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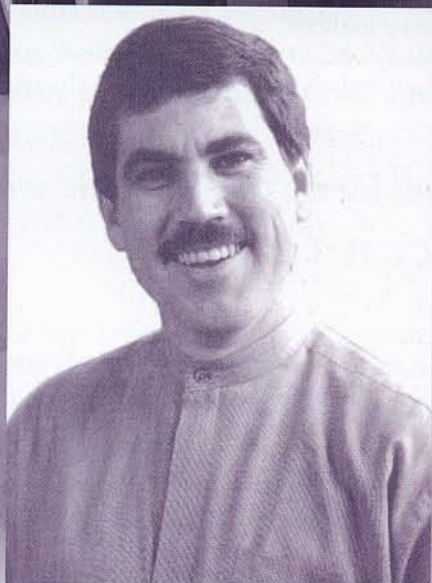
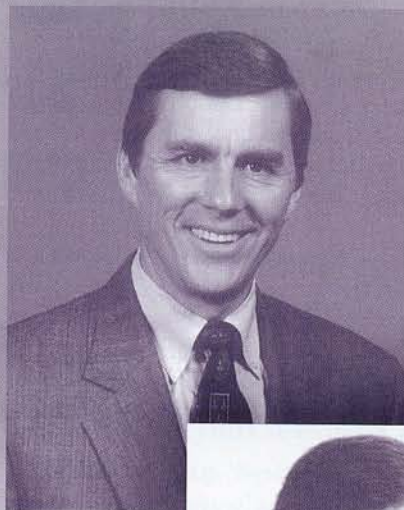
NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

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The New Congregationalism: What Gives?

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"Liberals" and "Conservatives"

Okay, okay. I know they're tricky labels. And labels often obfuscate as much as clarify. But for now humor me, and let me have my say. We can fix the labels later. Think of the church as a house. The conservatives are the builders; the liberals are the decorators. The builders pour concrete and nail two-by-fours. The decorators add flowers and skylights.

If you leave the construction to the liberals, they may pay so much attention to carpet, paint, cushions and pictures the house will collapse from lack of framing and foundation. On the other hand, if you leave everything to conservatives, you may end up with a house sturdy enough to handle a 9.0 earthquake and a Class IV tornado but so uninviting the kids won't visit, much less live there. Who wants to walk on concrete floors, sleep on cots and hang blankets over the windows for privacy in the evening?

Liberals don't build institutions. Colleges, hospitals, publishing houses, summer camps, academies, and churches are all built by conservatives. But liberals are the ones flexible enough to bend the original vision to fit present reality. Conservatives are the ones with enough conviction to part with their hard-earned dollars and actually get something going. Liberals are the ones willing to ask hard questions about efficiency and effectiveness.

Conservatives make the best evangelists. They are confident of what they believe. They know what other people need. And their convictions are specific enough to be readily communicated. Conservatives formulate the ideas, gather the people and build the institutions which become the targets of liberal remodeling efforts.

But conservatives have children. And when those children grow up they need the ministry of liberals. Doubters do not join self-confident sects. But they are born into them. Homosexuals do not join conservative churches in the same numbers that they grow up in them.

Non-Adventists don't have to join the Adventist church if they have unanswered questions. But if you've grown up Adventist and treasure the Sabbath and wholism and the Great Controversy theme and

Liberals are the adults in the church whom the children of conservatives can talk to.

vegetarianism and life-long friends and several generations worth of institutional loyalty, and then find yourself wrestling with geochronology or prophetic interpretation, whom do you talk to?

At first you might seek out a convinced, articulate conservative in a bid to revive your former certainties. But when you no longer find conventional answers persuasive, and you don't want to move out, then you'll thank God for the ministry of liberals.

And if it's your child who finds a home in the church through conversations with a liberal, then you'll give abundant thanks for the decorators. Liberals are the adults in the church whom the children of conservatives can talk to.

It also happens that liberals' children read Ellen White in high school or college and become radical Adventists. These children want a religion that's sturdy and vigorous, aggressively evangelistic, impatient with human frailty and bold in its obedience. They find liberalism boring and tasteless.

If all Adventists were liberal, sophisticated, and culturally assimilated, where would these "re-born" children of liberals find spiritual mentors? Conservatives are the adults in the church whom children of liberals can admire and conspire with.

Conservatives don't appreciate people who don't fit the system. They don't understand the hard questions of their grandchildren. They can't see the sincerity that drives honest dissidents to both love the church and argue with it. Liberals have a hard time with the passionate conviction of young zealots. They are offended by people with more loyalty than intellectual curiosity. Yet the children of the church include both the angst-ridden and the zealous, and these children need the respective ministries of liberals and conservatives.

So as is sometimes said in other contexts: perhaps we should stay together for the sake of the children.

John McLarty, *editor*



The New Congregationalism

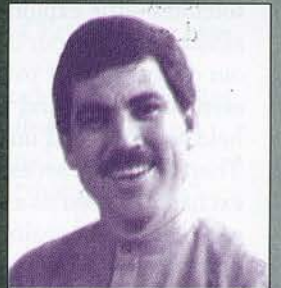
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ABOUT THE COVER:

Pictured are five of the pastors who have established congregational Sabbath-keeping churches within the past two years, after they were fired from Adventist conference employment.

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ADVENTIST TODAY

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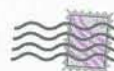
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FIRST CLASS

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Letters to the Editor
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Doctrine and Theology

This is an excellent article ("Doctrine and Theology: What's the Difference?" *Adventist Today*, Jan.-Feb. 1998), pointing out a critical difference in these two terms. I wish I had understood it much earlier in my life. My observation is that while having a "center from which to deviate" would be helpful, it is only functional if the official organization welcomes—not just tolerates—the exploration of ideas. I'm afraid that's not our church's position as our doctrines (not to mention the vast arena of policies and procedures) are held as sacred and untouchable. Therefore, such an exploration and exchange is seen as a threat, which accelerates the tension between the otherwise synergistic interaction of theology and doctrine.

Steve Divnick
Miamisburg, Ohio

Contrary to John McLarty's editorial in the January-February 1998 issue of *Adventist Today*, the conflict in the Adventist church is not about Liberal vs. Conservative, women's ordination vs. males only, short geochronology vs. long, the meaning of seals vs. trumpets, etc. These are symptoms of a much more serious discord, namely the Unity of Truth as presented by the Bible, the Book of Nature, and the historical record versus dogma supported by closed minds, and an administration more concerned with preservation of organization than with unity of truth. Not surprisingly, this conflict is not limited to the Adventist church.

Zane Price
West Los Angeles, CA

John McLarty states that "there is a delicious sense of adventure in roaming beyond the confines of doctrine." I'm

sure the same excitement and adventurous spirit consumed Lucifer when he mentally explored the alternative to believing and accepting God's authority.

Could it be that Mr. McLarty has stepped onto the same dangerous dead-end path to ruin that Lucifer chose to pursue? Considering his reluctance to accept traditional Adventist doctrines plus his seemingly gloating over the fact that there are other prominent SDA's

It's no wonder that seminary professors and administrators opposed Mr. McLarty's ideas when they realized his adversarial mind might be possessed by the same spirit of rebellion and independence as was Lucifer's.

and pastors who have jumped off the narrow doctrinal road to explore dangerous goat trails where travelers are apt to fall off satanic cliffs to bounce from one soul-bruising rock to another or to become entangled and lost in brambles of confusion and despair, it may be true.

It's no wonder that seminary professors and administrators opposed Mr. McLarty's ideas when they realized his adversarial mind might be possessed by the same spirit of rebellion and independence as was Lucifer's. The SDA church need make no apologies as to

the way the Lord has led us in establishing our doctrines. Rather, any re-evaluation of exegetical positions that are supported by the prophetic gift should come from the doctrinal heretics themselves.

Daniel McConnell
Rocklin, CA

AT is read from cover to cover the day it's received!

Your comments, John, were most appropriate. The Bible must be read and interpreted in today's world, as your references to previous Bible and Bible only reading led to Christians' approval of slavery, racial segregation and women's ordination today...

Elaine Nelson
Fresno, California

3ABN and General Conference

I heartily agree with the Houghton statement ("3ABN and General Conference Sign a Joint Declaration," Jan.-Feb. *Adventist Today*, P. 7) saying that "Folkenberg was advised by church leaders in other parts of the world that TV programs prepared for American audiences would not fly in their countries."

Having worked in three third-world countries I often shake my head at the assumptions our leaders make when they gleefully try to cover the world with Americanized SDA jargon. One size does not fit all when it comes to that!

There will have to be a local translation, not only for the language, but also for the culture adjustments, which would take an entirely "contextualized" program for many cultures of the world. Let the TV producers be chosen from former missionaries, and then see the difference!

Bessie Lobsien
Redding, CA

Alternative View

I have enjoyed your publication from its beginning and believe you are giving the Adventist community valuable service by providing it an alternative magazine which, by its very nature, can be more objective than those that are institutionally controlled. Your [Jan./Feb. '98] issue dealing with the tensions of the N.W. especially caught my attention because I am from the N.W. Among the letters to the editor, the letter by Kent Hansen, dealing with small study groups, rang true, I believe, to the Biblical Christian Spirit.

Edmund Rogel
Loma Linda, CA

Adventist Think Tank

In my paper "Re-visioning the Role of Ellen White" (so well reported in *Adventist Today*, March-April 1998, pages 19-21) I call for an Adventist "think tank" able to "generate and receive suggestions as well as explore and field-test ways to raise the level of awareness about Ellen White in the church at large."

