continued fostering of anger, isolation of themselves from the SDA community, and too much power invested in the pastor. BCCC's policies and bylaws are structured to try to avoid these things as much as possible.

Nine trustees govern the church and a third each year will be newly elected and no one can serve more than two consecutive terms. The officers are not elected, but are selected by themselves at their first meeting after the election. On the other hand, neither senior pastor can be dismissed without a meeting of the congregation in accordance with the bylaws.

I happen to be one of the founders of BCCC and former head Elder at Sunnyside for five years. I and my wife helped recruit Bob Bretsch for Sunnyside. I also helped write the bylaws for BCCC.

Vern Usher
Gresham, Oregon

Open Letter to Alf Birch

Dear Alf Birch [president, Oregon Conference], I have a serious problem with you. I want to personally explain my perspective. I want to ask you a question and I want an answer.

I am fourth generation SDA. My husband, my children and I have been educated in SDA system. We selected Portland

to live in because of good local church schools, a successful hospital and an opportunity to attend a church which not only met our needs but in which we could be contributing members. Our goals have been realized.

I grew up in a very small declining church in the midwest that my great-grandfather founded. Other than the Loma Linda University Church, it appeared that most Adventist churches I attended were following in the footsteps of the church I grew up in, dying. Life at Sunnyside has been like a breath of fresh air, alive, creative, challenging, growing and a blessing under the leadership of Bob Bretsch. I believed we faced a bright future. I believed that Sunnyside could be a model for a new way to do church successfully.

There were those who did not buy into the vision of the church; there were those who did not personally like our pastor(s), there were those that did not like the diversity Sunnyside offered. The great majority however did, they voted weekly with their feet by attending, giving and being involved. I had seen you as an advocate of Sunnyside's vision, program and staff.

It seemed that we had a workable situation until you seemingly bought into the song of the discontented and became part of the problem. Generally I have had a very low opinion of the church hierarchy and leadership. . . .

I am a member of a church and family that is coming unglued. Initially only a few people had any idea of what was going on, outwardly church life was stable, it no longer is. Your handling of Bob Bretsch's ministry is the straw that is finally breaking our backs not only as members of Sunnyside but of the Adventist Church. You have been playing politics and conducting investigations as our world falls apart. The Adventist Church in the next millennium will not have appeal for those like myself unless radical changes occur quickly. . . .

My question is do you understand the damage you are doing to me, my family, my friends, my schools and my church—what are you going to do about it?

Linda Usher

Gresham, Oregon

Open Letter to President Robert Folkenberg

[Elder Folkenberg], let me tell you who I am, where I came from and why I am so angry.

I'm 82 years old and my SDA roots are... deep....My grandparents came to be SDA's as the result of Bible studies from Ellen White in Sacramento, California in the late 1800's. My father joined the SDA work in the California Conference, then he went to the Washington Conference, the Oregon Conference and finally the Upper Columbia Conference where he retired...

I "built" the present Sunnyside Church....We started the building campaign for Sunnyside in 1977, broke ground in 1980 and burned our mortgage in 1994. We built it with our own in-house contractors...

Let me tell you why I am so angry and bitter at the heavy handed, political and undemocratic firing of Bob Bretsch. . . . without due process...

Let me describe the Sunnyside disaster as I and most of the Sunnyside congregation see it. . . .

I personally met with Alf Birch three times in his office on Bob Bretsch's behalf. . . . I met with him also, along with twelve members of the Sunnyside Church, in the Conference Office trying to save Bob Bretsch. I met with Alf Birch several times in the Sunnyside Church halls and the last time in the entry of Portland Adventist Hospital. The last time I had a conversation with Alf was in my office on a speaker phone with my wife and I talking to him about Bob Bretsch. . . . Alf Birch said, "I have NO intentions of firing Bob Bretsch. If he should leave of his own volition there are at least a half dozen men we can get to step right in and carry on the program he has started..."

On May 18 my wife and I left on a

two-month tour of the USA. . . . On Sabbath, July 21st, we attended our first church service at Sunnyside since we got home. There were less than 50 worshippers at the first service and 168 people at the second service. The last Sabbath we went to church before we left there were over 1000 people for all services. One long time member of the Sunnyside church who was vehemently opposed to building the church in the first place and opposed Bob Bretsch said, "Well we finally got our church back and got rid of all those young kids in the halls." Well, . . . all the kids

were gone and only a few old people remained. . . . After Bob was fired, 625 self-stamped post cards were mailed out to all local baptized members of Sunnyside asking them what they thought of the process used in firing Bob Bretsch. There were 353 individuals who responded, there were 343 individuals

who objected to the process used and only 10 individuals who returned cards that approved...

[Elder Folkenberg], you spent all of your time listening to 60 people (actually 7 people) this is 4% of the approximately 1500 members of the Sunnyside Church. What about the 96% of the rest of us? Apparently we do not count for much. Sheer weight of percentages should dictate a thorough inquiry into these accusations of misconduct before issuing orders to destroy a pastor and most of his congregation....

[Here are the facts.] Early in 1993 a prominent, well to do professional family, (not members of Sunnyside Church) wanted to reserve the church for a wedding on a certain day. That certain day was already reserved for a certain Sunnyside Church member. Pressure was applied to Bob Bretsch to [change his member's reservation]. . . . Bob refused.... As the result of this, a group of well heeled professional

Alf Birch said, "I have NO intentions of firing Bob Bretsch. If he should leave of his own volition there are at least a half dozen men we can get to step right in and carry on the program he has started."

people plus most of the high octane musicians, banded together to "get Bob." Such resentment was engendered by these people that everything Bob did came under condemnation. One was heard to say, "We got Charlie White, watch us get Bob Bretsch" and sure enough they got him.

Bob's theology, his tithing, his congregationalism was 100% a smoke screen. . . .

Elder Folkenberg, I have some strong questions whether the Oregon Conference or the General Conference took proper actions in firing Bob Bretsch for whatever his "sins" were. He devoted an entire sermon to laying open to all of us his so called "sins" including his tithe problems. He publicly apologized to anyone he had hurt. Even Alf told me that "Bob's apologies were as sincere and honest as he had ever heard."

I have questions about the morality, legality, protocol, denominational policies, discipline and censorship for "sins" such as Bob has done and more. . . .

Did the Conference Committee ever meet with the Sunnyside Board of Elders to get their appraisal of Bob Bretsch's leadership? . . . He was voted approval by his elders 22 for versus 3 against. . . .

Did the Conference Committee ever call a town hall meeting to let Bob and his supporters defend themselves? . . .

Was the accusation that he preached congregationalism his other major "sin?" I have never heard a single statement, or sermon, where Bob preached this philosophy. . . .

This letter is mine and mine alone. . . . I know this is a long letter but I had no other way to get my thoughts to you.

Frank Reynolds

Milwaukie, Oregon

A College Student's Reaction

[The firing of Bob Bretsch makes me dismayed and angry, and it] is typical of a world church that is increasingly deaf to the needs, concerns and faith of my fellow collegiates.

At the [Walla Walla] College Church attendance is remarkably low. The reason why is simple—the College Church does not cater to college students. Complaints by Portland students invariably end with the statement, "Well, at least it's not like this at Sunnyside."

To us, Sunnyside was the one point [where] we believed we could connect with the Adventist Church. Pastor Bob Bretsch's sermons didn't rely on pat answers, appeals to dogma, or revel in legalism. A sermon at Sunnyside embraced the far reaches of Adventist thought by compelling, enriching, and challenging the believer to take personal responsibility for his or her faith.

There is no way that the people responsible for this indefensible action can gauge, quantify, or begin to comprehend the impact of this action upon the college community. Or the future effect on Sunnyside church. Quite simply, our concerns were not consulted or considered. According to the philosophy of the Adventist Church these days, what collegiates think doesn't really matter. No, the conference office . . . proceeds with impunity to subject real people to the worst side of any religion. . . . that side that allows people to ruin relationships, divide, and destroy connections with other people on the basis of law.

Andrew Gildersleeve

Portland, Oregon

From the Conference

Since last May I've heard many versions of what happened to Bob Bretsch and the Sunnyside Church. Perspectives have included: squelching progressive ministry, control by the conference, a power struggle between an influential group and a visionary pastor, and a pastor who made some mistakes while pursuing a bold vision of ministry.

My conclusion is that the crucial issue at the heart of this lengthy and painful process was the breakdown of trust and confidence between Bob and at least three distinct groups.

Much of what Bob believed and attempted was approved by a wide body of participants and observers, including the conference leadership. But Bob destroyed the trust and credibility that are absolutely essential for success when a leader attempts to effect significant change.

The first breach of trust and credibility developed between Bob and an assortment of Sunnyside members which included some active and former leaders. Concerns

of these members centered on Bob's leadership style, administrative process, and personality. These people took exception to things Bob said in sermons and private conversations.

There was some attempt to deal with these matters internally at Sunnyside. But reconciliation did not happen, and distrust continued to build between Bob and this segment of membership.

The second area of distrust arose in connection with Bob's tithing practice. In 1994, Alf Birch, Oregon Conference President, questioned Bob about his tithing practice. Bob responded that he was practicing appropriate tithing. Bob's answer was accepted. Alf demonstrated his confidence in Bob by recommending him for membership on the Conference Executive Committee.

Then in the fall of 1996, it became known that Bob was not returning appropriate tithe. When Bob was again questioned about his tithing practice, he expressed a significant philosophical tendency toward independent and congregational thinking. Bob's tithing practice and attitude were a severe blow to the confidence the officers of the Oregon Conference had placed in his leadership.

The third group which lost confidence in Bob was the Oregon Conference Executive Committee. They met twice in May, 1997, to discuss the Sunnyside affair. By the second meeting, the committee concluded the breakdown of trust was so severe that Bob could not be continued as a pastor at Sunnyside.

