

**G.C. FAITHFULNESS SURVEY**

NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

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# ADVENTIST TODAY

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**Lay People  
Lobby for  
Regional  
Conference**

**Seminary States  
Position in  
Women in Ministry**

**Annual Council  
Votes Increased  
Involvement  
in Pastoral  
Education**



## My Place of Communion



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## Adventists, Presbyterians, Buddhists, Psychiatrists Fascinated with Jesus

**B**ill and I were driving around Canyonlands National Park talking geology, life and love. Old girlfriends, God, wives, geochronology, parents, church life, careers—we hashed it all. We'd gone to seminary together, but after a few years in the pastorate, Bill had taken medicine and completed a residency in psychiatry.

The more he learned of the chemistry of thought and emotion and the biological and social determinism behind so many of our apparently free choices, the less he could credit the claims of Christianity. He no longer regarded sin, forgiveness, and redemption or the resurrection and the Second Coming as objective realities.

He occasionally attended a Presbyterian church. But he regarded himself as a friendly agnostic, not a believer. Still, he told me, "There's something about the story of Jesus."

Bill was unpersuaded by the doctrinal constructions of Christianity. He wasn't sure how much of the gospel story was accurate and how much of the miraculous was overzealous elaboration by admiring disciples. But he couldn't help himself. He found Jesus profoundly admirable and attractive. The gospel stories had a curious, enchanting power.

When I met Bryan, he was a Buddhist. He'd grown up Presbyterian. But when he was fifteen, his dad died of cancer. And Bryan's Christianity died with him.

Looking for meaning a few years later, he encountered Buddhism. It offered spirituality without the messiness of a personal God who might or might not answer prayers. Bryan immersed himself in the disciplines: meditation, vegetarianism, the cultivation of detachment, a passive, non-violent stance toward the world.

We began having breakfast together once a month. He was surprised to discover I was a vegetarian. I was surprised to discover he'd backslidden and ate meat. We talked business and family life. And God. Bryan described for me the benefits Buddhism had brought him. Never once did I contradict him or try to show him where he was wrong. But whenever he said something that agreed with the teachings of Jesus, I'd point out the congruence.

Eight months later, after I'd pointed out another parallel between his thinking and something Jesus had said, Bryan remarked, "You know, I've been thinking maybe I should read the New Testament."

(You know where this story is headed; reading the New Testament is dangerous!)

Our next conversations focused on what Bryan was reading. And pretty soon I was guiding Bryan in building a Christian spiritual life. He became a devotee of Jesus.

*Adventist Today* often examines controversial issues. We look at challenges to Adventist and Christian faith. We publish analyses of institutional function and dysfunction. We pay attention to the voices and activities of dissidents. We often provide a platform for voices from the edge of Adventism. This is integral to our mission.

But it's vitally important for all of us who consider ourselves progressive or enlightened to regularly interrupt our own self-confidence by revisiting the story of Jesus. We who think we know, who think we see, need to join Nicodemus for an interview with the Master. We need to join the blind in shouting, "Son of David have mercy on us. We would see..."

The heart of Adventism is not General Conference policy or personnel. It is not our colleges or even our congregations. The heart of Adventism is Jesus. And we do our greatest work in worshiping him and making him known.

This season as you hear again the story of the Magi, as you watch bath-robed fourth graders act out the astonishment of the shepherds on the Bethlehem hills, as you experience the rapture of Handel's *Messiah*, for at least a little while lay aside your wisdom. Rise above your cynicism and become an admirer. Let go of your intellectual and professional credentials and be a learner. Forget your brilliance and follow the star. Open yourself once more to the story of Jesus.

*John McLarty, editor*





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## ABOUT THE COVER:

At this time of year, we take the cup of thanksgiving in gratitude for the gift of Jesus.

Photo by Richard Cross

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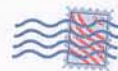
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# FIRST CLASS

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Letters to the Editor  
Adventist Today  
P.O. Box 8026  
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## Patient Charity

I can see my/our faults and am constantly asking the Master to either bring about the essential changes or else clothe me with patient charity to tolerate whatever. I am not interested in smelling dirty laundry.

C.C. Blackburn  
Chehalis, Washington

## Open Forum

I would like to take a look at *Adventist Today*—to see if it is truly an open forum where freedom of thought can be presented....

Congregationalism is a term being hyped today to get all the troops in formation, for obvious reasons, but the one that stands out to me is the specter of thought suppression.... I understand my responsibility to be in Christ and Him only. Is there salvation in the congregation? Is the corporate church the franchiser of the precepts of God? I doubt it? .... I'm thankful to God for giving me the opportunity to be with those who want to know more of His truth; but I recoil at the thought of being forced into a mold of man's designs.... Adventists teach that by being "in good standing" with Christ, we will likewise live out His teachings in our relationships with each other. Does that not apply to our relationship with corporate denominations? And vice versa?

Jim Chafin  
Williamson, West Virginia

## Only New Truth

Thank you very much for the report on Jim Walters' presentation on Ellen White and truth telling! Words cannot

tell you the difference that article would have made in my life if I had read it in 1984. It's painful to contemplate! But I still believe God leads.... I am a former SDA who has never been able to make sense of my experience with Ellen White. I was the truest of true believers, and when she fell apart (initially at the intuitive level with me), I fell apart. The things I read from the church, and the things the church people told me, strained my mind almost to the breaking point. I spent many years in anguish over

Thank you for publishing this report. I may not end up where Walters does, but what matters is that AT respected people enough to lay the facts on the table.

this. Walters' clear statement about her problem with integrity, coming from someone highly placed in the church, would have sent me the message that I was not crazy and not demon possessed. I believe that would have saved me many years of depression and confusion. Thank you for publishing this report. I may not end up where Walters does, but what matters is that AT respected people enough to lay the facts on the table.

Maggie Bockmann  
Chandler, Texas (via E-mail)

I congratulate you on your presenting controversial subjects but wonder if it gives opportunity for presenting material clearly detrimental to the church.... I read my first issue of *Adventist Today* with interest and amazement. The subjects were ...dealing with the Sanctuary, Ellen

White and the Investigative Judgment.... To do away with this truth is essentially to do away with Adventism, because this is the only fundamental new truth Adventism has brought upon the religious scene.... to do away with the Sanctuary truth is to do away with the Atonement, because "thy way, O God, is in the Sanctuary."

Edwin W. Reimer, M.D.  
San Diego, California

## Ellen White and Truth Telling

We loyal Seventh-day Adventists believe... that Ellen G. White was inspired by God and wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit brought to her mind ideas already used by others, you and I are not called to judge such situations. How dare you call her inspired words "abnormal literary practice"?

Ardith Escobar  
Colton, California

## Cultic Doctrine

I was shocked by Kevin D. Paulson's response to Ratzlaff's book *Cultic Doctrine* in the July-August letters. How can any Protestant state the words "doing the Law is the condition of justification"? The Scriptures make it clear that no form of creature merit or obedience can justify anyone.... Stewart Bauer also stated that "Paul's gospel included the judgment..." Not so. The gospel is defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as being the saving message of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing else! Paulson and Bauer's remarks sadly teach a doctrine of salvation based upon works.

J. Mark Martin  
Phoenix Arizona



## For Informational Purposes Only

I subscribe to *Adventist Today* primarily for informational purposes. I do not consider its editorial stance reflective of true Adventism and therefore cannot support an organization (beyond the subscription cost) with which I largely disagree.

D. A. Eckenroth  
Leland, North Carolina

## Not Renewing

I do not care to renew. The mag. is too negative.

Nick Poulos, M.D.  
Saint Helena, California

## Little Hope for Change

Thank you for your work. I continue to appreciate AT. I've not been inside the SDA church here in about 4 years. I have little hope for any change in my lifetime, but the frustration is diminishing when I do not attend.