My list suggested that this group should be inclusive of the church's talent in a range of fields: administration, biblical studies, systematic and historical theology, mission, history, science, anthropology, sociology, psychology, medicine, literature, and pastoral care."

James Walters in his article "Ellen G. White and Truth-Telling," shows my list should be extended. Walters is a careful student of Scripture, history and theology, but he is also an ethicist. From that perspective he has given us (*Adventist Today*, March-April 1998, pages 15-18) a faith-filled yet faithful understanding of Ellen White's literary dependency.

Arthur Patrick
Cooranbong, Australia

Ratzlaff Shocked

I am surprised—even shocked—at some responses I've received to articles in the last *Adventist Today* and to a number of email messages I've received from SDA pastors. My first comment deals with... "wild proof-texting"—the linking of one text to another without

regard to context.... The reasoning goes something like this: ...If the Bible writers used this method, it must be a correct method, and this gives license to Adventists, specifically EGW to do the same. ...Evangelicals (and I hope SDAs) believe the writers of the New Testament were guided in a special sense by the Holy Spirit and given this privilege. However, this does not give us the license to do the same. First, anyone can link texts together to prove anything. Who is going to decide which proof-texting is right and which is wrong?...

Second, if we assume that EGW's proof-texting is allowed because she is an inspired writer, then we face another set of problems. If we accept this rea-

One pastor said, "Christ did not have the light on health reform." As the doctrine of hell is founded largely upon the teachings of Christ, could we say that perhaps Christ did not have "the light" on hell either?

soning, then her writings must be seen as a Third Testament as she (with other Adventists) linked texts together in such a way as to reinterpret Scripture, give a new emphasis contextually foreign to Scripture, or to reveal new "truth" not found in Scripture, such as the investigative judgment....

The same reasoning used to support new "truth" given by EGW can be made by the Mormons. They, too, have new "truth." They, too, have a modern day prophet who has revealed "truth" not clearly stated in Scripture....I

believe the reformers were right when they concluded that the canon of Scripture was closed....

A second comment deals with the ease Adventists have in undermining the Bible, even Christ, in order to support EGW. John McLarty, for example, speaks about the "improvement" SDAs have made in their theology by not taking the Bible and the Bible only. He cites Adventist's disdain for the doctrine of hell as an example. I recall one time when I was an SDA in discussion with other Adventist pastors wondering why Jesus ate meat, especially after the resurrection. One pastor said, "Christ did not have the light on health reform." As the doctrine of hell is founded largely upon the teachings of Christ, could we say that perhaps Christ did not have "the light" on hell either?

The comment made by Max Phillips in comparing the failed prophecy of EGW (food for worms) to Christ's prophecy regarding "this generation" borders on blasphemy. Is he saying that EGW was right or Jesus was wrong?...

I thought Ellen White said that "God will have a people upon earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms... Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support." (GC 595)

Was she wrong—again?

Dale Ratzlaff
Glendale, AZ

Other Side of the Coin

Thanks for your timely and enlightening magazine. So we can see the other side of the coin. Especially Richard Frederick's response to Bill Johnsson's November 1997 article. Truth can stand to be investigated and has nothing to hide....

Edie Mably

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Former PUC Faculty Awarded Honorary Status

LARRY DOWNING

As part of the 1998 Pacific Union College (PUC) commencement exercises, President Malcom Maxwell awarded Honorary Professor Emeritus status to Ted Benedict, Ph.D., and to Alice Holst, Ed.D. As Maxwell presented the awards in behalf of the faculty, Dr. Charles Bell, academic dean, read the statements that acknowledged the contribution Benedict and Holst had made to PUC and to Adventist education. He recognized Benedict's role in developing PUC's general education curriculum and

Holst's participation in developing the PUC secretarial science department.

In 1963 the PUC board, under chairman R.R. Bietz, terminated Benedict and Holst. Their ouster resulted in considerable backlash from alumni, faculty and friends of PUC. Benedict and Holst point out that no charges were made against them in the 1963 board action, nor have any been given since. Consequently, they were not able to make a defense.

"The present faculty and board action granting honorary emeritus sta-

tus," say Benedict and Holst, "may be seen as an indication that the reasons for the termination, whatever they were, are judged to have been insufficient, and we are now restored to as close as we can be to membership on the PUC faculty."

In response to receiving the award Benedict said, "I have served on other faculties, but there is no faculty anywhere that I would prefer to be a member of than this faculty right here. We had a homecoming on this campus a couple of months ago. Today is a homecoming for Alice and for me, and I want to thank you for that honor."

"There is a well established and formal provision for recognizing a teacher who has given many years of service to Pacific Union College and who retires as a member of the faculty," Bell stated in his remarks... "When we look at the history of our institution it is apparent that there are a few other individuals who have made significant contributions, saliently above the ordinary, but who, for one of two reasons, are not eligible for a regular academic emeritus appointment. Either they did not retire at the conclusion of their service to the college or they were not a member of the faculty." He continued by calling Holst and Benedict forward to receive their honorary emeritus appointments.

During her sixteen years at PUC Alice Holst taught and chaired the Department of Secretarial Science and contributed heavily to the modernization of the curriculum. After her termination she stayed in Angwin and contributed greatly to college projects such as serving on the Committee of 100 and helping to fund the Rieger organ in the church. She taught for seventeen more years in the Napa high schools and at Napa Valley College, and she wrote a successful textbook for secretarial students.

Ted Benedict continued his career at San Jose State University, where he chaired his department, was dean of academic planning, and was special assistant to the president for faculty affairs. He also served as a trustee of the Adventist Media Center and La Sierra University and did consulting at PUC.

PUC Church Pastor Resigns

During the first week of May, Ray Mitchell, senior pastor of the 2,072 member Pacific Union College Church, resigned, effective immediately. The reasons for his resignation are not public, and Fred Kinsey, assistant to the president of the Northern California Conference for Communications, stated that there is a possibility of eventual litigation. He did not divulge the nature of the potential litigation, and he also stated that legal action might not materialize.

Darold Retzer, president of the Northern California Conference, broke the news to the congregation on Sabbath morning, May 9. Following is the statement he read to the church:

"There are days when being the president of the Northern California Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a joy. There are other days, however, when my heart is heavy. Today is one of those days.

"During this past week I accepted the resignation of your pastor, Ray Mitchell. With sadness, the conference administration agreed with the appropriateness of his resignation. I would like to request that

you do not speculate or spread rumors concerning this matter.

"Your focus on Jesus Christ has allowed this congregation to be resilient and continue to be a great light for the Lord, not only here in northern California, but around the world. I urge you to maintain your focus upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face. Truly, we long for a time when the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

"Pastor John Hughson (an associate pastor of the church) has been asked to lead this great congregation until a new senior pastor is selected. The conference administration will guide your church board through that process.

"In the days and weeks to come, please show your Christian compassion for Ray and his family and those concerned. I fervently wish that I could spare them and you the pain that will inevitably follow this announcement, and I long for the day when 'God will wipe away every tear' from our eyes."

The Pacific Union College Board set up a ten-member search committee to work with the Northern California Conference in finding a new senior pastor.

Campus Spiritual Leaders Meet in Florida

STEVE DAILY

Spring break in Daytona Beach is normally associated with college students, all-night cruising, and crazy parties.

But that was not the case when Adventist college and university students, elected as the spiritual leaders of their various North American campuses, met in March for their National Campus Ministries Convention. The keynote speaker, senior campus chaplain Steve Daily from La Sierra University, began the meeting with a message entitled "The Lazarus Generation." Daily noted that no generation in American history has been written off for dead the way Generation X has been discounted, but that God loves an underdog and will resurrect this generation to accomplish unprecedented works of faith.

Lukewarm Campuses

Celeste Ryan, editor of *Adventist View*, was another featured speaker who inspired and motivated campus leaders. She shared survey results which revealed that nearly all the Adventist college campuses currently see themselves as "lukewarm," but that there is a growing critical mass on every campus praying desperately for revival and the Holy Spirit. The convention itself was characterized by general sessions that not only emphasized the importance of prayer, but allowed time for small group prayer as well. In addition to the general sessions, breakout groups for Campus Ministries, Student Missions, CABL, (Collegiate Adventists for Better Living), and campus chaplains also met each day.

Some of the major issues that were discussed and voted in these meetings included: 1) the need for streamlining and updating the NAD and GC computer database to better process the increasing number of student mission calls that are coming from the campuses each year; 2) the need for a re-entry program to help returned Student Missionaries read-

just after their time overseas; 3) an official Constitution of NAD Campus Chaplains was voted to provide guidelines as chaplains function in their official advisory role to the NAD and General Conference; 4) that next year's meeting will be hosted by La Sierra University in Southern California on the theme of Worship and Prayer.

Church Attendance

The challenges faced by college and university churches were also discussed in the breakout groups. These challenges

experimented with student campus churches that meet at various times on a weekly basis in addition to their college/university churches. Similar numbers attend both venues. On every campus many students leave on weekends. Some attend their home churches; some are active participants in other community churches in their area. Although they may not attend their college churches each weekend, the majority of Adventist college students are still committed to regular church attendance and meaningful spiritual growth.