In spite of their disappointment in Bob, the conference officers still saw him as possessing many gifts for ministry. They recommended Bob be granted an open assignment for four months so that he might seek employment in another conference. The committee voted the recommendation; a few days later Bob opted for termination.

My position as assistant to the President of the Oregon Conference during this time provides me with a unique vantage point. I have observed a careful process lasting from the fall of 1996 through May of 1997 and beyond. The process offered repeated opportunities for Bob to change his direction and regain

the trust and confidence of the conference leadership and the disaffected members of his congregation. But Bob's approaches to these problems were viewed as too little and too late and in some cases deteriorated trust further.

One final note: Beyond the issue of trust and the question of who should take how much of the blame for what has happened at Sunnyside Church is another larger issue: congregationalism. Do we participate inside or outside the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Does the Church need change? Yes. Will it change fast enough for many people? Probably not. I believe, however, that the positive dynamics far outweigh the challenges.

Personally, I choose to work within.
Don Livesay
Vice-president for Administration
Oregon Conference

Holocaust and Human Evil

I agree with many aspects of Doug Kasischke's article, "Adventist Historian Reflects on Work at Spielberg's Holocaust Foundation," but his final statement to the effect that it "... can lift our attention out of the mire and show us the hope of rising above our all-too-human condition" reveals his lack of cognizance of what is going on in the world today.

Granted, if one is to concern oneself only with the condition of the Jews, then certainly all is quite well. However, if one considers all of humanity, then we still fall quite short in our concern. The Bosnians, the Cambodians, many Africans, the Lebanese, the Palestinians can all attest to the fact that we have learned little from WWII happenings. Additionally, even though the Jews have reaped many benefits—reparations for life and property taken, a country, and many other trade and tax preferences—others who shared equally in "the" holocaust—gypsies, homosexuals, cripples, Seventh-day Adventists, and many others—have not been so fortunate. Very little recognition, and no reparations, have been made available to these groups.

Mr. Kasischke says that "Many survivors relate how previously congenial non-Jews would suddenly and viciously

turn on their Jewish neighbors." Has he not read anything regarding the Bosnian conflict? People in this area who used to get along just fine, even intermarried, suddenly turned on each other, with horrible results, primarily for the Muslims. So this is certainly not a phenomenon that humanity has now transcended. The call of "Never Again!" is quite hollow....

Mr. Kasischke muses that "There are other aspects of the survivors that are not so admirable and which challenge the sensibilities of the viewer." Perhaps he is referring to Jewish survivors of Auschwitz who, once released by the Russians in 1944, committed atrocities against German civilians

including women and children which were unquestionably as evil as anything the Nazis did to them. John Sack, author of "An Eye for an Eye: the Untold Story of Jewish Revenge Against Germans in 1945," had been scheduled to give a talk at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. on this subject, but the museum director, Walter Reich, cancelled the talk at the last minute, saying that he had "... determined that holding the presentation would not be compatible with the Museum's programs." Mr. Sack, a self-described religious Jew, says that he wrote his book in compliance with what the Torah tells us; i.e., "to bear honest witness, and indeed, that if someone sins and we know it and don't report it, then we're guilty too...."

It is just about impossible to get through a whole day without encountering some reference to the holocaust—as pertains specifically to Jews. There are books, articles, movies, displays, talks, which promote the idea that, since Jews suffered so much and apparently all alone during WWI, then they should be entitled to any and all considerations in the present. Never mind that Stalin killed far more people than did Hitler. This is the attitude that sticks in one's craw: the overwhelm-

ing and almost-exclusive attention paid to one group's suffering.

The majority of moguls in the entertainment industry are Jews. Their focus seems to be "There's no business like 'Shoah' business."

Is it not time to let bygones be bygones? South Africa presents a wonderful model for accomplishing this; their Truth and Reconciliation Committee is

focused on forgiveness rather than retribution and vindictiveness. Jews used to be known for their compassion; this is certainly no longer true. As you say, just about anyone is capable of evil. Obviously, given the terrible persecution of the

Palestinians, this applies equally to Jews.

Doris Rausch
Columbia, MD

Tabloid Style?

Please do not renew our subscription. *Adventist Today* has lost my interest. It seems the journalistic style has moved towards a "tabloid" style that has become too much for me.

Ron Schulz
Lewiston, Idaho

Both Sides of the Story

Enclosed find a check ... for a 2-year renewal of my subscription....

I appreciate the magazine and it's refreshing to hear both sides of the story.

I read the *Review*, but it doesn't give me the current news that you folks cover.

Arni G. Asgeirsson, D.D.S.
Newburyport, Massachusetts

Adventist Today has lost my interest. It seems the journalistic style has moved towards a "tabloid" style that has become too much for me.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
Adventist Today, P.O. Box 1220
Loma Linda, CA 92354-1220
E-mail: AToday@aol.com

Adventist Ministerial Training Faces Overhaul

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

Traditionally, the S.D.A. Theological Seminary at Andrews University has been the only Adventist institution in the North American Division to offer a Master of Divinity degree. In recent years, however, other Adventist colleges and universities in the NAD, most notably Southern Adventist University and La Sierra University, have explored the possibility of offering graduate training especially for pastors. So far, however, these proposals have met with a variety of mixed reactions including outright resistance.

In March, 1997, La Sierra University circulated a 15-page document entitled "A Pilot Program in Graduate Education for Pastoral Ministry" outlining a proposal for an entirely "new model of education for ministry." According to the plan described in the document, La Sierra would work with Pacific Union College, as well as with faculty members from other institutions on the West Coast, to offer professional education for pastoral ministry that would combine academic work with actual ministerial practice. This curriculum would be especially for people on the west coast who would find it difficult to get to Andrews for study. It is intended to attract Adventist pastors who might otherwise pursue their graduate work at non-Adventist institutions such as Fuller Seminary or Haggard School of Theology, and the document states clearly that the program "is not intended to replace nor even to compete with the M.Div. offered by the S.D.A. Theological Seminary at Andrews University."

Distinctive Program

The new program would have two distinctive characteristics:

- the integration of "learning and the practice of ministry (a) in regard to time and location, delivering education to pastors where they are ministering, and (b) in regard to course content, focusing on the actual work of pastoral ministry;"
- the "extensive use of pastors and other experienced practitioners who are

successfully doing what ministers are called to do."

The course outline is "built on a core of Biblical, theological, historical, and ethical studies," and its purpose "...is to equip men and women for their most effective service as church pastors...with the intent of enabling students to meet denominational requirements for ordination in a period of four years."

The document, dated March 17, 1997, outlines in detail the objectives, purpose, philosophy, and curriculum of the program and includes a comprehensive list of faculty and adjunct faculty with the classes they would teach. Further, the document states that La Sierra would begin implementation of this program in the fall of 1997.

Adventist administrators questioned about La Sierra's program expressed a confusing array of reactions. When *Adventist Today* contacted Richard Osborn, director

...the North American Division is planning to review and revise the entire plan for ministerial training in the division.

of the Department of Education for the NAD, and asked him about his reaction to La Sierra's proposed new theology program, he said he knew nothing about it. When he heard the first paragraph of the document read to him over the phone, however, he said that he didn't realize that "they had come that far." He suggested that *Adventist Today* call Tom Mostert, president of the Pacific Union Conference and chairman of the La Sierra University board.

Supplemental Graduate Program

Elder Mostert, by contrast, was well aware of La Sierra's plans for a "supplemental" graduate program in ministry. His explanation of it, however, was that it was

in development. He stated that the board had asked La Sierra to continue to "work on the plan" and "refine it," but stated that La Sierra would not implement it yet.

Mostert further stated that the North American Division is planning to review and revise the entire plan for ministerial training in the division. Two subcommittees will be appointed to recommend specific changes, he said, and he suggested that those changes would include decreasing the current 10 years of training and internship required before a minister can be ordained. Additionally, the new proposal may allow for seminary students to do more of their training on satellite campuses instead of doing all of it at Andrews. This proposal for revising ministerial training, he said, is slated for a vote at the year-end meeting in 1998.

The La Sierra program, Mostert said, is not intended to replace the "regular track" of Andrews-based ministerial training. Even though it might eventually offer an M.Div., he said, La Sierra's program is not in competition with Andrews. It is designed for pastors and teachers who might find it difficult to travel to Michigan for study.

In answer to the question, "How will you make sure that the 'regular track' ministerial candidates go to Andrews instead of La Sierra?", Mostert responded that Andrews students have the financial incentive of a three-year internship financed by the division, the union, and the local conference.

Further, Mostert stated that he has kept NAD president Al McClure and Andrews University president Neils-Erik Andreassen apprised of the developments at La Sierra. "I wouldn't say they're not nervous about it," he said, but he has reassured them that nothing will happen before the NAD makes its recommendations.

La Sierra Hopeful

John Jones, chair of the School of Religion at La Sierra University, had yet a third perspective. Reluctant to speak of the program, he initially insisted that the projected starting date of fall, 1997, had not come from his office. When *Adventist*

Today clearly identified the 15-page document which outlined the proposed curriculum and which stated fall, 1997, as the starting date, Jones apologized and acknowledged that the document had come from his office. He feels a great need to be cautious about speaking of La Sierra's plans for this program.

The NAD, Jones said, met on July 22, 1997, and "took firm action" against La Sierra's launching this program. The NAD "has come down hard" and "seeks to rein this in," he said. In fact, the NAD is so strongly opposed to La Sierra's plans that they are putting the subject on the agenda at the annual Fall Council this year.

This NAD involvement "muddies the water," Jones acknowledges, "[but we] still have our own hopes." These hopes still include plans to begin offering the new program during the current school year.