Joseph D. Riederer, M.D.  
Juneau, Alaska

## NPUC Responds

We have been interested in the ongoing presentation of materials about the Northwest in *Adventist Today*. While the challenges of a few are certainly a concern to us all, in the interest of accurately representing the concerns of Northwest Adventists we would suggest three important clarifications:

1. The Walla Walla College Commission was created to help answer the questions raised by significant segments of the Northwest constituency. We were gratified that the Commission's work and final report did clear up several anecdotal items. But the report also affirmed many deeper concerns of our members, as illustrated in the following statement from the Commission Report: A ...The Commission, contrary to what many may expect, found the various anecdotal incidents reported to it symptomatic of much larger trends and issues. The anecdotal issues have received very wide press in the NPUC constituency and beyond, while

the larger issues have been hardly discussed at all. The Commission found the larger issues to be the most significant ones. (Preamble to the *WWC Commission Report*, page 3) These larger issues of theology and teaching methodology represent continuing concerns throughout church membership at large. They are not unique to Walla Walla College or the NPUC and indeed will be actively addressed by denominational college and church leaders for some time to come. Many Northwest area church members have expressed their appreciation for the Commission's work.

2. There is probably no way the brief reports in *Adventist Today* can adequately capture all sides of the discussion surrounding the several pastors who have left the employ of the church. Perhaps lost in the shuffle are the hours of prayer and

**...while we are challenged by independent thinkers and movements to reassess our organizational policies, teachings and structure, let's not forget the vast majority of our supportive members.**

heartfelt discussion, the patient processes which afforded these pastors every opportunity to rethink their positions, and the deep sadness we all feel at the eventual parting of the ways.

3. While not minimizing these concerns, let's also remember the context in which these pastors have left. Is it a church in disarray? Not at all. Overall trends are positive. Pastors representing 437 churches throughout the Northwest are gearing up for 285 short-term mission projects around the world in the next two years. Rather than showing disenchantment with the church organization, our members have instead given evidence of growing support, including increased tithe contributions.

So, while we are challenged by independent thinkers and movements to

reassess our organizational policies, teachings and structure, let's not forget the vast majority of our supportive members. Many of them are also deep thinkers, who, considering the options, have chosen to actively focus on the main issue—that of sharing a Christ-centered Adventist message.

Bryan Pascoe  
Secretary, North Pacific Union  
Conference  
Steven Vistaunet  
Assistant to the President for  
Communication

## Anti-Semitism

As a Jewish woman raised in an Adventist/Jewish home, I certainly did not take offense to anything in Doris Rausch's well-documented Letter to the Editor (AT, Sept./Oct. 1997).

Anti-semitism, E.R. Elkins should be reminded, also embraces the Arab population. Many people of the Jewish faith regularly make egregiously "anti-Semitic" remarks against the Arab population. When Mr. Elkins resorted to a personal attack on Doris Rausch, however, he lost his argument with me.

According to the Bible, the Jewish people killed nearly

all of their prophets. Is it anti-Semitism for a minister to say this in a sermon? What about Easter? Do we start blaming the Romans now instead of the Jewish High Priests? There is much in the New Testament about the animosity of the Jewish people against Christ and his early followers. The earliest persecutors of the Christians were, in fact, the Jews. They cried out at the Cross, "Let His blood be on our hands", cursing themselves. Where does a Christian have to draw the line in order not to offend the Jewish people or new converts?

It is true that the Jewish people have had to endure many hard times, but so have many other races and tribes. Let us never forget the greatest holocaust of them all: the crime of Black slavery, which lasted for nearly 400 years. Since



1948, however, and the founding of the state of Israel, a country that now illegally occupies four other nations, the fortunes of the Jews have changed for the better.

No one group, however, no matter how powerful, is ever "above" criticism in our Republic and that is what our First Amendment and our democracy are really all about.

Bravo to *Adventist Today* for upholding the right of free speech and for Doris Rausch for having the courage to tell it like it is.

Deborah Cohen Cox  
Corona, CA

After reading E.R. Elkins' letter, "Anti-semitism," I was intrigued to look up the correspondence he referred to in order to see what it was all about.

I must say that I found nothing anti-Semitic in Doris Rausch's letter. Granted, it did criticize the actions of 'some' Jews, but her facts were well-documented.

I hope that Mr. Elkins did not mean to say that it is totally unacceptable to criticize Jews at all. Jews are human beings, like all of us, and subject to the same tendencies towards good and evil. To maintain that by criticizing Jews one is thereby offending Jesus is pretty much of a stretch. Even though Jesus was admittedly a Jew, this did not stop Him from criticizing Jews, or anyone else He felt deserving of it.

I think the term "anti-Semitism" is something bandied about much too freely, especially as it relates to Jews. One actually finds more anti-Semitism practiced against Arabs than Jews, at least in this country.

Barbara Gravesen  
via the Internet

### Keeping Up

I appreciate all your newsworthy articles and your honest efforts at sharing what goes on in our very political organization. I enjoy each issue and appreciate the varied opinions. Keep up the good work.

Kelli Black  
Plymouth, Michigan

### Journalism Questioned

I read your article in the September/October issue regarding the

termination of Sally Jo Hand. I can't begin to tell you how disappointed I am with your "journalism." You don't make any more attempt to get your facts straight than the commercial journalists, evidently. It appears that you must have limited your interview to Ms. Hand even though you mention a few quotes from Elder Broeckel. I was the Ministerial Director during the time she was hired and, I must say, I was highly delighted that she was chosen. I had the opportunity to meet Sally at a Church Ministries Convention in Denver and was extremely impressed.

What is the purpose of your publication? Is it to give a voice to the youth and young adults and progressive leaders of our church in a way that tells it like it is while still fostering support of the organization, or is it rather an Adventist version of a check stand tabloid that titillates the mind with shocking half truths? This article was certainly in the latter category.

I was also part of the process related to Mike Pionkowski and Richard Fredericks. I haven't read your articles related to these two gentlemen and probably don't want to. You can print what you like, but you are no friend of the church or to anybody else when you allow such outright misleading and untrue reporting to come off your presses.

Marvin Wray  
Ventura, California

*Adventist Today did interview President Broeckel. We specifically talked about all of Ms. Hand's major concerns, and we attempted to show how diametrically opposed their viewpoints were. In keeping with our policy to present both sides of a story, we mention that Dr. Len McMillan, the director of the department of Church Life when Ms. Hand was hired, called AT. He disagreed with Ms. Hand's report that he had called her "entirely on his own" as opposed to representing the executive committee when he told her she should not plan to direct the youth camp. He also took exception to her report that he explained his supposed autonomous call by saying, "I'm sick and tired of doing their dirty work." Dr. McMillan declined to write an explanation of what happened.*

### Two-Way Street

After reading every article in the July/August issue, God's Spirit began to convict me that intolerance is a two-way street. So-called conservatives are characterized (many times rightly) as intolerant toward anyone disagreeing with them. But the opposite is also often true. Those who fancy themselves as more "enlightened" frequently engender the same feelings of intolerance toward those with dissenting views. How pleased I was to find that in every case, those who were expressing the pain of their experience in churches where intolerance is the rule also expressed patience and a hopeful optimism toward those who had hurt them. This is so beautifully expressed in Tinker's editorial. "Shared doctrine does not unite us... Rather it is Jesus who brings us into communion with himself."

Ryan Bell  
Berrien Springs, MI

### Judgment Considerations Missed

John McLarty wrote a very encouraging article on the Investigative Judgment which brought out several good suggestions. But there are three considerations that he missed.