Youth Making a Difference

The final featured speaker at the convention was Jose Rojas, the North American Youth Leader, who inspired the entire gathering with his stories and reports of how Adventist young people

...nearly all the Adventist college campuses currently see themselves as "lukewarm," but that there is a growing critical mass on every campus praying desperately for revival and the Holy Spirit.

tend to be similar on every campus but are being met in various ways. Oakwood college reported having approximately 500 students stay on campus for church each weekend. At Walla Walla, college students hold their own campus church once a month with an average of about 350 in attendance, but at least this many students typically attend the college church most other weekends as well. Other campuses tend to have fewer students attending campus church on a typical weekend.

Several campuses, such as La Sierra University, Columbia Union College, and Canadian Union College have

are making a major difference in the world today. Rojas shared how God has opened amazing opportunities, even into the White House itself, for Adventist young people to impact the nation as a whole. President Clinton recently singled out Adventist youth volunteers at his Summit on Community Services for their volunteer humanitarian work across the country. Adventist colleges play an important role in tutoring and community feeding programs that served as part of the basis for this special recognition. Clinton's words to Rojas were, "Please tell Adventist youth volunteers I'm proud of them."

Four SDA News Reports Compared

ALICIA GOREE

Ed. Note: The following is an uncensored critical analysis of four denominational publications. Alicia Goree is an independent writer and is in no way tied to Adventist Today.

For many years, any outsider could recognize an Adventist just by sight. There was a certain look, you know the one... conservative, plain, slightly out-of-date. In recent years, though, Seventh-day Adventists have become as diverse as the society in which they live. Along with the changing face of Adventism, as well as the thrust of the Information Age, comes a need for denominational periodicals which are as diverse as the church's constituents.

Adventist Review, *Adventist Today*, *Columbia Union Visitor*, and *Pacific Union Recorder* are four major Adventist magazines. The *Visitor* and *Recorder* are union papers. Each of these four has a similar agenda; that is, to ensure that their readers are informed about current church events and issues.

Occasionally, news stories come along that in some way affect the entire church body and warrant reporting in every denominational magazine. One such story appeared on the scene in early 1997.

The board of directors of Family Enrichment Resources (FER), a cooperative literature evangelism effort of the Columbia, Atlantic, and Pacific Unions, voted on Dec. 3, 1996, to dissolve the company. FER, born in January of 1992, had accumulated a \$3.4-million negative net worth. The story ran in all four magazines, but each had a dramatically different approach. The following is an analysis of each magazine's coverage, including comments from each editor.

Columbia Union Visitor

The *Visitor* story, "Report Regarding Family Enrichment," ran in the February 15 issue. This story is a complete copy of the official news statement written by *Visitor* editor Dick Duerksen, whose job also includes Crisis Public Relations for the Columbia Union and the FER Transition

ANALYSIS

Team. It provides a detailed look at both the positive and negative aspects of the history and current status of the FER project, including the names of those involved, the findings of the follow-up committee, and an address to write to for more information. In addition, Duerksen's editorial touched on the subject.

Adventist Today

"Financial Shortfall Rocks Literature Evangelism," by Albert Dittes, appeared in the January-February issue of *Adventist Today*. Its four pages also provide an open, detailed disclosure of information regarding

William Johnsson, editor of *Adventist Review*, would not comment on the FER story coverage...

the history and current status of FER, and it includes a few facts and interviews not found in the *Visitor* story. The focus, however, is on the negative aspects of the ordeal, evident even in the first paragraph, which immediately reports that the FER president "ignored denominational policy and invested \$264,500 in a Canadian venture." No options are given for obtaining further information.

Adventist Review

The *Adventist Review's* story, "Board Terminates Publishing Venture," ran in the February issue, and begins with a two-paragraph editors' note that gives a synopsis of FER history. It then provides a compact version of Duerksen's original news release. It does not include the information regarding wrongdoing by several FER leaders and the Columbia Union president and secretary. Again, no options are provided for

readers who want more information.

Pacific Union Recorder

The *Pacific Union Recorder* contains the least information about the FER story, which is surprising, considering that the Pacific Union loaned 59.89 percent of the approximately \$4 million FER start-up fund. "FER Board Votes To Cease Operations" covers about half a page in the January 6 issue. It announces the closing, gives a brief history, and maintains a positive slant. A guest editorial in the same issue by Pacific Union Conference President Thomas Mostert, Jr., implies that the problems of FER were overshadowed by its successes and that the financial difficulties resulted simply from a lack of adequate funding.

"The magazines have different missions and serve different constituencies," said Duerksen. "Accordingly, they automatically look at each story through different eyes. Portions of the FER story, for instance, have little or no meaning to members of the Pacific Union or to many readers of the *Adventist Review* and so there would be no reason for the *Recorder* or *Review* to report on those aspects of FER."

"I think that the *Columbia Union Visitor* had the most complete coverage of the Family Enrichment Resources story, given Dick Duerksen's open journalistic temperament and the fact that he (I think) was privy to details that were hard to come by, even if a reporter for another publication were interested," said former *Adventist Today* editor Jim Walters. "I guess that our own publication, *Adventist Today*, is most open in reporting sensitive stories, given that we take as our mission the publication of important information that the Adventist public is unlikely to read in mainline denominational publications."

William Johnsson, editor of *Adventist Review*, would not comment on the FER story coverage, but said, "Our declared goal is to build every issue on four principles: spiritual food, the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, diversity, and reader interaction."

"I feel that I have a responsibility to give the readers all the details as far as I'm

permitted to do so in order that they can form intelligent opinions about a given situation," said *Pacific Union Recorder* editor C. Elwyn Platner. "When the publisher, as in this case, is the church, it must be very careful what it publishes in order that it does not create news which could precipitate litigation against itself. The publisher in most cases determines the spin on articles which are considered to be of a sensitive and controversial nature. It is my opinion that our church members are capable of handling more information than they are allowed to receive at times."

"It is my responsibility to report all aspects of a story that are relevant to helping constituents make wise decisions about their church," said Duerksen. "As the 'shareholders' of Adventism, it is very important that they be 'in the loop' on issues that impact them and their congregations. The *Visitor* report on FER was, essentially, a report to shareholders on the closure of an organization in which they had invested considerable resources and hope."

The issue at hand is much greater than a responsibility to a certain readership area, however. "Virtually all news, in both church and public news media (even *Adventist Today*), is managed in one way or another," said Platner. "Those who manage the news can couch both negative and positive news in a way that will lead the readers to think the way the writers want. But when the information provided is either incomplete or insufficient, the audience will seek other sources. When the information provided by the church is incomplete and highly managed, many church members become disillusioned and church leaders lose credibility."

The point is this: readers should remember that every source of news, whether it be a church publication, the secular media, or the rumor mill, has a specific motivation for disclosing or withholding information. To obtain a clearer picture of any story, a discerning reader is well advised to consult more than one source.

Alicia Goree is a graduate of Southern Adventist University and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Religion (World Missions) at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

Science and Faith Conference to Meet at Andrews University

JAMES STIRLING

Andrews University will host a week-long conference beginning July 23, 1998, bringing together college and university science and mathematics professors to discuss problems relating to the integration of science and theology. Although planned primarily for scholars in the North American Division, the symposia and workshops will also be attended by representatives from the Philippines, Hong Kong, the Caribbean, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, and Canada. Among the eighty-five registrants are five from the General Conference and one from the Voice of Prophecy, and other theologians with expertise in science/religion issues.

According to an announcement, the stated purpose of the conference is "to affirm faith by celebrating together our Divine origin and the work of the Spirit, and by sharing the inspiration of God's creatorship through nature, the arts, and personal experience." It also will seek to "provide opportunity for interaction with positive communication, collegial association, and one-to-one personal contact between institutions, disciplines, and leaders/scholars in the area of science, math, and theology;

with open, honest, and stimulating discussion of science/faith issues by defining problem areas pointing out both strengths and weaknesses of arguments, and developing steps toward resolution. The atmosphere will be one where difficult problems can be presented and tough questions asked in a spirit of listening, tolerance, and diversity within a context affirming faith and a spirit of loyalty for the core issues and premises of the church."

An additional purpose is "to disseminate information on integration of faith and reason, and on issues of specific importance to college science/math professors. In-service training and useful materials for participants to keep will be available. Presentations will include contemporary discoveries in science and advances in creationism, and provide aid in dealing with challenges to faith from a scientific world view. Recognizing that SDA students have different questions today than in the past, these meetings will provide help in preparing them to face the issues and encouraging them to think."

The coordinator for the event is Ben Clausen, Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, CA 92350. He can be reached by telephone at 909/824-4548, or by fax at 909/824-4314. His email address is bclausen@lasierra.edu.

AT Goes Online

GREG BILLOCK,
ADVENTIST TODAY WEBMASTER

As a reader of *Adventist Today* you're interested in reading about—and in discussing—current issues in the Adventist church and the wider Christian community. We're pleased to announce our new web site which will provide you with even more opportunities for interaction, learning, and involvement. This web site is *aToday.com* and is located on the World Wide Web at <http://www.atoday.com>.

When you visit *aToday.com* you'll have options: you can view the current issue of *Adventist Today*; review past issues in our archive (which will eventually include every issue since inception); interact with other AT community members in forums, guest-books, or email; write letters to the editor; subscribe, give donations, or change subscription information; sign up for email notices of late-breaking news; review announcements of AT events, and much more.

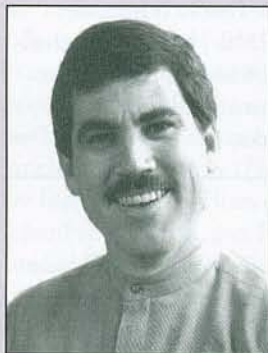
We hope to enrich our community by facilitating more discussion and by attracting others to join us in reading and interacting. We want our web site to help keep *Adventist Today* an exciting element of modern Adventism.