Former La Sierra School of Religion faculty member Ed Zackrison, who until last year was Professor of Theology and Ministry, shed some background light on this subject. In a September, 1997, interview he stated that the tradition of Andrews University granting the only M.Div. degrees in the NAD has been very strong. The opposition to any talk of establishing an M.Div. program at other Adventist colleges or universities has been so great that, until the last few months, faculty members had to be careful even about discussing among themselves the idea of offering an M.Div. program.

Qualifying for Accreditation

What La Sierra is doing, Zackrison says,

is developing a strong graduate program in ministry which will qualify them for accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS, not to be confused with the Adventist Theological Society, also called ATS), the main national accrediting body for schools of religion by which the

...until the last few months, faculty members had to be careful even about discussing among themselves the idea of offering an M.Div. program.

Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews is also accredited. In so doing, La Sierra will develop a curriculum for a nationally accredited M.Div. degree.

"It's much easier to ask forgiveness than permission," Zackrison observed.

Zackrison further stated that he believes La Sierra has at least three reasons for pursuing ATS accreditation and the offering of an eventual M.Div.: 1) increased enrollment which would improve the chances for survival of the School of Religion and of the university itself; 2) the establishment of an Adventist "Harvard of the West," a fully-qualified school of religion reflecting west coast concerns and thought which would be accessible to pastors and

teachers in the west; and 3) creating a school which would attract non-Adventist students of theology.

Decentralization Desired

The training of Adventist ministers faces change and is currently in a state of flux. The La Sierra story is only one example of the growing desire among Adventist clergy and educators for decentralized ministerial training. Southern Adventist University has also been working to establish an M.A. in religion, and they also have encountered obstacles. (See "NAD Nixes Proposed Religion Degree", *Adventist Today*, March/April 1997.) According to Gordon Bietz, president of Southern Adventist University, SAU is continuing negotiations with the General Conference regarding establishing this degree program.

Universities are not the only organizations concerned with decentralizing ministerial training. In a singular move of congregational authority, Loma Linda University Church took charge of training and ordaining its own ministers. In May, 1996, the church board approved an ordination program conceived by senior pastor William Loveless. It is overseen by a ministerial committee which includes a local conference representative and which is chaired by Gerald Winslow, chair of the Loma Linda University Faculty of Religion. The program requires an advanced degree in religion from a university or seminary recommended by the committee as well as a portfolio of experience gained as a member of the LLUC pastoral staff.

Roy Branson Suffers Heart Attacks

JAMES WALTERS

Roy Branson, 59, a leading Adventist progressive who has long edited *Spectrum*, had two heart attacks earlier this year—one in May and one in July.

"I feel as good as I ever have," Branson said in a recent interview, "and I am doing everything that I was doing before."

Beyond editing the independent

Adventist journal *Spectrum*, Branson is director of the Washington Institute, and he is co-chair of the Interreligious Coalition on Smoking and Health. Twice Branson has received invitations to the White House, where President Clinton commended him for his work against cigarette smoking.

A close friend of Branson's speculated that his heart problems are the result of his absorbing the wrath of certain denominational leaders who have objected to some

of the articles published in *Spectrum*.

Branson, however, says that the reasons for his problems are more complex than simply stress related to *Spectrum*. He cites family history, inadequate exercise, and diet in addition to work-related tension as probable causes.

Because of the timely use of the drug TPA to eliminate blood clots as well as two angioplasty procedures performed at Washington Adventist Hospital (some 25% of angioplasties must be repeated), Branson's physicians say he has suffered no damage to his heart.

Many Adventists Not Paying Tithe

ALBERT DITTES

A close look at a 1996 financial report issued by the North American Division shows many Adventists are not paying tithe.

The \$507,406,829 of tithe given in the North American Division amounts to a 3.2 percent increase over the 1995 tithe, according to the report, while inflation was 2.95 percent. While the tithe barely beat inflation, it still lagged behind a Disposable Personal Income (DPI) growth of 4.1 percent.

A comparison of the last five years shows the same pattern. Tithe showed an 18.5 percent increase; inflation drove prices up 15.2 percent, but the DPI went up 22.4 percent.

"This means our tithe increase is better than inflation but not quite up to our income," says Bill Cash, director of the Office of Archives and Statistics in the General Conference. "Our per-capita tithe is also not keeping up with inflation."

The Pacific Union gave the most tithe in North America during 1996, and the Canadian Union the least, according to figures released in "A Financial Report on the Use of Tithe, Ingathering and Other Funds."

Of the \$507,406,829 in tithe that the North American Division Adventists gave in 1996, \$107,536,936 came from the Pacific Union, and almost half, or \$206,610,961 came from the Pacific Union and Southern Union combined. Canadian believers give \$24,258,026.

The Pacific Union, therefore, gave 21.1 percent of all tithe in North America, and the Canadian Union gave 4.7 percent.

The Southern Union is gaining on the Pacific Union in tithing, however, and came in second with \$99,074,025, or 19.5

percent of the tithe. The Southern Union had a \$4.3 million tithe gain over 1995, the largest increase in the division. Pacific Union's tithe increased by \$2 million. If the present trend continues, Southern Union will ultimately give more tithe than the Pacific Union.

The other North American unions tended to cluster in groups of two's according to tithe percentages given. The Columbia and the North Pacific Unions gave 12.4 percent and 10.6 percent respectively. After that came the Atlantic Union (9.2 percent) and Lake Union (8.4 percent). The Southwestern and Mid-America Unions also contributed similar dollar amounts, giving 6.9 percent and 6.1 percent of the total respectively.

While the tithe barely beat inflation, it still lagged behind a Disposable Personal Income (DPI) growth of 4.1 percent.

According to the figures in the report, tithe per capita for 1996 was \$612. Assuming all members, including children, pay tithe, it would mean that the average personal income for North American Adventists is \$6,000 a year. According to the tithe figures, North Pacific Union Adventists apparently make the most money at \$7,080 a year per person, and the Canadians make the least, at \$5,420 a year. If tithe is an accurate indicator, Pacific Union Adventists are the second poorest in the NAD, with incomes of about \$5,650 a year.

Following are the unions listed in order of their tithe giving for 1996:

Pacific	\$107,536,936
Southern	99,074,025
Columbia	63,519,249
North Pacific	54,886,871
Atlantic	47,404,568
Lake	43,892,421
Southwestern	35,078,107
Mid-America	31,756,526
Canadian	24,258,026
Total	\$507,406,829

Other Financial Alarms:

- The 1996 tithe income was not enough to cover checks to denominational retirees. According to the report, 10.25 percent of the tithe goes to the Church Retirement Plan, meaning it received \$50.74 million while its operating expenses totaled \$65.81 million. Other sources of income for this fund are schools and other institutions. An "...unrealized increase in the value of the Plan's investments as of December 31, 1996," brought operating income for the year up to \$78.39 million, leaving it with a net gain of \$12.58 million. The retirement plan has 82.83 percent of its working-capital requirement.

- World Mission giving in 1996 went down 5.7 percent from 1995 to 1996—\$23.24 million to \$21.92 million. Per capita World Mission giving decreased 7.5 percent.

- The North American Division appropriated \$3 million to the Adventist Media Center after it became a division institution January 1, 1996. According to the figures, radio and television evangelism is not bringing in tithe dollars.

Inflation and personal income figures are from Bill Cash of the General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics. Tithe figures are the official division figures from the NAD treasurer.

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Adventist Retirement Plan Drops the Other Shoe

H. MAYNARD LOWRY

When the Adventist hospital system switched its retirement plan from a defined-benefit to a defined-contribution plan, could change be far behind for other church and institutional employees? The changes that are in store for the SDA Retirement Plan have been preceded by rumors that the retirement fund was in trouble, but until now the extent of that trouble and the nature of the needed changes have been kept discreetly quiet.

The retirement plan, commonly called sustenance, was established in 1911 for the purpose of assisting older employees who were unable to continue working. Through the years it evolved into a non-contributory plan which assured employees a specific, cost-of-living indexed retirement benefit based on their salary levels and years of service.

The proposed replacement plan will make contributions to individual employee accounts or annuities based on a percentage of salary. The amount of the retirement benefit will not be assured but will depend upon the financial return of the invested funds.

Currently nearly 12,000 retirees receive benefit payments from the plan. Donald R. Pierson, Adventist Retirement Plan Administrator, revealed that if nothing is done and the current level of institutional contributions to the plan are continued, all resources will be exhausted in the early part of the next century. The fund contains less than eight percent of the actuarially determined need of \$1.4 billion to support the nearly 20,000 current employees. In meetings held recently in Loma Linda, California, Pierson said that the switch to the new plan is anticipated as soon as the end of the year 2000.

Changes have been under study for some time. Questions about future benefits for current denominational employees were again discussed at an August meeting in Albuquerque, NM. The fundamental change will be freezing the defined benefit plan on or before December 31, 2000. Other probable changes, based on the rec-

ommendations of this meeting, include moving the retirement eligibility age up with Social Security, eliminating early retirement medical benefits and tightening coverage for eligible medical assistance. Elimination of tuition benefits for retiree dependents and other adjustments will be presented for adoption at the year-end North American Division meetings in Washington, D.C.

Changes in the plan will have varying financial implications for current church and institutional employees. Those early in their careers will have sufficient time to build their annuity/investment accounts and assure equal if not better benefits from the new plan. Those who are at the end of their careers are assured that the benefits

from the SDA Retirement Plan. Included are adjustments for survivorship of a spouse (10 percent reduction in the basic amount) and the "spousal supplement" (\$5,100 per year) which may be paid to a couple if a spouse has no other retirement of his/her own. Future cost of living increases assure that the effect of inflation is minimal. When supplemented by Social Security, the retiree's annual income could reach approximately \$33,500 per year.

As a general rule of thumb, retirement planners suggest that financial needs in retirement are the equivalent of 80 percent of pre-retirement needs. This percentage will differ depending upon the kind of activity that is planned. Stay-at-home gardeners will require less than

Because service credit will be frozen, mid-career employees in their 40's and 50's are likely to be shortchanged in the transition to the new plan.

they have expected will continue.