One: If the subjects of God's judgment as portrayed in various texts are examined, the vast majority are groups: nations, gods, the world, the wicked, angels, etc. I find only two references which indicate that individuals are to be judged and even those don't seem to be the judgment McLarty was discussing.

Two: Many texts specifically state that those who have accepted Jesus as Lord do not come into judgment, and many texts state that the Christian currently possesses eternal life.

Three: Paul says that we Christians will do the judging. Rev 20:4 indicates that the judgment referred to by Paul occurs during the millennium (as Adventists usually interpret the timing).

Bob Lee  
Keene, TX

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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# General Conference Distributes "Faithfulness Survey"

A letter dated September 23, 1998, and signed by Robert Folkenberg, GC president; G. Ralph Thompson, GC Secretary; and Robert Lawson, GC Treasurer; recently went to every employee at the General Conference (GC) headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. These employees included those hired by ADRA, Home Study, *The Adventist Review*—in short, every person employed at GC headquarters. This letter accompanied a survey called "Employee Faithfulness Response."

The two-page, single-spaced letter explained the purpose of the survey.

"Most of the world church consider all who work in this complex as leaders...." the letter states. "Thus it is expected that each of us be an active member of a local Seventh-day Adventist church for our own spiritual growth and ministry."

"Through the years, God has blessed this church in many ways. Some of those blessings are reflected in the more than \$900,000,000.00 (that's almost one billion dollars) annually returned to God as tithe by the world church membership...."

## Missing the Blessing

The letter continues, "We recognize that not all of us tithe. While this has a financial impact, the greater concern is the fact that God cannot fully bless us as a group in the way He would like to as long as some continue to rob Him...." the letter continues.

"It is important that we model a dynamic spiritual walk with God and His family. This is also why we are inviting you to re-examine your tithing practice.... If you have not been returning a faithful tithe, we invite you to give careful and prayerful thought to your walk with God, and what you are missing...."

"We feel these issues are of such importance that we ask you to respond to this letter by checking one or more of the statements on the enclosed response form. We have asked Charles Taylor to receive your response. Please send your response to him by October 15."

"Your information will be dealt with confidentially. The responses will be summarized for a comprehensive report to ADCOM with no names attached, in order to develop a ministry approach to strengthen our walk with God as a group. Your personal requests will be dealt with pastorally. The report forms will then be destroyed."

"The purposes for this process includes (sic):

1. To encourage and nurture our spiritual growth as a group.
2. To discover our level of faithfulness as a group.
3. To encourage our involvement in a local church and its ministry.
4. To encourage our growth in faithfulness to God in the area of tithes and offerings.
5. To develop a pastoral approach to these areas of concern.

"While this initial process is pastoral, we recognize there is an administrative responsibility to oversee the implementation of the employee church membership and tithing requirements as outlined in the working policies and employee handbooks. A separate annual administrative process will be initiated in 1999...."

## The Survey

The accompanying survey included the following:

"Please check any of the points below which apply to you."

"I am currently a member of a Seventh-day Adventist church in the area where I live or work."

"I regularly attend a Seventh-day Adventist church in the area where I live or work."

"I return a faithful tithe through a regularly affiliated Seventh-day Adventist church in the area."

"I am making a new commitment to faithfulness in tithing."

"I would appreciate additional information on the spiritual dynamics of tithe as worship, as well as how tithe funds are used."

"I would appreciate the opportunity of counseling with someone regarding tithing and its spiritual dimensions."

At the bottom of the form were lines for the employee to print his or her name and to list the department or organization where he or she works.

One employee who received the packet stated that several employees simply threw the letter and the survey into the trash can.

To date there has been no information regarding the results of the poll.

## Thoughts on the Employee Faithfulness Response Survey

BY DENNIS DELEON, MD

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY MEDICINE, DIVISION OF CLINICAL ETHICS; LLU MEDICAL CENTER

Standing in the hallway of my medical clinic, I uneasily shifted my weight first from one foot to another. I looked at Mary Beth Stanton, who worked for me as my personal office nurse and had been with my medical practice for the last six years. Mary Beth continued to fix me with a pleading expression, "Doc, it's a really embarrassing problem, I know. But I felt like I could tell you. Nobody else. And if all it's going to take is a test and a prescription..." She trailed off. I contin-

ued to squirm, exhaling slowly and deliberately to try to hide my discomfort. Should she be my patient? Was the problem as simple and straightforward as she claimed? Would I be giving her the same quality of treatment as the regularly scheduled patients I would be seeing at one o'clock later that day? Would I ask her the same comprehensive questions, deliberating in the same way as I would be obliged to do if she were on my list of afternoon office visits? And did it matter

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



## AAW and TEAM Face Change

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

**T**he Association of Adventist Women (AAW) organized in 1982. Since that time it has been active in promoting the role of women in all aspects of church life. During the past few years, however, the organization has begun to languish. Many of the original members have moved or for other reasons are no longer involved. The same several people have been managing the organization's affairs for several years, and financial support has been dwindling.

By 1997 the people in the East Coast office were burned out. No one wanted to take on the office of president, and the treasurer had moved away. Alyce Pudewell finally agreed to take the presidency, and then Kit Watts moved to California.

Kit and Alyce worked together and decided to move everything to the West Coast. In January, 1998, AAW cleaned and closed its East Coast office and shipped the organization's records to office space leased on the campus of La Sierra University. Several months elapsed before the first newsletter came out after the move, and even more time went by before

there was word of the next conference.

But on the third weekend in October, 1998, AAW held its conference at Loma Linda University.

AAW has now narrowed its focus to two main productions: the bimonthly *Adventist Woman* produced by editor Kit Watts and assistant editor Christy Robinson, and the yearly AAW conference.

### TEAM for Ordination

In 1988 AAW established a ten-person committee which Pat Habada chaired for the purpose of influencing the women's ordination vote at the Indianapolis General Conference session. Shortly before the Indianapolis GC session the committee adopted the name Time for Equality in

## Thoughts on the Employee Faithfulness Response Survey

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

that she was my employee? For example, if necessary, could I write her an off-work order with the same impartiality as I could for any of my other patients? Basically, should I be her employer and her doctor at the same time?

I teach ethics to medical students. The concerns that went through my mind that morning in the clinic hallway are ones which I discuss with students and colleagues under the rubrics of confidentiality, patient advocacy, and role-boundaries. Similar thoughts occurred to me as I read the recent letter to GC Headquarters staff from Robert Folkenberg and other Seventh-day Adventist General Conference officers. The letter serves to introduce an "Employee Faithfulness Response," a survey which asks specific and detailed questions about a worker's tithing practices and church attendance. The worker is asked to provide his or her name and department but is assured of confidentiality because the information is to be analyzed in aggregate and used only in pastoral confidentiality.

As sincere as this initiative may be in trying to teach the church the oft-forgotten discipline of worship through tithing and in beginning the effort with the

church's workers, it raises a few significant concerns about role boundaries. This explicit gathering of sensitive and private information is described in the cover letter as a pastoral process, to be treated with a bond of confidentiality like other pastoral exchanges of information. The administrative policy review of employee tithing habits, we are assured at the letter's end, will come next year. The present survey, we're told, is simply a pastoral process of ministry.

The role of administrators and employers is an important one. They must provide their organization and its employees with vision, guidance and leadership. They must make decisions, enforce working policies, and interpret employee handbooks. The proper concerns of presidents, administrators and managers include group morale, internal consistency, and adherence to the mission and values of the institution they serve.

The role of pastors is also important, but importantly, it is different. Pastors use personal knowledge of their parishioners, sometimes highly protected, private knowledge, gained in the context of a pastoral relationship, to help guide the parishioner to a closer walk with the Lord.