The New Congregationalism: What Gives?

A Panel Discussion

Panelists: Eric Bahme, Larry Caviness, Mitch Hensen, Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson

Moderator: James Walters



Eric Bahme is the pastor of the New Life Fellowship Seventh Day Adventist Church in Woodinville, Washington.



Larry Caviness is the president of the Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.



Mitchell Hensen is the senior pastor of the Glendale City Church in Glendale, California.



Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson is the chair of the Department of Modern Languages, La Sierra University, in Riverside, California.



James Walters is an ethicist on the Faculty of Religion at Loma Linda University. He is one of the founders of *Adventist Today*.

This panel discussion occurred on March 21, 1998, at the first annual Adventist Today campmeeting in Riverside, California.

Walters: Welcome to what I think is the first open discussion of the new phenomenon of congregationalism in the Adventist church.

Bahme: Congregationalism is not primarily about money or doctrine. Congregationalism is sweeping the church. Pastors and lay people want to see the sense of "movement" come back into the denomination. Congregationalism is alive, it is real, it is vibrant! And it has a message to share. It is about being impassioned with following Jesus wherever Jesus asks you to go, regardless of the cost.

Our denomination is an aging church, and the statistics show that. New Life Christian Fellowship has an average age of 32. Our cradle roll division is the largest division.

We have not severed ties with Adventism. Our official name is New Life Christian Fellowship of Congregational Seventh Day Adventists. We are still Adventists, no matter whether the definition of Adventist would include us or not—because Jesus is building his church, and we are part of that church. Congregationalism is not the only option. It's another option. And it is an option that has grace and the gospel at its center. It's about following Jesus.

Morales-Gudmundsson: I think that what pastor Eric has suggested here—that we have to have options—is absolutely on target. If congregationalism is not inclusive, then it's just one more thing that's happening in the Adventist church that is not healing, that is not enabling. If congregationalism does not allow the voice of the woman or the child to be heard centrally, as the male voice is heard, then we have just added to the disempowering the church.

As a Hispanic, I'm on many North American Division-level committees that deal with Hispanics. Hispanics do not see this movement of congregationalism as their own. In the Hispanic mindset, authority is the way it is. Congregationalism is tantamount to heresy.

This movement is important for the European/American sector of the Adventist church that is aging in the United States. Hispanic revitalization, however, revolves around traditional evangelism. It's important to me, though, that it's happening and it is revitalizing a sector of our church.

Caviness: I recognize that the traditional church is facing challenges, especially among the young Anglo population. I believe in and support the concept of the global church uniting its resources for the common cause. I believe in both the Scriptures and the ministry of Ellen White. I believe that both of them support the concept of the global church. The idea of a chosen people is illustrated in the Old Testament, in Paul's writing, and by the remnant of Revelation.

The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel to the entire world. It seems to me that the most efficient way to accomplish this mission is to join as many forces together as possible.

Our hospital system benefits from the corporate body. When the local hospital is prosperous, it may question the benefit of corporate participation. But when that same hospital falls on hard times, it welcomes the support of the corporate body.

The church body works the same way. When a congregation is weak or small, it needs the support and protection of the larger body. When a congregation gets large and no longer needs the body for support or survival, it is tempted to ask, "Why should I continue to belong?" When that happens, it severely damages the corporate body's ability to aid and to the weaker.

Look for a moment at what the church has been able to accomplish through the blessing of God and working together. Among other things, we have established a work in more than 230 countries around the world. We have a world membership approaching 10 million. We proclaim the gospel in over 700 languages. We have the world's largest Protestant education system, composed of more than 5,500 schools; 81 colleges and universities employing more than 45,000 teachers and serving more than 900,000 students. We have developed outstanding institutions. We have developed the world's largest Protestant medical work, composed of hospitals, clinics, medical launches, airplanes, retirement homes and orphanages. I question that this could ever have been accomplished by individual churches.

There are other benefits as well. The corporate church has easier access to a world-wide pool of pastoral personnel from which to draw. How does the pastor of the independent congregation, on his own or her own, find a new job if the congregation wishes a change? The network of church positions is not

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readily available or accessible to the pastor in the congregational mode.

I believe God has given this church a wonderful organization. But we easily fracture [and] choose up sides, and the devil wins because we are distracted from our mission.

Though I have been elected to serve as president of Southern California Conference, I know my service will not be without its mistakes. I will give the best I can to God and his church, both corporate and congregational. I want desperately for Jesus to come and take his children home, and I want to take as many with me as I can.

Hensen: We at the Glendale City Church are remaining in the organization, yet we do contemporary ministry. We have a special ministry for young families—they're our minority. We have a recovery ministry. We have an ethnic ministry because Romanian and Armenian people are the major groups in our community. We have a large

homosexual group. Some people think we ought to run them away or change them.

We decided that we would be a church that would give voice to the youth and young adults. And guess what? We have graduate students and others involved in the ministry of our church who drive to us from all over Southern California.

For the last seven years, while senior pastor of the Glendale City Church, I did not decide the preaching subjects for the year.

They are decided upon by a group of laypersons who get together

after hearing last years' sermons and formulate a menu of sermons for the coming year.

Congregationalism, I believe, already exists *de facto* within the Adventist church. I don't need to "take on" the organization. Today, I find that I have both permission and encouragement if I listen to my congregation.

Walters: Thank you. If I understood you, president Caviness, the Seventh-day Adventist church is a corporate, global church. And therein lies its threefold effectiveness: 1) Numerical growth; 2) an organized structure that can aid congregations better than single congregations can serve their own needs; and 3) serving the pastor better because pastors don't have to merely depend on great performance with one congregation.

Bahme: We built a wonderful institution, and we need to be very careful that we don't now institutionalize. The Adventist church has prided itself on being a movement. That means things can change. My church has the ability to respond much faster than an institutional church. It doesn't take a lot of committees.

My church is more involved in missions than we were before becoming independent. We've started an orphanage in Thailand. We see ourselves as part of the church. There are people out there of other faiths that are as much a part of the remnant church as we are. If we're to keep up with the new millennium, then we must change. I'm not saying that congregationalism is the answer; it's just part of a much wider picture.

Morales-Gudmundsson: I would simply say to church leadership: don't see these congregations as a threat to the corporation, but as an enrichment. I see these congregations enhancing the well-being of the corporate body if they're allowed to be a part of the body. I want the corporate body to say, Okay, you have a new ministry. Let's try to incorporate you and make you and the church stronger because of you.

Walters: Larry [Caviness], you ticked off the benefits of the organization. But what about the idea of seeing these churches not as the enemy but as self-supporting institutions that may give breadth and strength to the church?

Caviness: The challenge any organization faces is, as it grows, learning to stay light on its feet so that it can adapt to change as it comes. But it must also be accountable to the people it serves.

How would I respond to a group that might come and say to me, "We want to go independent?" My first response is: I need for you to get your church together in business session and corporately discuss it. You bring that request to us, and I will take it to the executive committee with the following recommendation: if this congregation no longer chooses to buy into the corporation and has sensed that God is leading them in an individual direction, then my recommendation is that the conference will not hold by force, authority or coercion, but only by love. And if that love relationship is not vibrant and the choice to go a different direction should be taken, then I would recommend we accept that.

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Walters: Larry, I don't mean for this to be a nasty question, but would you let the ownership of the church building go with the congregation?

Caviness: That gets into a legal question that I'm not sure can be answered this simplistically. My first reaction is, yeah. But you can't do that because you have people that made the major investment in the building, with the confidence that the denomination would maintain it. But I wouldn't fight over property, personally. If the movement is of the Lord, it'll succeed. If it's not, it'll come to naught on its own. I will do what I can to help it succeed.

Bahme: I want to clarify one point: of the churches that are going independent right now, it has not been their choice. I didn't go to my conference president and say, "Can I be independent?" It was action and an issue that was decided for us.

Caviness: I don't know what the issues were at Eric's church. But there comes a point at which church leadership has to say, "Here is the line in the sand over theological issues."

Morales-Gudmundsson: What exactly are we talking about? Really deep doctrinal differences? Are we talking about styles of worship?

Walters: That's a very good question and maybe Eric could address that—the sticking point in your church.

Bahme: There is style, but the issue is also theology, because a basic challenge is how we are going to define Adventism. We ministers would sit around the table at workers' meetings and shoot the breeze on "the remnant" and on lifestyle issues. And we discovered that not all of us held a hard line. A lot of people out there are saying, "I took what I wanted and the rest I threw out." Well, I didn't have that luxury. I was a pastor. And so I think it is theology, and it is style as well.

Hensen: A pastor could not have said what I have said today and continue in the work 20 years ago. The basic health of the leadership is an issue. Some leaders can allow a larger range of disparity. In one conference a particular congregation would have trouble, but if you pick that whole congregation up and move them 300 miles, they'd be just fine in another conference.

Bahme: So can we join California?

Walters: Let me press the point that Mitch [Hensen] has just mentioned. In some conferences we can have what amounts to quasi-congregationalism, with many of the benefits you have, Eric, plus the benefits of organization.

Morales-Gudmundsson: I think Mitch's comment underscores a radical, deep-seated problem in church structure. You can move a congregation like that a few miles down the road and they're okay, but where they are, they're not okay.