Because service credit will be frozen, mid-career employees in their 40's and 50's are likely to be shortchanged in the transition to the new plan. These will receive a small benefit from the continuing defined benefit plan, but they will have insufficient time to build up an annuity value to compensate for the difference in retirement benefits they might have earned.

Scenarios used by plan administrators have also included, for the first time, matching employee contributions in order to achieve comparable benefits under the new plan. The effect would be to reduce the spendable income of employees by the three percent contribution they must make in order to generate equivalent income under the current plan.

Under the current plan a retiring teacher, with 40 years of service, whose 1996 salary was \$35,000 per year, might expect to receive approximately \$14,500

those who plan to travel the country or the world. Del Johnson, associate administrator of the plan, admitted, "Compared to other retirement plans, benefits from the church's plan are very small." But, he added, "The benefits are comparable to other church plans."

The news from the SDA Retirement Plan does not come at a good time. As the safety net of Social Security seems more imperiled by the longer lived and increasingly aged population, the changes in the denomination's retirement plan for lifelong employees brings additional uncertainty to future retirees. Until now denominational employees have believed in the principle that acceptance of a sub-market wage would be compensated by retirement security later. The proposed changes confirm rumored uncertainties and validate questions about the stability and future of that assumed "social contract."

Spangler Killed in Car Accident

ALBERT DITTES

The death of Bob Spangler brought to a close a 50-year career which began during World War II

and ended with evangelism in post-Cold War Russia, something politically impossible during most of his active years.

Spangler died while on his way to the Los Angeles International Airport with his wife and two other people, according to his close friend Neal Wilson. A car cut in front of them on the freeway and caused a seven-car pileup. Police determined that the driver at fault was drunk and had a record of speeding citations and of causing two previous accidents.

Spangler was not wearing a seat belt. His wife Marie was seriously injured but

survived, as did the other two passengers. A memorial service for him took place in the Loma Linda University Church the afternoon of October 24, with Neal Wilson and Mark Finley officiating.



Bob Spangler

Since his retirement Spangler had worked for *It Is Written* and was on his way to the airport in an *It Is Written* van with another board member when the accident occurred.

"We were neighbors in the same housing complex with only a wall between us for 21 years," Neal Wilson says. He cites the following as some of Spangler's career

highlights:

- He spent 28 years in the General Conference office. He started as an associate in the General Conference Ministerial Association in 1961, then

became secretary after the retirement of Roy Allan Anderson.

- He started the PREACH program (Program to Reach Every Active Clergyman at Home). He served as editor of *Ministry Magazine* for 23 years. With denominational financial support, it attained a circulation of 300,000—the largest publication of its kind in the world, according to Wilson. "It now goes to pastors of all faiths and even to some non-Christian religious leaders," he says.

- He was the driving force in producing a book outlining the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists and raised \$700,000 to place it in every major library in the United States and around the world.

- He engineered the major thrust of Adventist evangelism in the former Soviet Union. "We had no trained pastors or evangelists there when the country opened up to us in 1989," Wilson says. "We brought in 100 evangelists and pastors from outside Russia to hold meetings there for three to six weeks. Now mostly national evangelists are working there."

- Spangler also spearheaded the translation of the Bible into Russian, a project still underway. The translators have just finished the New Testament and will start on the Old Testament at the Russian Adventist Seminary, the first religious training school built there since 1917.

"All the Russians have had the past 150 years is a translation by priests who were not scholars," Wilson says. "It portrayed God as stern and uncompassionate, and it had many mistakes."

- Spangler was responsible for putting together a world Adventist Bible Conference in Colorado responding to the Desmond Ford issue in 1980.

A native of Ohio, Spangler began his career there in 1944. During the next 50 years, he saw the coming and going of Robert H. Pierson, Neal Wilson, Desmond Ford and Donald Davenport among many others.

"I remember Bob as a creative idea person who made everyone around him feel at ease," says Russell Holt, who served as managing editor of *Ministry Magazine* under Spangler for several years. "He was down to earth, a dedicated Christian, and a great leader and friend."

How Seventh-day Adventists Figure in World Evangelism

ALBERT DITTES

In a world population of 5.7 billion, 1.7 billion of whom are either unevangelized or have seldom had the opportunity to hear the gospel message, here's how Seventh-day Adventists compare with evangelical Christianity.

- Of 1,600 churches being planted daily worldwide, six are Seventh-day Adventists. (Adventists organize one church every 4.33 hours.)

- By the year 2000, it is estimated there will be 100 million Christians in Latin America. Seventh-day Adventists in the South American and Inter-American Divisions now number 3,088,295.

- Nepal has some of the strictest laws

against Christianity in the world. In 1950 there were no known Christians. Today there are at least 150,000 Christians, 406 of whom are Seventh-day Adventists.

- When the Communists took over China, there were about one million Christians. Today it is estimated there are at least 70 million Christians there, 219,913 of whom are Seventh-day Adventists.

- According to the International Mission Board, from 1987 to 1995, Southern Baptists started 18,869 churches world-wide. Seventh-day Adventists started 12,403 churches during this time, according to official General Conference figures.

INFORMATION FROM THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION IN NASHVILLE, TN, AND FROM THE GENERAL CONFERENCE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND STATISTICS.

How Small Groups Have Helped Me to Experience God

Being in a small group allows me to experience different aspects of God's character and personality through the different personalities represented in our group.

PAUL CONEFF

My participation in small groups has transformed a familiar Bible verse for me: "They will call him Immanuel—which means 'God with us.' " (Matthew 1:23) This verse became not just religious theory, "Immanuel, God with us," but also my personal experience: "Immanuel, God with Paul Coneff."

It wasn't just attending the small groups that changed my experience, but becoming truly involved. Through Bible study groups, prayer groups, men's groups, and ministry groups, I experienced the gospel of God's grace growing through me as I shared my life with others and they shared their lives with me.

Relationships Provide Support

As a single person, I've been fortunate to have these relationships with small groups, receiving spiritual, social and emotional support. My friends have celebrated different turning points in my life, whether it was a birthday, buying a home, or graduating with my M.A. in religion. When I have been discouraged about a situation or relationship, they have prayed for me, listened to me, and encouraged me.

Although I'm not one to make altar calls or appeals for people to come up front when I preach, I once had a strong impression that I was to make a specific call at the end of my next sermon. I

shared this impression with my group, along with my hesitancy and fears. The result was that I did make the call, and God was glorified as people responded. I was blessed because I knew I had prayer partners supporting me through the experience.

When I have come to the group really tired from the week, my friends have allowed me to be less involved than usual. When I have missed group meetings because my schedule has been overwhelming, members have let me know they missed me. Through their friendship I have experienced Christ fulfilling his promise that He will "be with [me] always, even till the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

I have seen our group reach out and touch those around them with their love. At one time we were praying for a church member who was struggling with cancer. In our group, we decided to publicly affirm this person to let her know how much her ministry meant to us. During the service of affirmation, there was not a dry eye in the congregation. God touched all of us with his love as an outgrowth of our study group's prayer time.

Glimpses of God's Character

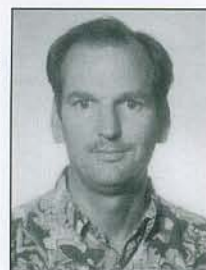
Being in a small group allows me to experience different aspects of God's character and personality through the different personalities represented in our group. Just as there are four Gospels, each with its own perspective, so the group

members give me different glimpses of God's character as they share their understandings of God's word. These varying viewpoints give me an opportunity to wrestle with God's word, to enlarge my perspective, to gain new understandings of Scriptural passages and issues.

When personal differences and conflicts arise in our groups, I am tempted to pull back, to distance myself from the people with whom I disagree. But during these times God has allowed me to experience His presence through His ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). I experience the power of the cross of Christ as I stay connected with my group members by prayer, by seeking forgiveness, and by working through our differences.

In a very tangible way I know that God is with me because of the way He works through my friends in small groups. I continue to grow into the "full stature of the fullness of God" (Ephesians 4:13) through the Cross, by the grace of God, and with the support of the body of Christ.

Paul Coneff is Associate Pastor at the Camarillo SDA Church in Southern California, ministering in the areas of counseling and discipleship. He has an M.A. in Religion from La Sierra University and an M.A. in Marital and Family Therapy from Philips Graduate Institute.



Small Groups:

DYNAMIC or NOT

CLARENCE SCHILT

Several years ago I wrote a small manual for group leaders entitled *Dynamic Small Groups: How to Make Them Happen*. Since writing it I have come to the increasing conviction that, with very few exceptions, they are not really very dynamic. It is a bit embarrassing to admit this because I am not only supposed to be enthusiastic about groups, I am also supposed to be something of an “expert” in this area.

My reflections here are not based on a study but are based simply on my own experience. Also, I think that my convictions and experience are somewhat unique within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is notable that small groups are alive and well in other Protestant churches and are in fact the primary agency for church growth in many of these churches.

Life-Changing Book

This is my story. After graduating from seminary I picked up Keith Miller's *The*

Taste of New Wine. It was life-changing for me—both personally and professionally. My wife and I read it together and wept with joy. Our lives and our ministry changed. It was our introduction to relational theology, both conceptually and practically.

This book articulated for me something I had sensed for a long time but didn't understand. The windows and doors flew wide open as I began to see how lonely, isolated and impersonal so much of our church life is. I now saw hope for a better way. I believed that hope could be realized through small groups. For the next twenty years a major focus of my pastoral ministry was small groups.