This important function, perhaps even more than the doctor-patient relationship, is too sacred to serve as a smoke screen for an administrative study. If this initiative is the first phase of a corporate survey to ascertain compliance with employee policies, perhaps it should be labeled as such. If the initiative is only a sincere exhortation by the managers of the General Conference to its employees to show greater accountability and material faithfulness, then there would seem to be no need to collect names. And if the initiative is truly a pastoral intervention intended to minister to people, it may be better accomplished in a sincerely pastoral context, not in a letter signed by one's employers, attached to a preemptively confidential document asking for names and collected for analysis by those same employers. In most circumstances, one's employer should no more be their pastor than one's employer should be their doctor. To play loose with these relationships threatens to diminish both the office of employer and of doctor or pastor.

I stopped shifting my weight from leg to leg and looked Mary Beth squarely in the eyes. "You know, Mary Beth, let's schedule an appointment for Richard Chatsworth across the street to see you. I know it'll be a bit more of a pain, but I can talk him into seeing you at the end of the afternoon. It seems to me we're both going to feel better that way."



Adventist Ministry (TEAM). They anticipated two years of hard work, after which they planned to disband.

History didn't turn out as they planned. Ten years later Adventist women's ordination is still not a reality. TEAM has lost several members, including its only paid member, project manager Rebecca Brillhart, who left in 1997 to join the pastoral staff at the Sligo Church.

The core of eight people who remain with TEAM see their role evolving into one of educating the world field and supporting women as they pursue graduate degrees in theology. During the past eight years TEAM has raised nearly \$100,000 of scholarship money, which they've awarded to women studying in seminaries and in university theology programs.

"We're tired," acknowledges Habada; "we thought we'd be done in 1990, and here we are. But Utrecht taught us we have to move outside this country; we must educate the Spanish-speaking countries and Africa."

#### Welcome Table Goes South

In 1995, the year before Utrecht, TEAM sent 5,000 copies of *The Welcome Table*, edited by Habada and Brillhart, to church leaders around the world. This year they funded the book's translation into Spanish and sent it to leaders in Inter and South America.

"We have received very positive responses from Inter-America," Habada says. "In fact, the only person that wasn't pleased was the conference president in Puerto Rico. That's ironic since Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory!"

South America, however, was a mixed bag. The mission president in Ecuador, for example, was kind in his response and asked for more copies of the book.

The conference president in Argentina, on the other hand, was "cordial but cool," Habada says. He told TEAM that he hadn't read the book himself; he'd given it to his wife. He also said he'd be more eager to consider women's ordination if North America hadn't gone ahead and ordained women after the negative vote at Utrecht.

Now TEAM is helping to send *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Nancy Vyhmeister and published by Andrews University

## The AAW Conference Through the Eyes of a College Senior

HOLLY WESTLUND, SENIOR RELIGION MAJOR AT WALLA WALLA COLLEGE

*Editor's Note: The Association of Adventist Women held its annual convention at Loma Linda University on the weekend of October 16-18, 1998. The following is a personal response by a college senior who attended the AAW meetings.*

I walked down the stairs of the Chan Shun Pavilion Conference Center on the Loma Linda University campus, and my eyes grew wider and wider. The brass banisters and beautiful tile floor filled me with awe. What a beautiful building! What was I doing at a conference in a building like this? College students have retreats in mountain lodges where we hope to have warm water in our showers. But here I was, attending a real conference. It was too bad I didn't have nicer clothes than my jeans.

I took me a day to get over my timidity. I was in awe of the building. I was in awe of the women I saw. They were such strong and amazing women, and most of them were my mother's age or older. I could see a fire in them—a commitment to serve and worship God with nothing standing in their way. Their dedication was beautiful.

But it was hard for me to see where I fit into the picture until some of these amazing women started talking to me and to my fellow college students. The women were thrilled by the fact that my friends and I are theology and religion majors. Their first question was, "So, are you going to pastor?" I would look sheepishly at my friends and

slowly shake my head "No." I had played with the idea of being a theology major several times but had settled for religion. My plans for the future included graduate school and hopefully missionary work, but no pastoring. It's not that I would not like being a pastor; it's just that I am deathly afraid of reaching.

Friday evening at supper we had the honor of sitting at the table with Tami McGrew, the new senior pastor at Riverside Church. She told us very frankly what it was like to be a woman, a wife and a pastor. What struck me most was her attitude about her calling. She had learned that to follow God's calling brings the greatest joy in her life. And even though she has been afraid or uncomfortable at times with what God has called her to do, she has found strength and great joy in following his lead.

Tami's frankness and the comments of other women forced me to look at myself and at my life. I am so glad I met those strong women who knew what to ask me and how to encourage me. I realized that the reason I had put out of my mind the idea of pastoring was that I was so afraid of preaching. And who am I to limit God?

Because of my weekend at the AAW retreat, I have decided to conquer my fear of preaching. I may never be a pastor, but I will have removed a block in my life that was keeping me from considering something God may call me to do. I am now confident that I can do whatever God calls me to do. And I know I have the support of many amazing people (men and women).

Thank you, those of you who were there.

Press, to Adventist college ministerial faculty. They have placed a pre-press order for 1,000 copies of the book (which they have already received) to help pay for its printing. They will send these books to church leaders in the Trans-European and Inter-American Divisions. TEAM is encouraging Vyhmeister to translate the book into Spanish.

"We came close to folding this summer after we finished our yearly scholarship pro-

gram," Habada admits. "It's getting harder to raise the scholarship money since La Sierra, Andrews, the North American Division, and the General Conference, now all have scholarships for women in ministry."

But Habada declares that they can't disband. "Some people are saying, 'Why bother?'" she says. "We're still needed. More women from outside the United States need scholarship money. To quit would be to let the women down."



## Annual Council Votes Increased Involvement in Pastoral Education

**O**n October 6, 1998, the last day of the 1998 Annual Council held in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, delegates voted to approve a document entitled "International Coordination and Supervision of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education." This decision will institute an "integrated structure" at both the regional and world church levels. This new "structure" will replace the Ministerial Training Advisory Council which oversaw pastoral training in many of the world divisions.

The document explains that an international board will suggest a basic curriculum for pastoral training. Each division board may expand on this suggestion as it sees fit. These boards will also "affirm the faculty authorized to teach in these programs through a process of denominational endorsement." The document adds that "the endorsement may be valid for up to

five years as long as the faculty member is teaching in the program for which he/she was endorsed, and may be reviewed."

Charles Sandefur, president of the Mid-American Union and chairman of the board of Union College, comments, "While we wait with interest for the report of the international board, the document's goal of assuring that ministerial training and education is a responsibility and activity of the whole church, not just of individual institutions, is supportive of plans to improve ministerial training that are already taking place in our part of the world."

He added that he is "pleased that the document allows for different areas of the world to create alternative procedures that lead to the same helpful outcomes."

This new International Board is scheduled to begin functioning during Annual Council in 1999. "The [next] year during which suggested guidelines and application processes are under development provides

opportunity for world divisions and training institutions to consider implementation procedures," says Dr. Humberto Rasi, director for the Education Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters.

He commented further that the document provides a mechanism through which the church will decide on the "kind of training it expects for its pastors. This is a process similar to other professions, such as the medical professions. All of them have guidelines."

Robert Folkenberg, president of the General Conference, said, "This decision provides a framework for creative and ongoing dialogue between general church leadership and educators in order to increase the effectiveness of pastoral education."

When the delegates met the members of the international board, the members suggested that the board should be more "gender sensitive." Consequently, five women pastors or pastoral educators were added to the board.

To read the entire document, visit our website at [www.AToday.com](http://www.AToday.com).

—From Adventist News Network by Ray Dabrowski

## Seminary States Position

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

translations made Junias a man, but she was a woman (Junia) until the eleventh century!"