Bahme: In my discussions with a conference administrator, I said, "I want to talk to my church about this." He replied, "You can't do that. If you were my 12-year-old daughter, would I give you the keys of the car to drive? Our people are like my 12-year-old daughter. They can't drive the car." And I replied, "What you're telling me is that I, as the pastor, need to bring them in line because they don't know how to function and raise the church." And he said, "Absolutely."

I don't believe that.

I do believe that if we were in this particular conference, our whole church would still be together. Adventists are pretty loyal. They don't just pick up and walk away. And yet we're starting to see entire churches leaving. Something needs to be done before more of this happens. And we're willing to come back at any time that we can.

Walters: Larry, what do you think about the considerable congregational latitude illustrated by City Church in Glendale?

Caviness: Local congregations exhibit a tremendous spectrum from ultra-conservative to the liberal. That same spectrum represents itself in conference leadership and on conference committees. If I am faced with an ultra-conservative conference committee, then most of the decisions that come down will reflect the make-up of that committee. If I have a progressive committee with a very conservative administrator, I've got a blockage that doesn't function well together.

Walters: So are you saying that whether or not individual congregations have the latitude to run their own programs depends primarily on the local executive committee?

In one conference a particular congregation would have trouble, but if you pick that whole congregation up and move them 300 miles, they'd be just fine in another conference.

I believe that congregationalism is of God.

Caviness: I think your local executive committee pretty much lets the local congregations do what works in their congregations. We try to provide resources and help, and we remind them of the global church.

Walters: If the whole church changed to be "open," what about authoritarian parts of the world that see organization very differently?

Morales-Gudmundsson: The American Adventism exported to the missions has been very traditional. I remember in Puerto Rico asking my pastor friends why, in 90 degree weather and sweltering humidity, they were wearing black suits, white shirts, and black ties.

Hensen: We don't get any problem in our creative ministry from the conference. We get it from members of other churches who write nasty letters saying, "You shouldn't be allowed to do that!" They go to Larry and the conference committee and say, "They're not allowed to do that!"

Walters: Let's go to the audience for comments and questions.

Calvin Thompson: I pastor a church that is probably among the top five in the whole denomination [Azure Hills Church, Grand Terrace, California].

And yet we have no money for ministry because we have over two million dollars a year that goes away and never comes back in any form. We are seriously hampered in doing ministry because of the financial structure.

Hensen: When a Presbyterian woman pastor joined our church not long ago, she was shocked at how much Adventists send on.

Bahme: When there is vision, people fund it. If we'd had a strong tithe base, I think, the Washington Conference would have kept us.

Walters: Well, these are very big questions that you have raised. But they're not beyond the capacity of President Larry Caviness to address.

Caviness: I would hope that the decision to let a church go is not based on its dollars. Just as the local church struggles with its finances, the local conference struggles with its. My conference has had a flat tithe gain over a number of years. I can get up and tell a story of something going on in Russia, and I can raise money that quick. But if I say, "Ten and

three quarters percent of the gross tithe that comes into this conference goes into the retirement plan for our workers," that's not very exciting.

Walters: Yes, Jim Stirling in the back.

James Stirling: What proportion of tithe goes to the union conference which then has to send it on to the General Conference?

Caviness: We send 10 percent to the union and 20 percent to the General Conference, and then we have additional higher education and other pieces that are in there. So it comes out to about 46 percent of our tithe dollars that we send on. But of that 46 percent, using those same percentage figures, about 17 percent comes back to us in different ways.

Walters: Perhaps we could end with brief summaries from our panelists.


Bahme: I think that Adventism should look at models such as the Assembly of God or Foursquare churches, many of which are congregational, that send 10 percent up and do a fantastic job.

I believe that congregationalism is of God. And I believe that this is not a problem to be solved, but something rather to rejoice in. And if congregationalism is going to exist today, neither you nor I will be able to stop it. And if it's not God's move, neither you nor I will be able to get it going.

Morales-Gudmundsson: I appeal to the church organization to be flexible. If we want to be united, we're going to have to be flexible. But I say, let us all see each other as children of God and make the family a big accepting place for all the members of the body of Christ.

Caviness: Just as deeply as you believe that God is leading in the movement of congregationalism, I deeply feel that God has led in the structure of his church.

I believe that if God has allowed this people to face this challenge, he is big enough to help us know how to meet it appropriately. And he will give us the solutions.

Hensen: If we didn't have the church, whether congregational or otherwise, we'd have to invent it. It's unique. But I believe there will be a time when what we now see as the organization will no longer exist. But I have a sense that if we are faithful to what God is leading us to do and to be, our children and our grandchildren will be Adventists. The genius of Adventism in the Christian world is that it is a movement. And that's the exciting part for me. 

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH:

☒ Hierarchical or ☒ Congregational?

TIM CROSBY

Ed. note: This paper is a Bible study; we've preserved its scholarly form in the use of customary abbreviations throughout.

Virtually every significant organization known to man—armies, governments, businesses, sports teams—is organized hierarchically for the simple reason that this has proven to be the most efficient way to do it. There is evidence angels are organized hierarchically—note the “chief princes” of Dan 10:13, and the angel who commands other angels in Rev 7:1-2. Moses found it necessary to organize the Israelites hierarchically (Ex 18). Though the early church does not seem to have had a rigidly formalized structure, there were levels of authority beyond the local church.

In the NT, the terms “elder” (Greek *episcopos*), “bishop” or “presbyter” (*presbuteros*), and “pastor” (*poimenos*) are different terms for essentially the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:1-5)—an office which corresponds to the present-day office of pastor. These church leaders were appointed by their superiors, the apostles (Acts 14:23), or the evangelists (Tit 1:5).

Timothy and Titus, besides “doing the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4:5), seem to have functioned as district superintendents of a large geographical area, fulfilling some of the same functions as our conference presidents.

Timothy had authority to ordain new pastors (1 Tim 5:22), to denounce pastors who sinned (v. 20), and even to determine which

pastors should receive double honor (v. 17); which, on the basis of v. 18 and 2 Tim 2:6, “means most probably an additional material recompense rather than particular esteem on the part of the congregation” (P. H. Menoud in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 1:624).

Titus, whom Paul described as “my partner and fellow-worker among you” (2 Cor 8:23), also exercised plenary authority (Tit 2:15) to ordain (1:5) and discipline (3:10) in areas such as Crete, Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10), and Corinth (2 Cor 7:15). The Corinthians are commended for receiving him “with fear and trembling” (2 Cor 7:15).

It is clear that Timothy and Titus exercised authority over the pastors of more than one local congregation, and that the apostle exercised authority over Timothy and Titus. Notice that this chain of authority corresponds to the order in which the spiritual gifts are listed in Eph 4:11. Apostles—prophets—evangelists—pastors and teachers. And there was yet a higher lever of authority, the council of elders which exercised authority over others, a carryover from Judaism. In Acts 15 we find this council, a carry-



Tim Crosby is an editor-at-large for the Review and Herald Publishing Association. He has authored several books on subjects including prayer, angels, and theology.

over from Judaism, exercising the power to prohibit and permit which was granted to the church by Jesus while on earth.

The Jewish rabbis claimed to sit in the seat of Moses, which gave them the authority to “bind” or prohibit certain practices, and to “loose” or permit others. Amazingly, even though many of their rules were frivolous and burdensome, and Jesus heaped opprobrium upon them for it, nevertheless Jesus told the Jews to obey them (Mt 23:2-3).

In Mt 16:19 and 18:18 Jesus, using the common rabbinic terminology of binding and loosing, confers this right upon the church, giving it the authority to rule on certain issues that are not explicitly settled by Scripture (e.g. slavery, smoking, etc.). This statement also conveys authority to discipline those who do not obey (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20), for another meaning of “bind and loose” is to condemn and to absolve. To quote John W. Stott (*Confess Your Sins*, p. 45), “It is by binding and loosing certain practices (declaring them lawful or unlawful) that the church can go on to bind those who disregard its teaching, and loose those who . . . having disregarded it, repent.”

We see the early church exercising this authority in Acts 15. A theological dispute had arisen which was submitted to a Jerusalem meeting of the apostles and elders. After some discussion, the decision was announced by James (“It is my decision . . .” v. 19), and was adopted as the consensus of the group (vv. 22, 25), guided by the Holy Spirit (v. 28). This decision was then formulated into a statement of policy (vv. 23ff) which became the official position of the church. One comment in this document is of particular significance: v. 24 indicates that workers in other cities had to be “authorized” by the Jerusalem council in some way.

Of even greater significance is Acts 16:4, which indicates this “decree” was delivered to all the churches in other cities “for them to observe.” Clearly, the NT church was not congregational; policies decided on by the central ruling body were obligatory for all churches.

Paul was not a strong supporter of this decision (1 Cor 8-10). But then Paul was an inspired apostle and prophet, and had the right to demur from administrative actions, as Ellen White sometimes did, without setting precedent for other church members to disregard church decisions.

To balance the picture, there is also evidence in Acts of congregational involvement in church polity. Under Peter’s direction, the congregation participated in selecting a new disciple to replace Judas (Acts 1:15ff). Again, in Acts 6:1-6, the congregation selected seven men to serve as deacons and brought them to the apostles to be ordained. It appears from 1 Cor 5:4 that disfellowshipping from church membership was done by the entire congregation in assembly.