From the beginning there were a few major issues that constantly frustrated me. First, there was the problem of getting significant participation from church members. In every church I pastored I found an initial keen interest in groups. Our first round of invitations brought encouraging responses. However, after the initial series, things always came to a screeching halt. Once I had satisfied the early eager beavers, it was virtually impossible to get others to join small groups. The result was that we always had a few groups going on the side, but small group life never came close to being a central program of the church.

Groups Don't Grow

Another issue was the fact that the groups seldom moved beyond narcissistic religion. That is, they rarely moved out of their own comfort zone in either their

own spiritual growth or in their inclination to minister to others.

I have nothing against groups providing a safe refuge for those who are lonely and isolated in the church. I firmly believe in the “warm fuzzies” that small groups offer to their members. I just have a difficult time when they don't grow beyond this stage of experience.

I believe that spiritual maturing in a group will mean its members deepen their walk with Christ both inwardly and outwardly. A healthy group will grow in its commitment to classical spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, meditation, simplicity, and service. This in turn will thrust the group away from meeting only for itself. As it matures the group will become increasingly focused on mission and evangelism. This outward focus can take numerous directions. I have no particular agenda for outreach. I am just convinced that healthy groups will look outward.

I have not figured out how to facilitate good maturation of small groups in the churches I have pastored. For this reason, for the last several years I have not devoted my energies to this ministry. In short, I have become very disillusioned with small groups in the Seventh-day Adventist context.

Again let me say that my conclusions are not scientifically studied. Nor am I ready to be dogmatic about my disillusionment. I am simply giving testimony. But my own experience, much to my disappointment, is that most small groups are not dynamic.

W. Clarence Schilt is currently senior pastor of the Calimesa Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern California. Throughout his 30 years of ministry he has specialized in small groups, family life, and personal and professional growth through various modalities of accountability.



Home Churches Blossom in Russia

During Russia's dark days, secret home churches kept the Light on. Seekers after truth met in kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms to pray, study, and practice how to be effective secret agents for the King of Kings. Children learned new songs—quietly. Teenagers hand-copied inspired writings. Grandmothers greeted secret police, buying time through conversation while home church congregations “disappeared” into thin air.

Then came Perestroika. Members of secret home churches poured into the state-owned cultural palaces for Sabbath worship. Home churches were perceived to be vestigial organs of a restrictive bygone era. But I believe they can play a vital role in the church of the future, and not just in Russia.

When I arrived in 1992 there were fewer than 600 home churches functioning in the entire Euro-Asia Division. Today there are more than 9,000 home churches. Consider three examples:

Valentina

Valentina was baptized July 27, 1991. The next day she begged, “Pastor Kaminsky, how can I be a missionary for God?” He advised, “Organize a home church in your friend Julia’s apartment.”

Julia was baptized a year later, and Valentina taught her how to run the home church. Soon it was time to multiply, but no one wanted to leave. Consequently, Valentina said, “Good-bye.”

“So what did you do then?” I asked.

“In April, 1993,” she replied, “I began a home church in my own home with three people. Within four months this group blossomed into two home churches with a total of 40 people attending.”

Those two original home churches multiplied to eight, then to fifteen. As of September, 1996, the home churches Valentina started have involved over 300 people, and 97 of those have been baptized.

When I asked her recently how many of those 97 have stopped attending Sabbath worship, she named three—one of whom had died.

Tale of Two Churches

In 1995 Calvin Smith led a team from the United States to the Euro-Asia Division to conduct seminars across Russia, teaching people how to organize Sabbath School Action Units and home churches.

One of the seminars seemed futile. Smith told me, “It almost seemed like I was wasting my time. Half of my seminar was taken over by the Union president who had come to manage a crisis. One hundred fifty church members from the large 500 member Central SDA Church of Chernovsee were threatening mutiny and planned to become independent.” It seemed as if everyone there was caught up in this emergency, and few seemed really interested in responding to Smith’s team of missionary trainers.

One year later I visited the same city.

After Smith and his team had left, the conference committee decided to plant two new churches with the 150 disgruntled members who had been planning mutiny the year before. Smith’s presentation on small groups had heavily influenced this decision. He had taught that the best way to solve problems in a church was to help the members to do missionary work, so local officials decided to field test the idea by involving the unhappy members in small organizations where they had to take responsibility. (Eventually the president and the Central Church pastor were removed, partly because of the painful but courageous decision to plant churches with disgruntled members.)

Two young but experienced pastors took the assigned congregations of 80 and 70 members respectively in the city of Chernovsee, leaving 350 in the Central Church. One of the two pastors, figuring he had nothing to lose, implemented what he had learned from Smith that weekend. He organized his seventy problem members into twelve Sabbath School Action Units which met at church Sabbath mornings and also

midweek in home fellowship groups to which they invited neighbors. The pastor wrote a small pamphlet describing how to conduct the home groups. He told his members, “I do not know the answers to all your questions. But I do know that there are thousands in this city who are lost. We must find some of them, or we will also be lost. Therefore I expect you to let me help you be good missionaries. I will do my best.”

By fall, thirty had been baptized as a result of the home group ministry. The pastor then held his own two-week evangelistic campaign, without benefit of Conference funds. Nineteen more from the home groups were baptized. In short, that newly planted church grew from 70 to 119 in less than 10 months.

The other pastor tried a more conventional ministry to his 80 new parishioners. He visited them faithfully, preached sermons to answer their theological questions, organized a choir. Sabbath School continued to have a traditional general lesson study, and there were no home groups. This church lost 40 members to the “Reformists”—an independent Adventist group—and has a membership today of 40.

Editor’s note: The revival of home churches in Russia has not been without controversy, especially among some Adventist church administrators. While this article may raise as many questions as it answers, we thought readers might enjoy a report from an evangelist who has worked there.

John K. McGhee is
Director of Global
Church Plant Institute



CONFEE

by the Members of a Small Group

CHERIE ROUSE AND PATTI COTTON-PETTIS

Here, in my mind, are the people who sit beside us in the small group that you and I attend. We haven't thought much about them before. What does each of them contribute? What can we learn from them? What can we teach them? What kind of week have they had? What do they need?

When we think about it, we joyfully realize that it is indeed an adventure and a blessing to associate with these dear saints. We view them with great affection (and a little frustration). How profoundly they enrich us, and what sharp corners they polish off us!

Below are the voices of imaginary members in a small group near you. Listen.

THE PROFESSOR

As a university scholar, I sometimes have special expertise on the topic under discussion, and I'm glad I can share information and theories with the group. I try to be objective. I like a discussion that is logical and well-informed.

My job, as I see it, is to point out all the factors involved and all the



complications of the various viewpoints. Some of the members tell me I'm a "doubting Thomas." Once, I found myself pointing out the complications in choosing a marking pen! I like to think that I remain open to new ideas, but sometimes the others tell me I'm "sitting on the fence."

In the meetings of my small group, I'm most interested in new ideas.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

I was lonely when I first came to my small group, and the group quickly became my family. Don't we do better when we work together than when we work alone? When the others get into a big argument, I like to help find the common ground; I consider myself a peacemaker of sorts. I think every voice should be heard and everyone made welcome.

What I enjoy most is to hear all about how the others are. They ask me how I am, too. Sometimes the formal discussion seems like an interruption.

In a small group, someone should be concerned to look after the people.



THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

I worry about the logistics of making our group work, so I arrange the important



details, such as a place to meet, people to lead discussions or make presentations, books that need to be ordered, marking pens, mailings, phone calls, refreshments, and potluck dinners.

If I didn't have my small group to look after, I would have an "empty nest syndrome." I like to care for people's practical needs, and this group certainly needs me. After all, no small group will succeed unless someone takes responsibility for these practical things.

THE CURATOR

I would like us to preserve the best of our traditions—the best ideas of the church pioneers, such as searching Scripture for oneself. After all, the Bible is our authority, isn't it? That which is new isn't necessarily better. I remind my group that we already have some helpful, time-honored solutions to questions that come up again and again.

And there is real comfort and inspiration in some of the old ways of doing things. For instance, how often do we kneel when we pray these days? When was the last time you stood and gave your personal testimony in a prayer meeting, or sang all the verses of "The Old Rugged Cross"? Do we still dress to convey a message—about being genuine, nonmaterialis-

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tic, and unselfish and generous with our money?

Sometimes we're too eager to throw out an old, beat-up trunk with broken hinges and a broken latch, and we accidentally throw out the wonderful old treasures that are in it, too. Among those treasures are old-fashioned courtesy and order. I applaud and support those members who are polite and mindful of proper procedure. When the discussion gets off course, I try to help steer it back.

The intellectuals with their bright, new ideas certainly stimulate and sometimes provoke me. They push me forward and make me reexamine my thoughts, but life is not just theory—each of us has a personal responsibility to live our Christianity in a practical way.

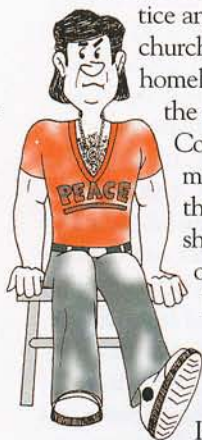
THE ACTIVIST

I ask this group—What are we doing in the 19th century still? Why are we putting energy into approaches that were long ago outmoded? We need to be moved by the Holy Spirit instead of expecting fancy clothes and a Lesson Quarterly to transform us on Sabbath morning. My view is that all that heavy doctrine stuff can be left at the foot of the cross.

How is this group going to celebrate Easter and Pentecost this year? Come over

to Fellowship Hall, everyone, on November 27. I'll lead you in a festival of Thanksgiving that will change your life—a real party. A Christian needs more than discipline—we also need celebration.

This group needs to get beyond merely theorizing and speculating about the Christian life. How can we tolerate injustice and its cover-up in the church? How can we let all those homeless people be dragged out of the shrubbery behind the Country Club? We spend too much time just talking around this table. Some Sabbaths, we should hold a demonstration or run a soup kitchen.