The committee also examined how things changed in the first five centuries. The church actually backed up to an Old Testament model. It changed from all members ministering according to their gifts to having a priest intervening for the members.

"The church fathers brought the Old Testament levitical priesthood into New Testament times," Nancy explained.

Early Adventism, the committee found, took their patterns of ordination from the communities in which they had previously been worshipping. Their practices were more pragmatic than theological. Ellen White makes it clear that ordination does not add gifts to the recipient, but an ordained person carries tremendous responsibility before

God. She even recommended the ordination of lay women to local ministry.

Feminism, Nancy said, has missed the point that Old Testament women were not always submissive. Sarah, she pointed out, was "one tough cookie." The problem of women's subjection seems to have begun after the Babylonian captivity.

"Did having a king produce this phenomenon?" she wonders.

The book is divided into five parts: Ordination in Early Christianity and Adventism; Women in Ministry and Leadership; Perceived Impediments to Women in Ministry; and Other Considerations. Chapter titles include: "Clerical Authority and Ordination in the Early Christian Church," "Headship, Submission, and Equality in Scripture," "How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?" "The

Ordination of Women in Light of the Character of God," and sixteen more. In the chapter "The Distance and the Difference: Reflections on Issues of Slavery and Women's Ordination in Adventism," Walter Douglas draws a parallel between those who approved slavery from scripture and those who oppose women's ordination on the basis of scripture.

A book opposing the viewpoints in *Women in Ministry* is already in the planning stages. Five men from the seminary, Samuel Pipim, Mervyn Maxwell, Samuele Bacchiocchi, Bill Fagel, and Gerard Darmstedt are collaborating to produce a book as soon as possible which will argue against women's ordination. The seminary is not endorsing their book.

*Women in Ministry* is being printed by the Andrews University Press and is being distributed by Pacific Press. It is a trade paperback, and according to Nancy Vyhmeister will cost \$11.95. It is available through the Adventist Book Centers, and it may be ordered if it is not in stock.



# Lay People Lobby for Regional Conference

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

**T**he sixth issue of a new newsletter came off the press on October 28, 1998: *Western Lay-Persons for a Regional Conference*. It is an independent publication supported by Adventist lay members. The WL-PRC officers are: David L. James, president; Hilton Gunner, vice-president; Charlie Jo Morgan, treasurer; Eldora Eaton, Secretary; and Blanche James, Publication.

"The Administrative set-up that now runs the Adventist Church would not be a problem for African Americans or anyone else, if there were not racism and its deleterious effects in our Churches," asserts the newsletter. "Given the membership of some of the Anglo Conferences, and with an appropriate weight given to fairness, African Americans on the West Coast with their 25,000 membership, could have 2 or 3 Regional Conferences. If fairness in the World Leadership of the Adventist Church were not such an invisible component, then African Americans could have at least 2 Regional Union Conferences."

The newsletter also specifies denominational leaders' statements and church policies that its editors believe show non-support for the idea of regional conferences. For example: "Why must Oakwood College, 'the Gem of Black Adventism,' have an Anglo gentleman as chairman of its Board of Directors? The policy that ensures this must be changed to allow the most senior African American General Conference Officer to successively become Chairman of the Board."

## Mostert Quoted

Further, "Why is it that Elder Thomas Mostert, President of the Pacific Union Conference, in objecting to a Regional Conference on the West Coast, reportedly cites the following three reasons, among others:

"I do not believe that they need a Regional Conference.' He presumes to know what we need.

"If another Conference were established, the Pacific Union would undoubtedly experience a shortage in its financial intake.' It seems obvious that it is our money he respects and not we.

"I have the power to say no.' Elder Mostert needs to be reminded that having the right to take an action does not necessarily mean that taking that action is the right thing to do."

Anthony Pascal, director of regional affairs for the Southeastern California

room and said to the pastor, "Freedom has made it possible for all of us to be together in this room. Freedom should further allow us to decide with whom we wish to meet. Freedom was not about changing our common interests; it was about giving us the right to go where we wanted to go. Beyond that, we should still be able to choose with whom we worship and associate."

African Americans, Pascal asserts, have unique problems and needs, and a western regional conference could serve them well. But, he says, a regional conference would not accomplish anything helpful unless it operated under a completely new paradigm.

"We won't accomplish anything if we

**For example, if a segment of Anglo church members had a concern, it would not receive appropriate understanding and treatment if they took it to a meeting of regional conference presidents.**

Conference, says that while the publication is strictly independent, he has counseled its publishers to soften their rhetoric so they will garner understanding for their cause instead of defensiveness.

"The issue of regional conferences," says Pascal, "will never receive objective treatment until it's dealt with in the proper venue. For example, if a segment of Anglo church members had a concern, it would not receive appropriate understanding and treatment if they took it to a meeting of regional conference presidents. Likewise, discussions about regional conferences should occur in meetings of African Americans instead of in meetings of white administrators."

## Freedom Means Choice

Pascal further commented that an Anglo pastor once spoke to him about being committed to including all races in Adventist churches so there would be no discrimination or racism. As they spoke they stood in a cafeteria in which tables of African Americans ate together, Hispanics ate together, and Anglos ate together. Pascal waved his arm to include the entire

establish a regional conference and run it the same way the regular conferences are run," he admits. "It would have to operate differently. For example, we would have to give women more authority than they currently have in the church."

There are 25,000 African American Adventists on the West Coast. Pascal says he has a three-stage plan by which a single West Coast conference could form and gradually subdivide geographically. He also has developed a financial plan which would support such a regional organization without jeopardizing the existing conferences' incomes.

At the 1995 Union Executive Committee, the agenda included an item showing how a regional conference could be financially successful. Before its presentation, however, the item was pulled from the agenda.

"The people feel they're not being heard," Pascal observes. "If someone listened to them and seriously considered what they want, their rhetoric would tone down. We must remember that love allows freedom of choice even though we might not like the choice."



COVER FEATURE



My Place of

# Communion



**W**e drove up and parked in the driveway. The house looked smaller than it had in July when surrounded by grass and flowers and sunshine. It was now almost midnight. The house was dark. It was February. The snow was gone but the chalky-cold night wind intoned winter. My sister had given us the key to let ourselves in, and so we gathered our things together and went up to the door.

Only two nights earlier she had called to let us know of Daddy's death. Now his "remains" lay in a mortuary on the other side of town. "They'll haul me into Bates' one of these days," he'd often said when I was a child, meaning the Bates' Mortuary that was across the street from Grandma's house. "And then they'll put me in a pine box, and I'll be lying out east of town beside Mommy." He had always intended, he had told us, that he would live to see "Mommy" through. She had died almost a year and a half ago. Tomorrow Daddy would be buried in a pine casket beside her out east of town.

I gave the key to my husband. He unlocked the door and held it open for me. I stepped inside and flipped on the light switch. A swag lamp across the room dropped a circle of light upon the dining room table draped with a Quaker lace cloth. The rooms around me were in perfect order. Everything was readied as for Sabbath.

It was an ordinary dining room table. Not the kind made by a well-known manufacturer. Not constructed from the finest hardwoods—cherry or pecan or oak. It was just the table Mom and Dad felt they could afford years ago when the veneer on the old one peeled and splintered and broke. And it worked just fine. It was easily washed down after meals, and Mom liked tablecloths for between meals. The old Quaker lace kind had been her favorite.

### Our Daily Bread

We gathered at the table for all of our meals. Growing up on a farm meant we were not fragmented by Little League or ballet lessons, by one parent or the other staying late at work or sitting through one more committee meeting. Instead, we were fragmented by worry over drought, or wheat prices, and fear of not getting the harvest in before frost, fragmented by guilt and hurry, but we were there at mealtimes—around the table.