An important NT passage on power structures is Lk 22:24-30. The disciples are jockeying for position in the kingdom, and Jesus rebukes them, citing pagan power structures as an example of how not to behave, and forbidding them to “lord it over” one another. Jesus is here promoting a philosophy of leadership; he is not condemning all organizational structure—indeed, Jesus promised the disciples that they would sit on thrones and judge Israel (v. 30; Luke 19:15-19). Jesus is saying, “You are in fact going to rule. But you must not seek authority; indeed you must lower yourself to serve before you can be trusted with authority.”

This counsel is reinforced by Peter: the shepherd, or pastor, is not to domineer over the flock (1 Pet 5:3). On the other hand, the congregation was to “be subject” to and “obey” him (1 Pet 5:5; Heb 13:17). If Christians are to respect and obey the authority of even pagan powers (1 Pet 2:13ff), even if they are harsh and unfair, if resisting secular authority is resisting

God and will bring punishment (Rom 13:2), then how much more should Christians be subject to those who are over them “in the Lord.” (1 Th 5:12).

The pastor does not merely have the authority of the consent of the governed; his authority flows from Christ himself, and is to be honored. But this authority is to be exercised in humility, never in arro-


gance or for selfish purposes.

Thus we find in the NT, not a highly formalized structure, but a balanced picture of strong leadership with active congregational involvement. It is clear there were levels of authority in the church and that Jerusalem was the center of that authority.

Among Adventists, the Biblical model of church structure is often ignored in favor of 20th-century cultural ideals. The church is, in fact, not a democracy, but a benevolent dictatorship, with Christ as its head.

Appointed leadership has its own problems, of course, but churches who call their pastors are probably more vulnerable to the problem of 2 Tim 4:3, “Men will not put up with sound doctrine.... They will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear;” and leaders are vulnerable to the problem of 1 Sam 15:24, “I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.”

In summary, the NT does not seem to support the concept of hierarchical totalitarianism, such as we find in the Roman Catholic Church, in which church leaders make all decisions for the church and are not subject to the congregation. Neither does it support a congregational system in which each church is financially and organizationally independent. It does reveal a church with a central policy-making body and various levels of authority, in which the membership plays a key role in decision making, all under the guidance of the Spirit.



Clearly, the NT church was not congregational; policies decided on by the central ruling body were obligatory for all churches.

Yes, But . . .

A response by the Editor

*If there is a
disagreement
between church
practice and
Ellen White,
who wins?*

Crosby is right on: The New Testament church followed neither a strictly congregational nor a fully hierarchical model of church governance. But the devil, as they say, is in the details. Crosby presents a tidy picture of the church, but reality is not so simple, then or now.

In the New Testament there were clearly inter-regional transfers of money, but they were voluntary. And the money sent from the Gentile churches in Greece and Turkey was for the poor believers in Judea, not for the support of the "council of elders" or their appointees. How does this compare to our present situation?

The record of the Jerusalem Council cuts two ways. True, in Acts 15 the council promulgated rules for non-Jewish believers, demonstrating real authority. But in Acts 10 and 11, the Holy Spirit leap-frogged the council. Through the ministry of one reluctant leader, Peter, the Spirit set aside centuries of precedent based on the teaching of Moses. Only after this tradition-shattering action in a local ministry did the central council reluctantly open the door of the church to people and practices that were previously taboo. In this case the Central Council did not lead change but followed the indisputable work of God among his people.

In the conflict between Paul and the Jerusalem council, who was ultimately right, the prophet or the church? If there is a disagreement between church practice and Ellen White, who wins? (For example, do we pay pastors' wives? Do we regard gluttony by church leaders to be as sinful as drunkenness?)

Since congregations can discipline, what is the responsibility of congregations toward unethical behavior by pastors or "higher" church officials?

Crosby writes, "workers in other cities had to be 'authorized' by the Jerusalem council" (Acts 15:24). But the text does not support his conclusion. He also supports organizational authority by citing Jesus' mention of the disciples sitting on thrones and judging Israel. But in Revelation this throne imagery is explicitly applied to "all who overcome" and to martyrs. Jesus' caution against power is reinforced by Revelation's portrayal of mind-boggling power-sharing: the Father's throne is shared by Jesus who shares his throne with his people. Which is about as flat an organizational structure as you can get.

A question too large to be adequately explored here is: to what extent do we take the New Testament example as prescriptive for our times? Is Jerusalem supposed to be our ecclesiastical center? Should our doctrinal statement be limited to the four items voted in Acts 15? Is it a violation of the New Testament to have rules against drinking? Were Adventists wrong to practice civil disobedience by hiding and transporting fugitive slaves?

Crosby's article is an appropriate challenge to those infatuated with American individualism. Authentic spiritual life is lived in community. Individualism and congregationalism carry spiritual hazards. On the other hand, despite his cautions, Crosby's arguments may be used by some "in authority" to urge submission on those "below" them. Church leaders may be tempted to appeal to their authority or to use their influence to solve conflicts rather than committing themselves to an open process of prayer, conversation and research aimed at reaching conclusions firmly rooted in justice and truth.

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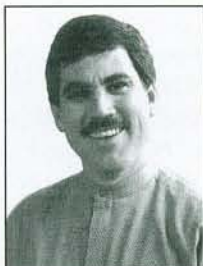
What I've Learned

Lessons from ministry in a Congregational Seventh Day Adventist Church

ERIC BAHME

Two years have passed since the church I pastor, New Life Christian Fellowship, was forced to leave the official Seventh-day Adventist denomination in order to continue its mission to the community. On June 1, 1996, 98 percent of the old congregation formed a new nondenominational church—New Life Christian Fellowship of Congregational Seventh Day Adventists.

While we were no longer under the “umbrella” of conference administration, many of us still held membership in the local SDA church. In February, 1998, however, the local Adventist church from which New Life spawned voted to cease functioning. There were no longer enough members to support it, and efforts to build membership through evangelism had failed. Sitting with the seven voting members left in that church prompted me to reflect on my own congregation’s pilgrimage and the four major lessons we have learned since leaving the denomination.



Eric Bahme is the pastor of New Life Christian Fellowship, a congregational Seventh Day Adventist church in Washington.

Lesson #1

Message and Mission Really Matter

It was unheard of, even inconceivable, that an entire congregation would “leave the church.” Over the years Adventists have been surprisingly loyal to the institution. But in this postmodern culture thinking has changed. Protecting and building the organization is no longer seen as essential. Big government is viewed with skepticism. Realizing that no one can contain the transcendent glory of Christ within the bastion of institutional walls, many Seventh-day Adventists are redefining their understanding of church and its reason for existence. Of course, some would defend the institutional church at all costs, but others have concluded that while the mission of the church and the message of God’s Word are unchangeable, the structure of the church is not nearly so sacred.

The message of the church must be the gospel—the cross of Jesus Christ. The mission of the church is to reach lost and hurting people with the message in order that they might become followers of Christ. If we compromise or dilute either the message or the mission we lose our reason for existence.

When the structure, rather than the Word, begins to define the message and restrict the mission, something has to give. A battle ensues between the institution and the cross. Over the centuries men and women have willingly given their lives in this conflict. I believe Adventist leadership has underestimated the power of the gospel when it conflicts with the power of the insti-

tutionalized church. Preserving the fort is not nearly as important as winning the war. We cannot compromise the message or the mission, even if it means leaving behind what we once valued.

Lesson #2: No Church Is an Island

Among the benefits of being part of a formal organization is the sense of belonging to something bigger than the local community. The sharing of ideas, the dreaming of dreams, and the pursuit of a common vision has multiplying impact. The Willow Creek Association has effectively proven that a congregational network can significantly impact the local church.

Before my employment with the denomination ended, I interviewed about a dozen pastors who had left Adventism and tried to begin independent churches. Overwhelmingly, each said that if we allowed ourselves to become isolated from a network of like-minded groups, we would not succeed.

God is not into “independent” work. The body of Christ must function as a body—each part seeing the value in the other parts, even if they don’t look or act alike. We must look beyond ourselves in our finances, mission, and focus. Churches that have not learned this lesson have imploded and no longer exist.

Isolation is usually the result of bitterness. Bitterness causes a group to withdraw into itself. Hurt and bruised, we retreat to the isolation of our own community to lick our wounds and find healing. Of the dozen pastors I interviewed, every single one emphasized that leaving with any bitterness would be harmful to the overall work God wanted to accomplish. God will not bless a spirit of bitterness. This disease is not limited to those who “leave the church.” Bitterness can exist in or out of the denomination. Sometimes people who stay loyal to the denomination become bitter because an entire congregation leaves a conference and flourishes by God’s blessing. Sometimes bitterness grows from perceived “unfair treatment” by the denomination or its officials. We must guard against this insidious disease and realize we all belong to the body of Christ despite our differences.

Lesson # 3: God Will Build His Church

Christ was very clear on this point. “. . . I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Mat 16:18 NIV). It is God who builds the church. The church does not belong to us; it is his. His bride. His body. His beloved. This will be the church with whom He will walk down the aisle into his kingdom.

Yet confusion still appears to exist in the minds of some Seventh-day Adventists as to who will comprise this “remnant” group. In a recent letter I received, the president of the Washington Conference made an impassioned appeal for New Life

“to recognize and to be a viable part of the remnant church” (letter of February 6, 1998). This same thought has been expressed by union and conference presidents, editors, and others in statements regarding churches that are leaving the “sisterhood.”