I like attending a small group, because here I can just play it by ear and speak up when I'm moved. I hope I can inject some real courage and passion and persuade the others to "get real."

THE NEIGHBOR

I spent eight and a half years on the front lines of "the work," in a place you cannot imagine and I will not name. The cruelty of the "brethren and sisters," and the personal tragedies that took place—they still hurt and give me nightmares. Most of the time, I hide my limp and my bruises and scars pretty well. But sometimes I find myself talking way too long and being unable to "turn it off." Or I carry on

fanatically, again and again, about some minor or unsolvable thing which is not my real concern. Or I sit silently the whole time, hoping someone or something will fill my empty cup.

I'M aware that when you summon the courage to ask how I'm doing, I whine (on a good day) or weep (on a bad day). I know I seem too sour to be real. But my experience is also part of "the truth." I've been to the other side of Adventist experience, the dark side, and I think you should know about it.



Sometimes, I glimpse the possibility that your genuine kindness, faith, and commitment in this group might gradually heal me, and that's why I keep coming. You are the hands of God that hold me, warming and sheltering and encouraging me. Please don't let go.

Cherie Rouse and Patti Cotton-Pettis wrote this article because they have both been so greatly blessed through the years by various small groups in their churches. Cherie works as a mother and free-lance writer. Patti also works as a mother and free-lance writer besides working in public affairs at Loma Linda University.



SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

RONALD L. JOLLIFFE

When I think about why I am an Adventist, I have to think about stories from my past. It's impossible for me to explain my Adventism in objective terms alone. The best explanation I can give in one sentence is to say that I think I am a Seventh-day Adventist because of mystery.

Here are some glimpses of what I mean.

Ronald L. Jolliffe is Professor of Biblical Studies in the School of Theology at Walla Walla College. His favorite classes are Greek I, Aesthetics and Spirituality, and Gospels. His hobbies include reading, drawing, and photography. He resides with wife Glenda and daughters Missy and Kara in College Place, WA.



I began learning about mystery as a small child, mainly from my church. I remember walking to church one Sabbath morning, both arms up, hands in Mom's and Dad's hands. We couldn't step on sidewalk cracks. I didn't know what mystery would happen if we did, but I learned something of the mystery of patterns and repeating sequences in time and space. Not stepping on cracks in the sidewalk was a wonderful game; I still play it sometimes.

Standing on the Past

We worshipped God in the old Medford Church. I don't know much about that building's history, but today it does not seem consonant with a church Adventists would have built. They probably purchased it from a group of Calvinists, or other stoic Christians. It was stark white outside with a green-asphalt shingle roof. The wide wooden steps displayed their true weathered grays except near the handrail newels where evidence of the atoning white paint survived, no doubt

once applied in preparation for a 21-night evangelistic series. Dad and Mom sometimes swung me up those front steps. From those steps I learned that you can see farther by standing on the structures that others before you have built.

I liked going to church. When we entered the church I had to be quiet—a difficult thing for me. At home, my parents continually said, “Ron, don’t talk so much!” “Ron, think before you speak!” Being quiet in church was serious business, at first, encouraged by a gentle “Sh-h-h-h!” and later enforced by my logger father’s thick, third-finger thump on the back of the head. It was in the enforced silence of church that I learned the difference between thinking and speaking.

The church walls were also white inside. The sanctuary was filled with exceptionally determined hard wood pews. Movement caused the oak joints to squeak and groan. I had to sit still. Church meant discomfort. Church meant being quiet and hearing Bach come out of a Hammond

organ. One could talk and play on the way to church, but stillness and silence ruled within it.

In church I learned that not everything of value comes out of comfort and ease. Beauty also exists in rigor. The 10 Commandments hung on the front wall of the sanctuary behind the pulpit with our duty to God printed on the left tablet and our duty to man printed on the right. I learned basic lessons of category, ranking, and constitutions. I didn't understand much that the pastor said, but I knew he was talking about a very special book, the Bible, and that it was full of puzzling stuff. He was always asking, "What does this mean?" or "It helps us understand this verse when we consider..."

Church was where I discovered that the Bible was interesting and important, otherwise all these people wouldn't come to church all the time.

Bible Mysteries

I also learned that the Bible was complicated and full of mysteries. In front of the pulpit stood the wooden communion table. Most weeks the big Bible lay opened in the middle of it. But every thirteenth Sabbath the Ordinances came, and the big Bible was replaced by the shiny silver stack of dishes. These were then covered with a white cloth that ladies, called deaconesses, removed in a sort of deliberate, choreographed duet. But before they let us see those shiny silver dishes, the pastor had to talk, and then I went with Mom to a big room where the ladies rolled their Ordinance-Sabbath garters down their calves and spoke of how they hated to forget it was the Ordinances and come to church with their hose hooked to their girdles. After Mom and another lady finished washing each other's feet, we went back upstairs and sat, quietly, until everybody came back into the sanctuary. Then the heavy sweet scent of concord grape juice and the toasted crispness of sesame-wheat renewed the discovery of the value of the senses in experiencing God's actions personally.

At least once a year we had an effort. An evangelist would come to the church and would preach and tell us that we would be renting a hall this time for the effort. When we went the first night, I remember being surprised that we were

going into a theater. Mom and Dad had promised God that they wouldn't go to the theater any more if God would spare my little brother's life after he drank the paint thinner. But we were going in, and we were taking our neighbors with us, and nobody seemed worried about the angels.

Mysteries of an Effort

An effort was mysterious. I learned something about the meaning of use and purpose. A effort usually began with one or two people singing together while the evangelist's wife played the piano. I sometimes got to help take up the offering. And then, just before the evangelist began his slides, the lights would go down and the evangelist's wife would do a black light chalk drawing of heaven. After she had astonished me with how beautiful heaven would be—especially if it had ladies as pretty as she wearing clothes with cuffs that radiated in purplish white—the spot light came on, and the evangelist would ask for the first slide. He always used slides that had the Bible texts in yellow letters right on the picture. He always read the yellow letters to us. I think I learned to read in efforts.

The Bible was so amazing. The Bible was very old, the evangelist told us, but it knew about modern things such as rocket ships and locomotives and people traveling to and fro. It not only spoke about car headlights, it even predicted dates that reached almost to our very own time!

But you didn't just pick up the Bible and read it as you would read the paper. It was closer to solving a case in the tradition of Scotland Yard and its star detective Sherlock Holmes. The Bible seemed similar to books of word puzzles I discovered shortly after I learned to read, full of riddles, hidden codes, and secret writing. I learned to treasure the mysteries of inspired texts.

But for me, being an adult Seventh-day Adventist is not all romanticized nostalgia and warm, fuzzy childhood memories. One of the greatest mysteries continues to challenge me. It is the mystery of how to keep mystery alive. To me as an adult, the church and the colleges sometimes seems fearful to allow mystery and curiosity out of the Cradle Roll and Kindergarten rooms. Too often it seems both settings want to discourage exploration and discovery and

to focus our entire attention on what is already known. Both want to forget about mystery and to become absorbed in discussing abstract propositions and being careful to avoid changing the order of service or the dependence on the textbook.

For too many of us, I fear the mystery of truth has been completely demystified in 27 statements and in exact formulae, propositions and lists of facts. We expect new converts and undergraduate students to be curious enough to learn the lessons we have to teach them. We need to encourage them to be curious enough to come back and ask us why these are the things they have to learn.

Jesus once said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." And he also said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The doctrines of this church

Church meant being quiet and hearing Bach come out of a Hammond organ.

and the accumulations of its colleges' knowledge are mileposts along the way to the kingdom, but we are not in the kingdom yet. There remains before us more light to be seen, more knowledge to be acquired, new mysteries to explore, more steps to take in the pursuit of truth.

The curious thing about truth is that the more we learn, the more questions there are to ask. And the more honest questions we ask, the more mysterious the beauty of truth becomes. It always takes an effort to explore mystery, and we will never have the truth, for we know that even in the kingdom there will always be new heights to surmount, new truths to comprehend, and new mysteries to explore.

The apostle Paul explained our role as members of the church as being guardians of the mysteries of all God's universe. He said, "Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ and Christ to God. That's how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and guardians of the mysteries of God." (I Corinthians 3:21-4:1, translation and italics by the author)

Understanding People:

Stages of Christian Maturity

RAYMOND E. COTTRELL

Part of my way to an early morning appointment many years ago led downhill on a narrow, one-way, winding road. On my way down, I encountered another vehicle moving in the same direction—at a snail's pace. Ah! Frustration! But I soon realized that the driver was an elderly neighbor I highly respected, who was obviously doing her best to cope with the narrow, winding road. Of course! I wouldn't want her to drive faster than she could, safely! My blood pressure instantly subsided.

We often find it frustrating when people do things differently from the way we think they should, but understanding why they think and act as they do can enable us to relate to them objectively, understandingly, and patiently. The same is true of people corporately—members and leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the church itself.

Profile of a Mature Christian

At ethical-moral-cognitive Christian maturity, a person experiences an abiding, loyal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord that permeates every aspect of personality, thought, and conduct. Gospel principles are fully understood and integrated into every aspect of one's life and being.

For the mature Seventh-day Adventist the Bible is the supreme revelation of the divine will and purpose. It is understood in

terms of the meaning the inspired writers intended to convey, in its own historical and literary context. A mature person has an open mind, thinks and reasons objectively, modifies pre-suppositions as objective evidence may require, and maintains a balance between faith and reason.

A Profile of Conventional Maturity

Conventional maturity is that of the typical Seventh-day Adventist. He or she has a living relationship to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, a practical understanding of the gospel, and the intention to integrate its principles into daily life. The Bible, "just as it reads" and for what its words (in translation) mean to the modern reader, is a revelation of the divine will and purpose for all people of all time.

The typical conventional Adventist finds personal security as a member of the church, and accepts its perspective of the gospel and its teaching authority as normative.