Breakfast had always begun with the Lord's Prayer and a bowl of oatmeal—every morning. Daddy drew in a breath and we all began, in chorus, on the first word, "Our Father... which art in heaven." Slow and contemplative. Time to envision the fulfillment of each phrase. "Hallowed be thy name." Peace and quiet. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." I imagined heaven descending onto the earth. Green grass shook out over all these dry, dusty little farms and settled down like a tablecloth. "Give us this day our daily bread... And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." I felt guilty. I don't like bread, God. It's dry and hard to swallow... And I don't know how to forgive. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..." Please, God, deliver me. "For thine is the king-

dom... And the power... And the glory... Forever."

Daddy had been a serious man. Serious about religion, serious about work. He had no patience with anything frivolous; he didn't have the time or the money, because he was serious about providing a living for us—"keeping us out of the poorhouse." There were no poorhouses in Nebraska that I knew of, but Daddy had known about poorhouses in Wales as a boy. Orphaned at two and dependent upon an uncle who controlled his existence with threats of the poorhouse, he intended to keep food on our table—and loved the phrase about daily bread. He ate bread at every meal. Demanded bread at every meal. And expected us to eat bread too, like he did: sparingly buttered and with little or no jam. It was a mark of good sense and humility to eat bread. "What's wrong, are you too good for bread? Too common for the likes of you?" he would growl. Daily bread was the grounding of ordinary life. One would not think to ask God for cake or fresh peaches! Only bread!

### Waiting for a Blessing

After breakfast Daddy would read a devotional or a bit of the Sabbath School lesson and then pray. This time, in his own words. My mind wandered with his prayers, seeing the masses of "those less fortunate than us," (heaven forbid) and "the leaders of the world" as mentioned, joining in a group. Mostly I heard the sincerity of my father's tone as my own mind flitted between his words and my own thoughts. And then he ended with a prayer of gratitude and an invocation of blessing for each of us. I was the fifth of six children, and I listened intently as each of us was individually named and a particular blessing requested. I waited for my name with anticipation. I longed for a blessing.

Dinner arrived at noon and—in the summer—fresh from the garden. "God is Good. God is Great. And we thank Thee for this food. From Thy Hand must all be fed. Give us Lord our daily bread."

My father was also an angry man. Mealtimes were also times when we were called to account. "How much did you accomplish this morning?" He was an independent man and intended that we should be also. We were weighed in the balance and found wanting. "I never saw such a worthless bunch of kids. I saw you out riding your bike this morning... I guess you don't have enough to keep you busy, huh? Well, I can sure find something for you to do." "You aren't worth your salt!" "You lazy good-for-nothing! Do you think you did enough today to earn this food?" His words stuck in my throat. Please, God, please make him stop talking like that. His words stuck in my throat, but I gulped them down—gulped down his words, my tears, the dry bread, I gulped

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them down together. Blessings and cursings altogether. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive."

### Communion Table

On Friday evenings we gathered for our first Sabbath meal. Perhaps homemade chile and fresh-baked cornmeal rolls. My father was very conscientious about conserving electricity, and so all the lights were turned off except the light above the table. In the circle of that light we gathered to celebrate the freedom the Sabbath hours brought to us—freedom from work, freedom from worry and from guilt, freedom to breathe deeply, freedom to laugh and sing and tell stories, freedom to rest and celebrate the blessings of communion with God and one another. Heaven on earth!

In our church communion is celebrated quarterly. It begins with the "ordinance of humility"—serving one another by the washing of feet as Jesus did at the Last Supper. In our congregation, it was done in silence or hushed tones. A basin of water, a towel. Kneeling. It was a time for contemplation—"If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (Jn. 13:14) Memories of the baptism that had already taken place... Freedom from guilt... And a symbol of the service in the ordinary living of life—washing and drying—serving and being served.

And then the communion table—the bread and the "wine." Washed. And then fed. Daily bread—"Take this and eat...this is my body...broken." "My blood...poured out for you." Washed

answers he wanted to hear. I felt paralyzed by his expectations and judgments.

And then before Thanksgiving just over two years ago, Dad had a stroke. Left with only limited use of his left hand, he was unable to care for himself. And unable to speak. In order to make room for a hospital bed at home, the dining room table was dismantled and stored in the garage. In its place—a hospital bed and my father's broken body.

My sister and her daughter who lived nearby carried the ongoing responsibility for Daddy's care. Mother was not well and couldn't manage. Not wanting him to have to face a nursing home, my sister orchestrated twenty-four-hour-a-day care. The father whose modesty and independence and privacy had never allowed anyone close to him—now completely dependent upon others.

### From Table to Bed

I visited in April over my spring holiday. Now as we gathered together for family meals, we gathered around a hospital bed. Filling our plates buffet-style in the kitchen and balancing our plates in our laps, we continued to gather for meals, trying to keep our voices loud enough for him to hear.

I was surprised by the seemingly patient manner in which he received assistance. I was far more aware of my own reticence to invade boundaries of nearly half a century. I learned to use the lift so he could sit in a chair and start off the day with breakfast—every morning the Lord's Prayer and a bowl of oatmeal. I read his Sabbath School lessons to him and sat and listened to tapes of hymns by Tennessee Ernie Ford. I ran the medications in his ventilator. I washed the feces from his body. Did the laundry and dishes. Visited with my mother. And looked for things to do around the house. But there were still long open spaces in the day.

I turned him during the night as a precaution against bedsores. The visiting nurse came and demonstrated how to prop him to get him higher onto his side. That night I went out and found him lying on his back on the floor, his eyes staring up above him. With a wave of shock I went to him, knowing he was dead, knowing it was my fault! I had apparently propped him too close to the edge and he had rolled on over and onto the floor. "Daddy?" I spoke tentatively as I went to him, and without moving, he shifted his gaze to me. "Oh, Daddy. I'm so sorry. How long have you been here? I'm so sorry! I must have propped you too high." Weak with relief and remorse I babbled on. Reluctant to move him for fear of broken bones, I covered him with a quilt and called my brother who was staying at my sister's house to come and help. And then I kneeled down and while we waited, I sat and held his hand, too sick at heart to talk at all.

We found he was okay, no broken bones, and didn't even catch cold, but a great weight hung upon me. It was the shame of my ineptness, and of bone-crushing boredom. It was the smells. It was the lifelong suspicion that I truly was as worthless as my father had suggested long ago.

I longed to run away; I longed for the distance that I had learned to live with even though it too was filled with pain. But I stayed. Fumbling and bumbling my way through the week, I

## Daily bread was the grounding of ordinary life. One would not think to ask God for cake or fresh peaches! Only bread!

and fed. "Peace is my parting gift to you." (Jn. 14:27)

Very little changed through the years. On our visits back to Nebraska, family gatherings continued to center around meal-times. We had all had the opportunity to go to college, thanks to our parents' expectations and financial support. Mother reported he was now proud of all of us "kids," but we found few topics of conversation mutually interesting. He rejected our gifts with varying degrees of scorn and disinterest—"What will I do with that?" And the questions he directed to us did not elicit the



stayed. Like eating bread without butter or jam, I stayed. I stayed and bumbled along with the truth of being myself. Swallowing the truth: I am not as worthless as I feared, nor as capable and strong and noble as I had always hoped I would become. Swallowing the truth that love does not change the smell of excrement nor forgiveness the results of injury. The truth that I loved my father after all. That I had forgiven him for not meeting my requirements for a father. That I could also forgive myself for not being the daughter he imagined. I stayed because this was the first time he had ever accepted even one small thing without complaint or rejection. And it might be the only chance I'd ever have.

### The Dream

One night before I left I had a dream.