In all fairness, I do not believe the Washington Conference president is passing judgment on our salvation. I personally know his heart. I would like to suggest, however, that New Life, Bridge City, Grace Place, Set Free, Damascus, and others are still very much a part of the remnant body of Christ. We have never left! God’s church is bigger than one group, and all of us must be careful not to narrowly define who is included in Christ’s “remnant” body.

Adventism today is being redefined. While some want a “pure church” undefiled by diversity, in reality the Adventist church is no longer comprised of those who believe a certain way, dress a certain way, and act a certain way. Rather, God has exploded the box and is moving far beyond the boundaries we once knew.

It is imperative for us not to draw lines in the sand—defiantly daring each other to cross over. Together, we are the body of Christ! The challenge we face is to behave like a body in the days ahead.

Lesson #4: Heritage Is Important

Whether we are currently part of an official Adventist congregation or are part of a congregational body, we cannot deny the impact Adventism has had on our lives. To this day my wife has never touched a piece of meat, and we have chosen to raise our daughter as a vegetarian. There is a danger among those of us who consider ourselves “congregational,” “evangelical,” “charismatic,” or any other label. That danger is the knee-jerk-reaction to throw all our heritage away. In my interview with former SDA pastors I discovered another valuable lesson—Adventism’s cultural impact should not be denied.

I still love a good veggie-burger at camp-meeting, and popcorn and apples just taste better when the sun goes down. Sabbath dinner is excellent when it is shared with friends and afternoon conversation. Uncle Arthur’s bedtime stories will always find a warm reception at the end of a day. I still don’t eat pork—even though my theological understanding has changed. Academy means more than a military flight school, and I even know where Walla Walla is on the map. But beyond all this, Adventism has given me a hunger for Scripture. It taught me to be true to God’s word no matter what the cost—to stand up for my convictions. Despite its legalism, it has allowed me to see a picture of God that I have seen in few places—one who loves so unconditionally that he could never burn his children in an eternal hell. I take comfort that when I die I will sleep until Jesus comes.

Adventism is like a diamond in the rough. It needs real change; it needs polishing. But like a true diamond it has sparkled in my life, and for that I will be forever grateful.

The Anatomy of a Defrocking

STEVE DAILY

Lord Acton once said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." A review of letters sent to Pastor Eric Bahme by the Washington Conference of Seventh-day Adventists between 1991 and 1995 (before he was fired and disfellowshipped) raises questions about the appropriate use of power.

For example, should conference officials dictate whether or not a pastor and his wife may wear wedding bands, even when their congregation is not concerned about this issue? Does a conference have the right to control the private devotional life of a pastor who occasionally speaks in tongues when he is alone with God? Should tithe and offering records of pastors and church members be available for conference scrutiny? Should a conference president be able to forbid a pastor from ever attending a theater, drinking a cup of coffee, attending a non-Adventist church, or allowing a non-Adventist minister to speak or provide music in an Adventist church? Should any of these issues ever be addressed by conference administrators if they are not a source of controversy or dissension in the pastor's local church?

Jesus and his disciples were forever being harassed over such externals by those in positions of spiritual authority, and Jesus repeatedly exposed the hypocrisy of these leaders. For years, stories have emerged about pastors receiving scrutiny of their personal practices from their conference administrators. Eric Bahme of New Life Christian Fellowship in Woodinville, Washington, is such a pastor. Let us consider the correspondence that he received

from his conference officials in the context and in the order in which he got it.

Keep Conference Happy

On September 22, 1992, Eric's conference president sent him a letter advising him and his church to do everything possible to keep the conference happy, including him and his wife removing their wedding rings. "Do everything you can to keep your church close, or bring it even closer, to the conference," the president said. "I did relay to you the combined counsel of all the conference presidents, as well as the union officers, that we make one more appeal to you not to use the wedding band."

For many young couples in our culture today, the wedding band is a powerful symbol of belief and commitment to marriage. Those who do not wear them are presumed to be just living together.

More Demands

The next correspondence came on November 30, 1992, and moved beyond wedding rings to a strong emphasis on "receiving tithe," a caution against "worship renewal" and a mandate for leaders with regard to the following practices: "Members may feel that they can do certain things

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Steve Daily is the senior campus chaplain at La Sierra University and is an editorial advisor for *Adventist Today*.

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contemporary, gospel-centered worship style. Their goals and plans were no secret."

By December some church members were voicing their unhappiness to the Kruegers and had begun to write letters of complaint to the conference office. By March a group of dissenters had begun to meet in a local Assemblies of God church on Sabbath. "I just couldn't sit in Cloverdale and be part of what was going on," says Greg Raines, a Cloverdale board member.

"We made arrangements with the Idaho conference office for our tithes and offerings to go into a Cloverdale-restricted fund, separate from the main Cloverdale funds, until the situation was resolved," says Herman Doering, a Cloverdale church member.

"They knew that if they could create a financial crisis that threatened the \$450,000 mortgage on the church, they would have leverage to replace us," says Harry.

Throughout the growing tension the Idaho Conference remained silent. It was March when President Stephen McPherson first talked to Harry about events at Cloverdale. At no time did McPherson state any specific concerns about the Kruegers' ministry or message.

No Reason Given

In April the conference committee met to discuss what to do with the Kruegers. Harry and Teresa were invited to attend. "I knew we would be terminated when I heard NPUC secretary Royce Pascoe say, 'We can't allow this kind of thing to continue,'" comments Harry.

"This kind of thing," however, has been hard to pin down. The executive committee never gave the Kruegers an official reason for termination. In a private conversation Harry asked President McPherson why he was being fired. He stated nothing specific, merely referring to accusations and concerns.

"You mean," Harry asked him, "that I'm being fired on the basis of rumor and innuendo?"

"That happens sometimes," responded McPherson. (Neither McPherson nor Pascoe has been available for comment, nor have they returned *Adventist Today's* calls.)

In fact, both the board of elders and the majority of the church board voted to keep the Kruegers as pastors. Their firing happened in direct opposition to the will of the majority of both boards.

Jere Webb, a former pastor and currently a member of the Church of the Cross Roads, quotes McPherson as saying, "In a

It seems as if the whole Pacific Northwest is being pulled back into the nineteenth century.

way you could say [the reason for the firing] is money." Cloverdale had fallen into default to the conference revolving fund for a period of about two or three months, but simultaneously the local giving for the first quarter of 1998 had stayed comparable to previous quarters in spite of the fact that several major donors ceased to give. Tithe paid to the conference during the same period had increased over \$10,000, thanks in part to the new members who were joining the congregation even as established members were moving away.

Opposed to Gospel Emphasis

"I believe a major reason for the opposition to our pastors was their emphasis upon the Gospel," said Webb in an open letter to the Cloverdale board. "Again and again they were asked by a certain group of members, 'When are you going to move beyond the Cross to the distinctive doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists?' There was specific discomfort with their 'by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone' ministry emphasis.

"The outreach to the 'weary, worn, and wandering' was never accepted as a legitimate imperative for the church by many in the opposition...At the conference committee where the Kruegers were fired, the Union secretary Royce Pascoe questioned

the theology and practice of the 'Purpose Driven Church.'"

"The thing that's so disturbing," says Ted Bertelson, "is that we can do this sort of 'witch hunt' in the name of Christ."

"The local discontent is only part of the picture," continues Bertelson. "The most worrisome component of this situation is what the church organization is doing. It seems as if the whole Pacific Northwest is being pulled back into the nineteenth century. The Kruegers' treatment almost seems to be an example to anyone who dares to introduce gospel-oriented worship styles and outreach to their congregations."

(Three of the executive committee who

fired the Kruegers, in fact, sat on the committee which requested an investigation of the theology faculty at Walla Walla College [see *Adventist Today*, January/February, 1998]. Also on the executive committee was the wife of Cloverdale board chairman Jon Kattenhorn. After the board of elders voted 17-4 in support of the Kruegers, Jon told Harry, "The board of elders does not speak for the church; I do.")

On May 2, 1998, the Church of the Cross Roads met for the first time. A group of members asked the conference if they and the Kruegers could plant a church using the Krueger's mission statement and organizational plan. The conference responded that the people could start a church, but they couldn't guarantee that the Kruegers could be their pastors. Further, members of such a church would have to sign a statement of denominational loyalty.

No Conference Connection

All thoughts of Cross Roads being a conference church have evaporated. Today they have a board of trustees and a completed set of bylaws and are in the process of applying for nonprofit status. They currently have between 70 and 80 regularly attending family units, and on June 20 over 200 people met for church. During May, local giving from the new congregation

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totaled \$13,000. The first three weeks of June had yielded \$9,000.

"Not a Sabbath has gone by," says Harry, "without someone filling out our visitor questionnaire and saying he or she wanted to know more about Jesus and about deepening one's spiritual life."

"My biggest mistake," says Harry, "was in believing that the whole [Cloverdale] congregation was as ready for change as were the families and search committee representatives who talked to us when we came."

Meanwhile, many of the Cloverdale members feel as if they have survived a "hostile takeover." The Kruegers' theology and the Cross Roads church have divided families and friends. In some cases, husbands and wives, children and parents now meet in separate congregations on Sabbath. "Harry's theological positions continue to come out," says Herman Doering. "He's sounding less and less Adventist."

"Harry took a principled stand," says one Cross Roads member. "His personality was stronger than that of past pastors. When he left, (former pastor) Don Driver told me he was leaving because he was tired of the board running things. Harry didn't bow to the board."

Ted Bertelson sums up the joy many Cross Roads members feel today. "I have nothing but respect and love for our pastors. The joy for me comes from the Biblical focus on Christ. I am proud to be a part of a community where God's character and graciousness is the central message and the peripheral issues are put in their proper perspective."