Preconventional Adventist Maturity

The preconventional stage of Adventist maturity is that of new converts to Adventism, or of members with an imperfect understanding of gospel principles and what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist, or who have not fully implemented gospel principles into daily life, or of children. Some of the traits of a conventional Adventist are missing, perhaps because of a lack of understanding, commitment, motivation, or personality defects. This state may be either temporary or permanent.

The Maturation Process

At birth a person is confined in a little bundle of self with no awareness of anything or anyone outside of self. "Growing up" is the process of emancipation, or

escape from this tiny self-centered cocoon.

There are five aspects of mature personhood: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. Conventional maturity may be defined as one's capacity to function at least minimally in these five areas of personhood. Nominal physical maturity is usually attained between early and mid-teens, mental maturity during the late teens, and emotional and social maturity during the early post-teen years. Nominal spiritual maturity may be attained by approximately mid-teens or soon thereafter.

Nominal maturity does not consist of knowledge, but of the ability to think rationally—logically, objectively, and constructively. Nominal emotional-social maturity consists of being able to relate to people and circumstances with equanimity and objectivity. Nominal spiritual maturity consists of whole-hearted commitment to and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Major leadership roles within a congregation are usually entrusted to persons who are perceived as demonstrating Christian maturity, and lesser roles presumably require at least conventional maturity. The church is composed of imperfect human beings, and the maturity level of the church as a whole is a composite of the collective maturity of its members and especially its leaders. Most problems and issues that arise are the result of, or involve, some degree of immaturity on the part of some, or perhaps all, of those involved.

A person at any stage of ethical-moral-cognitive maturity may tend to be impatient with, and critical of, people at a lower stage as being too conservative, and to suspect those at higher stages of being too liberal. It is incumbent on a person at any stage of Christian maturity to be patient with those who are less mature and to exercise confidence in the integrity of those who are more mature.



Raymond Cottrell, editor emeritus, is a co-founder of *Adventist Today*.

Potomac Conference Addresses Damascus Church Crisis

See related story on back page.

This is excerpted from a document distributed by the Columbia Union Conference. The entire document, along with other correspondence related to this subject, is available through the SDA Online forum in the Compuserve library.

On October 7, 1997 a meeting of the conference officers and the DRCC staff was held at the Takoma Park offices of the Potomac Conference. This meeting was called with the highest regard to the Christian integrity of the leadership of the DRCC and the DRCC Inc. and with the utmost confidence that we can safely follow the Biblical counsel that "if it is of God it will prosper." Further, conference leaders respect the biblical guidelines regarding corrective discipline as outlined in Matthew 18 and are dedicated to following the four basic steps in that process, (1) self-discipline, (2) one-to-one, (3) one or two others, and (4) the church (leaders; the whole body). Discipline is God's provision for good order in His church. Hebrews 12:11 says, "Of course, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant for the moment, but later on it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained in it."

Notice the purpose of discipline: It functions within an educational process and is designed to produce righteousness as its fruit, which, when you bite into it, tastes like peace. Righteousness (rightness: conformity to Christ's standard of conduct) has the flavor of peace because wherever it is found, it produces harmony and order. Where there is conformity to God's will, there is structure. Where there is biblical structure, the prime condition of learning is present: peace.

Moreover, the Church Manual records appropriate counsel from the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, saying "never allow anyone's ideas to unsettle your faith in regard to the order and harmony in the church....The God of heaven is a God of order, and He requires all His followers to have rules and regulations, and to preserve order." (5T, p. 274) We, the officers of the Potomac Conference also respect the rea-

sons outlined in the Church Manual for which members shall be disciplined. "(1) denial of faith in the fundamentals of the gospel and in the cardinal doctrines of the church to the same; and (2) persistent refusal to recognize properly constituted authority or to submit to the order and discipline of the church." (SDA Church Manual, pp. 168, 169)

In spite of the long-standing desire on the part of all concerned to avoid the pain of separation, the DRCC and the DRCC Inc. are entwined in a new legal entity with property purchase and future commitment which are not controlled, voted by or ordered by

the Potomac Conference Executive Committee, the Potomac Conference Association or the officers of the conference. Recognizing our fiduciary obligation and moral responsibility as servant leaders of the people to support the purposes and policies of the denomination, to inform members of deviation from church order and to protect the name and interests of the denomination, we, the officers of the conference recommend the following actions to a specially called meeting of the Potomac Conference Executive Committee to be held at the Columbia Union Conference Office on October 15, 1997:

Therefore, we, the officers of the Potomac Conference:

COUNSEL, that according to the NAD Working Policy Pastor Richard Fredericks and Associate Pastor Bob Fournier, resign from their employment in the Potomac Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

RECOMMEND to the Potomac Conference Executive Committee that freedom of choice be given to all members of the DRCC and the DRCC Inc. regarding their desire to remain members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church or to become members of the separate organization which has been formed.

RECOMMEND to the Potomac Conference Executive Committee that a new Seventh-day Adventist congregation be formed and begin meeting on Sabbath, October 18, 1997, in the Adventist church in Damascus, and that those who are currently members of the DRCC are invited, encouraged, and urged to join the new Adventist congregation or to ask for transfer of membership to any other Seventh-day Adventist Church, and that the next constituency meeting of the Potomac Conference take action concerning the DRCC and any remaining members. The meeting is scheduled to take place in the spring of 1999. The officers will also

RECOMMEND that the Potomac Conference Executive Committee consider the status of Debbie Lawrence as an executive committee member.

We love each other; let us love one another enough to let those who choose to leave do so in peace. No matter how similar, the DRCC and the DRCC Inc. are a separate ministry, legally formed with a constitution and struggling to complete their bylaws, with new policies of operation and a different system of governance and a statement of beliefs which is not possible within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All Seventh-day Adventist churches choose to accept and uphold the statement of faith established by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in session, currently stated in 27 Fundamental Beliefs. To constitute, designate or propagate separate or partial lists is in effect establishing a separate organization.

Damascus members who find themselves uncertain about their future church home are encouraged to pray diligently and to consider their options carefully. All are invited and urged to join the new Seventh-day Adventist Damascus congregation or to transfer to another Seventh-day Adventist congregation, a new and separate organization.

The officers and the Potomac Conference Executive Committee have a sacred responsibility to protect and uphold the unity and integrity of the church which Ellen White calls "God's special jewel." We offer membership to all individuals and urge all to remain safely within the body.

Herbert H. Broeckel, President
Roger E. Weiss, Vice President for Administration
S. Kurt Allen, Vice President for Finance

Potomac Conference Gives Ultimatum to Local Church Pastors

CONTINUED FROM BACK

from parking lot greeters to sound and light technicians, actors, singers, dancers, musicians, and other participants. They held two services each Sabbath until the facilities were too small for further growth. Then they moved to the local high school auditorium.

Shortly after Fredericks began his pastorate at Damascus, he was driving from CUC to the church one day when he felt impressed to "Look right." He did, and he saw a gorgeous stretch of undeveloped property.

"I'm not a particularly mystical person," Fredericks says, "but I clearly sensed God saying, 'Someday you'll build a church on this land.'"

A church member introduced him to the property owner, who explained that he wanted \$2.5 million for the 225 acres of land. The price was prohibitive. As the church grew, the staff began looking for other purchase options. During this past year, the church formed the nonprofit DRCC, Inc. and it also voted to sell its aging eight-grade school. They hoped to use the profits from the school sale to finish paying off the mortgage on the church building. When the mortgage was gone, they reasoned, more of the members' giving could go into the DRCC for the purchase of new property.

During the five years of Fredericks' Damascus pastorate, the conference has kept close watch on the church. Fredericks has kept open lines of communication with the conference, but they have had fundamental differences of opinion. Main points of disagreement have been Fredericks' beliefs that Adventism does not define the boundaries of the remnant and that local church members should be encouraged to give the majority of their offerings to their own congregation.

Fredericks is clear, however, that he takes giving to the conference seriously as well. In an open e-mail letter to Dr. William Johnsson of the *Adventist Review* he stated, "I did think through my position on conference giving and I did state it—though it has never been reported accurately. Sallie and I give well beyond a tithe. We decided to give 70% of all we give locally and 30% (a triple tithe of our total giving) to the world denominational structure through Potomac."

On April 1, 1997, Herb Broeckel attended a business meeting held at the Damascus Church for the purpose of discussing the congregation's relationship to the denomination. In an April 4 e-mail memo addressed to several General Conference officials, Broeckel reported on the meeting:

"...90% of his church is behind him [Fredericks] in their plan to develop (sic) a new facility and to funnel a mayor (sic) portion of their giving in the direction of the new corp. they have or are already forming. He has convinced himself and them that they are going to remain under the 'umbrella' of Adventism, unless we push them out.

"We have laid down the (sic) gauntlet. Our three nonnegotiables (sic) are: 1. Pastors must pay tithe. 2. Pastoral staff must teach members to tithe, and 3. Property must be held by the conf. corp...."

In the same transmission Broeckel further reported on an April 3 meeting of the Potomac Corporation Board:

"We voted to accept the church action to proceed to sell the school to the Central Md. [Maryland] Korean/Alleg. [Allegheny] East church for approx. \$650,000 (sic). To pay off the \$70,000 revolving fund loan on the Hadley Acres School and to place all the remaining proceeds in an interest bearing account reserved for future school development only. It was a tense meeting at times. Debbie [Lawrence, a member of the Potomac Conference Committee and the administrative pastor of the Damascus church staff] had to take the news back that they would not be able to pay off the remaining loan on the church leaving them with the monthly mortgage payments. This will slow down their ability to salt away money for their planned move. It will be interesting to see what this now does to their plans...."