I dreamed I sat by my father's bed—on the back side of the bed—facing into the room. I reached out and placed my hand on my father's arm and with shock I felt the coldness. He is dead, I thought, but as I looked into his face I saw his eyes, serious and alert, looking at me. Just then the door opened and I looked up. It was Jesus. He was dressed in ordinary modern clothes, but I recognized him at once and with a cry leaped to my feet and began to make my way to him, around the end of the bed, stepping and stumbling over the ventilator tubes, squeezing past the oxygen tank and the night stand with medical supplies. I threw myself into his open arms with tears of relief and joy. And as he held me I felt a melding with him, as though now dissolved into one with him. With great surprise, I lifted my head from his chest and looked questioningly up at him. "Now you know," he said gently. "What do I know?" I asked. And I awoke.

I awoke into peace. "Now you know." I repeated. I know peace. I know oneness with God in the midst of the messiness of living honestly with contradictions and paradoxes.

I know that all of God we can know is found in the mix of ordinary living—in ordinary thoughts and feelings and actions.

I stayed there for a long time, memorizing the touch of peace.

When my visit was over and I sat down to say good-bye, my father would not let go my hand. He tried to talk. . . "Ahn! Ahn! Ahn!" and punctuated each articulation with a firm gesture of his left hand. He looked fierce—or was it just earnest? I had always dreaded those good-byes. Years of last-minute interrogations regarding my adherence to church doctrines, scriptural interpretations, and investigations of my faithfulness scrolled through my memory. For my father, everything was just yes or no, this or that. My ponderings left him anxious. His anxiety left me isolated.

The last time I had visited I had sat with him for most of an hour before leaving. I had sat with a grief for the distance we had never bridged. Saying with tears what no longer could be said with words. How I longed for deep conversation, for understanding, for communion! How much I had wished to kneel with the hands of my father upon my head and receive a blessing. Father Abraham, bless me as I go.

"It's hard to say, 'Good-bye,' isn't it?" he had said. "It's hard to be so far away," I had said.

### The Blessing

And now there would be no more words. No words except my own. "Daddy," I say, "I think I know what it is you wish to say. When I've left before, you've always inquired about matters of faith. But I think what you've really wanted was to give me your blessing and to know that we share the hope of meeting again. We will talk there." I put my hand on my father's head. He began to cry. And I began to cry. We sat in silence until I had to go.

I had visited again twice: Mother's funeral had been six months later, and then there had been a summer visit with the kids last July. And now...

I stood in the doorway of my father's house on a winter night.

**I know peace. I know oneness with God in the midst of the messiness of living honestly with contradictions and paradoxes.**

I had expected to see an empty hospital bed, but the bed and all its accessories were gone. The table again stood in its place.

A table—a place of communion. A holy invitation. "Come in. Come in. Accept the peace of communion. Live honestly with your limitations and needs and pain and be a living ordinance of humility. Gather with one another and accept the bread and wine of brokenness... For communion as a religious act is lost unless grounded in the concrete realities of living everyday life with one another. Come in and partake of this mystery of Love that coexists with the limitations of being human. Come in. Eat...Drink... We commune together even in our broken ways...Do this in memory of Me. Peace is my parting gift to you."

(Epilogue: I bought a nice loaf of boulé at John's Wheatland Bakery yesterday. I'm going to go now and have a couple slices with my tea. I am grateful to my father for always keeping bread before me. And I will slather it with jam and eat it with joy—to honor the abundant grace my Redeemer gives.)





# The Christmas Tree

MORGAN ANDERSON

*I*t was two-and-a-half weeks before Christmas. I pushed heavily against the trunk of the tree Ryan and I had just brought home. For the last half hour we had been trying to balance it so it would stand on its own, but no matter what we did, it listed and threatened to topple completely at the slightest touch. Besides, there was an ominous pile of dead needles at its base. No fresh tree we had ever bought before had dropped so many needles. It had looked beautiful in the tree lot, but, I admitted, it had been both dark and raining when we picked it out.

Ten-year-old Nathan came into the living room and wanted to help.

"Is the tree straight now?" came Ryan's muffled voice from the base of the tree.

"Come here," I directed Nathan, "and push toward the window while I step back to see if it's straight."

Nathan disappeared into the branches, all of his little weight pushing against the trunk of the eight foot fir.

"It's not straight yet," I observed. "It looks like it's going to fall onto the couch."

"Push it straight," ordered Ryan.

"I'm trying," I shot back as I leaned into the tree again. Nathan stood opposite me and pulled on a branch.

"We're going to lay the tree down," Ryan said with something close to desperation in his voice, "although I don't know why we're bothering. This tree's already



dead. I'll tip it up from the base, and you walk the top down."

The tree was nearly horizontal when I felt something give.

"Great. The legs of the stand just bent," Ryan announced in a tone that clearly said, "Don't offer sympathy."

Nathan and I watched him unscrew the trunk, reposition the stand over the base of the tree, and screw the bolts back into the wood.

"Here we go," Ryan said. "Lift it back up."

I walked the tree back into an upright position while Ryan tried to steady the compromised stand. Nathan helped by pulling on branches.

"Is it straight?" Ryan asked again from his post under the tree.

"I'll hold it while you look," offered Nathan.

He kept tension on the branches while I stepped back.

"No, this time it looks like it's heading for the fireplace," I announced in clipped tones.

"How am I going to fix this?" asked Ryan of no one in particular. "Keep holding it up while I get some shims."

I settled myself against the tree trunk, and Nathan assumed his position opposite me, pulling branches. This tree seemed the ironic end to a year of uncertainty and change. My mother-in-law had nearly died eleven months before from cardiac complications of the flu. My father had just been released from the hospital the week before, following a life-threatening infection, and he and my mother were arriving from another state the next day with the intention of looking for a house to buy near us.

Ryan had also had a troubling year. In February he had learned for sure that he had an ulcer. Furthermore, the company for which he worked was reorganizing, and his position was being threatened. He dreamed of leaving and establishing his own business, but he worried about finding a client base large enough to support us. I worried about his losing insurance benefits. I wanted Ryan to be able to be independent, but if I thought long enough about what independence really meant, a tide of panic threatened to drown me.

I felt the rough fir bark under my hands, and I looked at Nathan helping me steady this monstrosity that should have been one of the season's simple pleasures. His eyes sparkled. For him this was exciting.

My mind went back again, further this time. Nathan had been only two when I married Ryan, and Timothy had been six. I had never expected to be a mother, but the boys and I had grown together over the last eight years. I thought about

how often I prayed that I would be able to love them for God. Nathan especially had been aloof as a small child. His heart had been hurt by a mother who punished him with prayer and angry hitting. Countless times over the years I had prayed that Nathan would learn to love and trust Jesus, that he would learn that Jesus was not a celestial punishment waiting for his next sin.

Ryan returned bearing strips of wood. Wordlessly he disappeared again under the tree, and I felt determined bumping and shoving as he tried to wedge the strips to stabilize the tree. "Is it straight now?" he called.

"Let me look," I called back.

Nathan held the tree as I stepped backwards. "Slowly let go," I told him. Gradually Nathan released his tension on the tree, and equally gradually it began to lean, this time toward me.

"It's not straight," I reported. "It's got to go towards the window." I pushed against it in time to keep it from crashing into me.

"Get it straight," commanded Ryan again.

"It's as straight as I can make it," I replied irritably.

Feeling helpless, I leaned once more into the branches of the great fir. Suddenly a thought flashed across my mind: "Praise the Lord in all things."

Praise was definitely a new idea. Clearly, though, we needed something to counteract our frustration. Silently I said, "I praise you for this stupid tree, Lord. Now would you please help us to get it to stand up?"

"How is it now?" called Ryan.

Before I could step backwards, I knew what the answer would be.