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and even wear certain things. Leaders who seek the good of all will not follow these approaches. For example, theater attendance, fixation with certain sports, and use of obvious cosmetics and bodily adornments."

Tithe Issue Again

The tithe issue surfaced again in a letter from the conference president on February 16, 1993. This time a slight drop in tithe was presumed to be attributable to Pastor Bahme's unwillingness to talk about money. "I know that among all the things you have to do, the one that is sometimes the most difficult is to talk to the members about money.... We do give thanks for the funds that came in from your church, but we did notice that there was a tithe loss." Issues of budget and levels of giving, we must note, are generally considered to be the concern of the church board and the finance committee. They are not simply problems for the senior pastor to solve.

In May and September of the following year, Pastor Bahme received two more letters from the conference president, this time focusing on "charismatic" and "Pentecostal" practices. The May 19 letter warned against the practice of "private speaking in tongues" (a practice over which Paul himself rejoiced—1 Corinthians 14:18). The September 19 let-

ter contained the following generalization about "celebration churches:" "I think any responsible leader will have to see that the 'high profile celebration churches' are just not working." The letter contained no clarification of the definition of "working," whether that meant generating tithes and offerings, pleasing the conference, or observing traditional worship styles. Since the Bible mentions no grounds for dismissing or disciplining celebration-style churches, the letter was unclear and somewhat confusing.

Do Not Associate With Non-SDA's

Another letter was sent by the conference president on September 14, 1994, to this same pastor listing the following issues as problems: 1) tithe 2) moving toward "Pentecostalism" 3) celebration music 4) wedding rings 5) associating and ministering with non-SDA pastors. The conference secretary followed this letter up on Halloween of the next month by reiterating these concerns and responding to the question of why it was inappropriate to associate with non-SDAs in the following words: "We are not to associate with non-SDAs because they are part of apostate Babylon, and they do not possess all the truth."

On April 20 of the following year, pastor Bahme received one more letter from

the conference president telling him to get his house in order over these issues for the last time. "I am asking you very directly and urgently to restudy for yourself the doctrine of the church and to lead your board in that understanding. The conference cannot be something that is just endured and tolerated." When questioned about how it was the pastor's responsibility to lead the board in such matters, the conference president compared the members of the local church to a twelve-year-old driving a car. "They just don't have the ability to make those decisions," he said. "It is your responsibility (as pastor) to keep this congregation loyal to the conference."

There is a great lament in Adventism today over the "apostasy" of the congregational churches that are "leaving the fold." But when one contemplates the correspondence that led to the departure of this pastor and much of his congregation, one wonders to what extent these churches are arbitrarily choosing to leave, and to what extent they are being pushed out.

As a church we must ask ourselves, to whom are administrators accountable? Can they legitimately exercise this kind of control and judgmental spirit toward ordained ministers, their personal spiritual lives, and their congregations? How does the New Testament model of the "priesthood of all believers" fit into a conference-controlled approach to church governance?

As a church we need to consider again Lord Acton: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Korean-American-Adventist— What Am I?

ANONYMOUS

I'm writing about my life as a Korean living in America and being a Seventh-day Adventist. I wanted to express the personal frustrations I feel in being a Seventh-day Adventist and a Korean-American. I think there are lots of people who are in my shoes, and it is time someone wrote about it.

I am over twenty years old and am currently going to school at Loma Linda University, a Seventh-day Adventist school. I was born in Seoul, Korea, and traveled to America in November of 1977 when I was seven years old. I attended kindergarten, first grade, and the beginning of second grade in Korea and finished the rest of my education in America. I have forgotten most of my Korean language, so I prefer to speak in English. I still like Korean food and I enjoy most of the American food I eat. I have been a Seventh-day Adventist since I was born, following in the footsteps of my grandfather. I go to an English-speaking Korean church and have grown quite accustomed to this juxtaposition.

I come from a very traditional family where one obeys every word of one's elders. Our family is ruled by the fathers, and the wives are submissive to their husbands. In family gatherings, the women eat in the kitchen and chit-chat about menus and groceries after all the best foods are given to the men in the dining room. The men in the dining room talk about politics and controversial issues while the women are told that they do not need to know such complicated issues. The women in our family never complain or speak against what the men say.

I once sat next to my father in the dining room when the men were talking about our new president Bill Clinton. They were saying how good a president he was for our society, and I timidly said, "I disagree. I don't trust him." My father gave me a stern look and called my mother to take me into the kitchen. That night my mother gave me a two-hour lecture on not speaking back to adults.

This is my family.

Several things bother me about my situation. I go to school and learn that women can do anything men can do, and at home I learn that women should just stay home, take care of their children,

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and not meddle in men's affairs. My father would always tell me that, as Jesus is the head of the church, a man should be the head of the household. I think being in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination has only created a more male-dominated society for the Korean culture. The list of do's and don'ts got longer with Adventism, and the rules became more rigid.

Our parents want us to marry Korean Adventists. In fact, in a meeting at my church the parents said it was more important to them that we college kids marry Koreans than Adventists because we could change people's beliefs, but we couldn't change their nationalities. I couldn't believe this declaration was coming out the mouths of the parents who taught us that God should be our first priority.

In America we are taught that parents can be our friends; sometimes we can even call them by their first names. In Korean culture, if we don't bow to our elders (to anyone who is simply older than we are) we are labeled rude and disrespectful. How can we make them understand that we don't mean to be rude but that we are now thinking like Americans?

I don't know if there is a solution to this messy problem. We are caught in the middle of pleasing our parents and doing what we believe is best. As our parents struggle to retain some of their homeland traditions, they feel like their children are becoming strangers to them—that they are losing their children to America. As their children, we feel suppressed (especially the girls) when we want to do certain things and our parents do not allow us to do them. Right now we are trying very hard to understand one another.

This is something that we have to solve within our own churches. I don't think the General Conference can help. There are a lot of feelings involved, and we all know this cannot be solved overnight. It will take some time to form a union between the two separate cultures.

The author wrote this piece while attending Loma Linda University in Southern California.

Idaho Fires Pastoral Couple

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

On April 21, 1998, Pastors Harry and Teresa Krueger were officially fired from their positions as senior and associate pastors of the Cloverdale Seventh-day Adventist church in Boise, Idaho. Their termination came nearly six months after they arrived from Maryland to assume their new pastorate.

Early in 1997 the church members of the largest church in the Idaho conference learned that their pastor of 12 years, Don Driver, was taking a call across the continent. Cloverdale requested and received permission to search for and to select its own new pastor.

The Kruegers were the third couple invited to consider pastoring Cloverdale. (The first two had declined to come.) Teresa was a pastor in the Potomac Conference, and Harry was employed by the North American Division as Project Director of the



Pastors Harry and Teresa Krueger and sons

Kruegers as senior and associate pastors. (Teresa was the first woman pastor ever to be hired by the Idaho Conference.) It was, in fact, the first time the board had been undivided in 20 years.

"Teresa and I went home and individually made lists of pros and cons for

ship leaders, had instituted a celebration service that included contemporary music and drama. In mid-December they replaced the pulpit and platform chairs with a twelve-foot cross draped with a purple cloth and a crown of thorns. They also held a board meeting within days of their arrival and spelled out the details of their plan for developing a "purpose driven church" to attract "the weary, the worn, and the wandering."

Many in the church were thrilled with the changes, but many of the established congregational leaders were outraged.

"In our talks with the conference and the church," says Harry, "we were emphatic from the beginning that our message and methods were cross-centered and that the atonement at the cross would drive everything we did."

No "Adventist Gospel"

"No one was informed or consulted," objects one member. "I was at the first board meeting, and I was confused. I couldn't tell where Harry was going. The Kruegers had an agenda to reach the weary, the worn, and the wandering and had no concern for the feelings or needs of the church members. It's true that Harry did tell us in his interview that he would never preach a sermon that wasn't Christ centered," this member continues, "but he never said anything about all this cross stuff! They weren't presenting the full Adventist gospel. They say God's grace ends at the cross."

Critics of the Kruegers' theology also complain that they didn't teach corporate probation, Sabbath as the seal of God, or remnant theology.

"I wasn't a board member," says Ted Bertelson, currently chairman of the board of trustees of the Kruegers' new congregation, The Church of the Cross Roads, "although my wife was. I knew from the day the board interviewed the Kruegers what direction they were going. I knew clearly that they were planning a

"Harry did tell us in his interview that he would never preach a sermon that wasn't Christ centered," this member continues, "but he never said anything about all this cross stuff!"

Adventist Health Network and a field representative/project liaison officer for ADRA/NAD. Prior to his employment by the NAD, Harry had been the director of pastoral care at the Shady Grove Hospital in the Mid-Atlantic Union. While employed at Shady Grove, Harry, as well as Teresa, had been unsalaried members of the pastoral staff at the Damascus Road Community Church during Richard Fredericks' second and third years there.

Although the Kruegers were not looking for new positions, they agreed to go to Idaho for an interview.

Immediately after the interview the board unanimously voted to hire the

moving to Idaho. When we compared notes we found that we had 34 reasons for going and no reasons why we shouldn't," Harry recalls. "We felt that God was calling us to Boise. The conference and the church board and the search committee told us the congregation wanted change, and they had been interviewing pastors who had a "vision for change."

By their second Sabbath in Boise, the Kruegers, in consultation with key wor-