In June, 1997, Fredericks held a church business meeting to discuss putting a line item on the new fiscal budget for property purchase. They had found 70 acres which they felt they could finance, even with continued mortgage payments on the present building. Those attending spent the final 30 minutes of the meeting in prayer together, asking for guidance regarding the proposed purchase.

While they were praying, Fredericks reports, the owner of the original 225 acre lot called his lawyer and said he felt he should talk to Fredericks again about whether or not his church could use the land. Fredericks had not seen or spoken to the man for three years.

The owner's attorney arranged a meeting with Fredericks, and the result was that the owner offered the following deal: if the church would purchase 56 acres of the lot for \$620,000, he would donate the remaining 169 acres as a gift.

November 5 was set as the closing date for the purchase of the 56 acres. On that date the church must make a down payment of approximately half of the purchase price. According to Fredericks in an open letter to Steve Timm, moderator of SDANet, dated October 1, 1997, the church had raised over \$150,000 toward the purchase within the preceding six weeks. On the last Sabbath in September the church's local giving totaled \$34,500, including a check for \$5,000 from a visitor.

The October 7 meeting between the Damascus pastoral staff and the conference officials originally was scheduled to take place later in November. Fredericks and Fournier do not plan to resign. Fredericks is optimistic, however, that their consequent termination will not impede the property purchase. He and his staff are already holding their worship services in the local high school auditorium, and they're looking for new office space and equipment.

While the future is suddenly uncertain, Fredericks retains calm faith that God is leading him and his church. His ministry team as well as many of his congregation said they would go with him if he is fired. If they close their land purchase in November, they plan to begin developing a campus including a worship center, a "top-flight school," a center for Christian arts, athletic fields, a youth center, a Christian bookstore, a Christian "bar"—strictly nonalcoholic but with the ambiance of a trendy watering hole where young people can hang out and where young artists can perform their gigs, and, on a 40-acre wedge of land separated from the main portion of the property, a cemetery.

Meanwhile, they will continue to meet every Sabbath and to await "the literal and visible Advent of our Lord and Savior."

At press time, the Potomac Conference had appointed David Newman to be the new pastor of the Damascus Seventh-day Adventist Church beginning November 1, 1997.

O Pioneers!

MARYAN STIRLING

I am who I am because of events that came about in the 1840's. Ellen was still "Miss Harmon," alone with her daunting task. Some people in that room believed her amazing claim. There were scoffers. There were honest doubters, listening, open, praying. She was so young, so little. But she spoke up, firm and free, and told her experiences, her visions, her solemn duty to "make known" what God had shown her.

Roxbury

Brother Haskins felt the pull
Of Spirit power, a-lifting,
In joy
In joy,
In radiant joy.
In Roxbury
In eighteen forty-six.

They still said, "Brother, Sister,"
And they still knew
What to do
With joy.

So Brother T. Haskins
Arose, his face
Aglow
Because he recognized
The Spirit-energy
That wore a familiar
Face
To Roxbury.

"The same power,"
Said he,
"Attends this
That attended the truth
In 1844!"

The peace,
The power,
The radiant joy—
He knew it well,
And lifted trembling
Hands
To add the good word.

"I do not," says he,
"I do not expect
To find another
So green a spot
This side of our deliverance!"

Those were his very words
In Roxbury, Massachusetts—
"So green a spot."
So green as where
The Spirit moved
Like wind along a hill,
Like rain, like river,
So green with life,
With joy.

The glow
On Brother Haskins' face
That night
Is our inheritance
Of joy.
Of radiant joy!

We are the Brother Haskines
Of our own time,
Searching Rand-McNally
For the road that goes
From where we are
To Roxbury.

Looking down every freeway exit
For the green.
Asking at every prayer gathering,
"Is this our Roxbury?"

But Rand-McNally doesn't
Know.
And has no sign to show
So green a spot,
So Spirit-blessed
A spot so green
As Roxbury.

See Spiritual Gifts, vol. 2, p. 67

Rachel Oakes Preston

Rachel was a
Focus-glass
Pulling together the random
Beams
Of heavenlight

Impatient with male
Generalities,
Weary of brotherly
Abstraction,

She grabbed the
Light
And bent the rays
Together
Til they smoked
And flamed.

"The seventh day,"
She told them,
"Is the Sabbath
Of the Lord thy God!"

The seventh day
Is Saturday.

"Remember Saturday
To keep it holy!"

What they diffused,
She focused.

When it flamed,
That was the start
Of a long, loud
Cry of angels
To all the earth.

That day it wasn't loud.
Not very bright,
But it was new
And it was
Heavenlight.

Rachel was a focus-glass.

We all know women
Who do that
To light.

They had no meeting houses. Little groups gathered in homes; big ones met in barns. But only if the timing was right. If the new hay hadn't been brought in yet. Or in late spring when the old hay was pretty well gone. (And the morning chores were done!)

Barn Meeting

Spider webs
Hastily
Broomed away,

Chaff
From a hundred
Loads of hay.

Barn cat
Watchful
For rat or mouse.

This is
God's day
And this is God's house.

Sit on a
Bench
Of plank and stump,

Drink from the
Dipper
Beside the pump.

Dusty glory
In slender rays
Lights the
Impromptu
House of praise.

Kneel, Brother, Sister,
As we seek
His face

Surely the
Lord
Is in this place!

Poems copyright 1997, Maryan Stirling

Big things happened in small places like Washington, New Hampshire. A major "Adventist Distinctive" came to life because Rachel Preston was there and because she wasn't silent.

Maryan Stirling is a writer who has spent many years helping to find and polish treasures and pull weeds in the field that is the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Potomac Conference Gives Ultimatum to Local Church Pastors

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

On Tuesday, October 7, Potomac Conference president Herb Broeckel and conference officers Roger Weiss and Kurt Allen met with the pastoral staff of the Damascus Seventh-day Adventist Church. The conference presented the pastors with a document outlining two options: either senior pastor Richard Fredericks and associate pastor Bob Fournier must resign, or they would be fired on Wednesday, October 15.

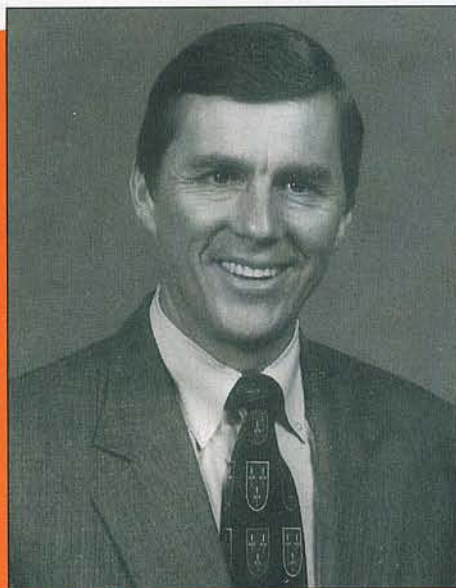
According to Fredericks, the conference stated that the crisis had arisen from the pastors leading the congregation toward congregational control and away from conference control. Conference officers cited the following five issues in their conversation with the pastoral staff:

1. The pastors have not taught that the conference is the "true storehouse" and that all tithe must go to the conference;

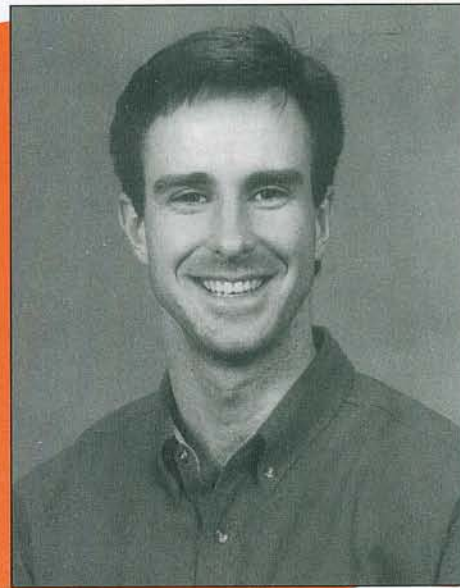
2. Conference leadership is concerned that the pastors do not believe that the Adventist church is the definition of God's remnant church. They do not believe that Adventism, in spite of its failures, defines the boundaries of God's remnant people and that at the end, all those saved will embrace it.

3. The conference takes issue with the church's nonprofit organization, the Damascus Road Community Center (DRCC), Inc., which the congregation formed in order to raise money to purchase non-conference-owned land for a new worship center. Especially troublesome are these three concerns:

- a. the congregation would own its own land and facilities;
- b. the DRCC's statement of beliefs does not include all 27 of the Fundamental Beliefs;
- c. the DRCC's bylaws are written as congregational articles of incorporation.



Richard Fredericks



Bob Fournier

4. The congregation allows non-Adventists to be active in ministry.

5. The church has moved ahead with their plans too fast without conference approval.

The Damascus situation actually began over five years ago when Fredericks was on the theology faculty at Columbia Union College. He and a group of students decided to hold an experimental praise worship service designed to appeal to "the bored, the burned, and the bypassed." They met in a local evangelical church, and 350 attended the first service.

After eight services, Fredericks said, he realized that the attendees needed a pastor and a permanent place to worship. With permission from the Potomac Conference, he left his teaching position and went into full time ministry at the semirural Damascus church. He told the conference that he would use "very contemporary" worship

methods, and he further stated that he would take on this new church only if he was allowed to center his ministry on the gospel and not on maintaining a traditional Adventist church.

Within the first year membership increased from 100 to 400, and now, five years later, it has reached 600. Its local budget has increased from \$105,000 annually to \$800,000. Overall giving to the conference has increased, but the parishioners' sacrificial giving goes to the local church.

Their services include singing praise songs with a worship team, drama, sacred dance, and film clips as well as a sermon. No matter what the topic, at least four to five minutes of every sermon must be devoted to clearly presenting the gospel. About a third of the congregation is involved in the program every Sabbath,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22