Nathan and I let go slowly, and as we held our breaths, we realized that not only was the tree straight, it was also standing still. After an hour of struggling, the tree was finally upright.

I hurried to get water for the stand. Ryan followed me into the kitchen.

"I praised God for the stupid tree," I told him a little sheepishly, "and I suddenly felt much better about it."

"Praise God for the stupid tree," Ryan laughed; "it does feel good to say that!"

We watered the tree and had worship with the boys. "We're praising God for the stupid tree," we told them. "Its trunk is crooked, but we're going to give thanks in all things." They giggled; to have permission to label something "stupid" had to be a Christmas miracle!

By the next morning, though, I knew we had a problem. The tree had not drunk a drop of water. With a sinking feeling I thought of all the needles

**"I praise  
you for this  
stupid tree,  
Lord. Now  
would you  
please help  
us to get it  
to stand  
up?"**



Feeling  
trapped, we  
looked at the  
only remain-  
ing option:  
keep the  
Stupid Tree  
and make  
do.

we had vacuumed from the carpet the night before. Ryan had been right; the tree was not only crooked, it was dead.

With a surge of determination I called the tree lot. "We bought a northwest fir tree from you last night, and it hasn't drunk a drop. We can't keep a tree that won't drink; it's a fire hazard!"

"Bring your receipt back," the manager said soothingly. "We'll give you another tree."

I felt my adrenaline abate. "Thank you," I answered gratefully.

Four days went by before we could go back to the lot. The tree stood like an abandoned shadow in the living room, taking up space and absorbing the light. I wanted to avoid the room. "I'll be so glad to get lights on a decent tree," I thought to myself.

On Friday we took the boys and went back to the lot, this time in full sunshine. We wandered through the lot, but no matter where we looked, we couldn't find a tree as tall as our Stupid Tree. The biggest we could find was six feet tall, and the attendants told us that they weren't expecting to get any more eight-foot trees that season.

Pressured, Ryan and I assessed our options. His office party would be in our house the next weekend. We didn't have time to look in any more lots, and a six foot tree just wouldn't fill our oversized living room properly. Feeling trapped, we looked at the only remaining option: keep the Stupid Tree and make do. We could take it down before New Year's Day, always make sure the lights were off when we weren't around, and hide its brittle branches with decorations.

Resolute, we headed home.

"Thank you again for the Stupid Tree, Lord," I whispered in my mind, "and if possible, please help it not to dry up too fast."

When we got home I took inventory of the situation. Determined to transform the ill-fated tree, I glanced at the stand—and gasped. All the water was gone; only a thin film of moisture remained on the bottom. Grabbing a pitcher, I poured a full two gallons into the bowl.

"Ryan," I said, breathless; "the tree stand was dry."

"Well, maybe we'll have a tree after all," he said with a hint of a smile.

At worship that evening Ryan talked to the boys about keeping the tree we had. "We couldn't get another one this big," he said, "so we're going to thank God for what we have. This is a chance for us to praise God when our plans didn't work out. But it's Christmas time; let's each tell something we feel like praising God for."

Nathan spoke up last. "I'm praising God for the Stupid Tree," he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

That night I strung white lights on the tree and hung gold balls on its boughs. I breathed deeply of the spicy evergreen smell that came from its branches. It still felt supple, and it still stood straight, even when I brushed against it. "Thank you for the Stupid Tree," I whispered again.

Two days later I checked the water in the stand. It was half gone.

"Ryan," I said, astonished, "I just gave the tree a gallon of water. It's drinking!"

"Praise God for the Stupid Tree," he grinned.

When I checked the water again in two days, I was sure that I was tending a Christmas miracle. I gave it another half gallon.

That night Nathan said his usual bedtime prayer: "Dear Jesus, help me not to have any bad dreams, and help me to have a good day tomorrow—and thank you for the good tree," he ended.

"Ryan," I marveled when I left Nathan's room, "Nathan just thanked God for the good tree. Maybe Nathan is the reason that this tree is drinking. Maybe God knew he needed something tangible to help him know how much he cares for him."

"He's been praising God for that tree every night at bedtime," Ryan said softly.

Two days later, after pouring more water into the stand, I stood up and gazed at the tree. No needles had dropped from its branches during the last six days. Its fragrance enveloped me, and I felt as if the miracle of Christmas filled the room. The tree was ethereal; white lights reflected off gold balls, and white ribbons and baby's breath made it look like a Christmas bride.

"It's a tree of life," I thought to myself; "it's a resurrection tree!" And as I drank in the wonder of its beauty I thought of the uncertain future. I thought of Ryan starting his own business; I thought of losing our financial base. And then, as clearly as I could see my sparkling tree, I heard a thought in my mind, "Your bread and water will be sure."

I knew then. The miracle of the Stupid Tree was not just for Nathan. It was also for me, for me and for Ryan and for Timothy. If God could make a stupid, crooked, half-dead tree stand tall and drink, then he would also hold us up and provide what we needed for an uncertain future.

"Thank you, Jesus," I whispered, Tears and joy pushed up from someplace deep inside, and I knew at that moment what a miracle Christmas really was.

MORGAN ANDERSON IS A PSEUDONYM.



# The Pope's Prayer

FRED L. ELKINS

**W**hen I was pastoring in Houston, Texas, my wife Ruth obtained employment with a group of Jewish doctors at the M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. On her way home on the bus one day she overheard a conversation between two ladies seated behind her. One asked the other, "What group do you think are the most anti-Semitic?"

"The Seventh-day Adventists. My daughter-in-law wanted me to go to church with her last Saturday; so I did. When they referred to 'those who crucified our Lord,' I knew good and well they meant the Jews! And I'm sick and tired of being referred to as a 'Christ killer!'"

My wife's bus stop came up and she had to get off, never knowing how that conversation ended. But didn't Jesus predict in Matthew 20:18-19 that it would be the Gentiles who would mock, scourge, and crucify him?

One Orthodox Jewish convert whom I baptized complained of similar experiences, while her Jewish mother left church in tears one Sabbath. My wife and I have heard these prejudiced remarks by church members ourselves—even a few from fellow ministers in high places!

Soon thereafter, Ruth enrolled in an anti-Semitism class at a nearby synagogue. She shared with me the things that would help us as we worked with Jews.

Later, when we visited two of our Adventist sisters, Ruth mentioned the conversation she'd overheard on the bus. The sisters frowned. "Just what does 'anti-Semitism' mean anyway?" they asked.

We explained. "Jews are both a race and a religion. A person who is prejudiced against either one is perceived as an anti-Semite. Anti-Semitism is when such a person acts out his disregard

through demeaning words or destructive behavior.

Both sisters looked agitated. "Our church or schools never taught us to consider it as one of our Christian standards!"

"I understand," I replied. "We didn't know much about it either until Ruth

*I knew good and well they meant the Jews! And I'm sick and tired of being referred to as a 'Christ killer!'"*

went to a synagogue and took a class in it to find out!"

"You did what!" both sisters gasped. "Those Jews are frauds! You never should have stepped your foot inside that door! You must be crazy!"

"Where else could I have gone to fill that missing gap in my Christian education? Refraining from acting out anti-Semitism does not automatically happen just because one is a baptized member of the church!"

One sister interjected. "I don't believe any Adventist would say anything that would offend a Jew!"

"They sometimes do," we insisted. "Last week didn't you say you 'Jewed down' a salesman?"

A startled look flashed across the sister's face. "Well, I used to say it!"

"According to G. Krefetz in *Jews and Money* (1982, NY, Ticknor & Fields, p.7), 'The public opinion polls find that, year after year, close to one third of the population have anti-Semitic leanings.'"

A Jewish convert recently confided in us that a fellow church member told her, "My family doesn't want me to talk to

you anymore because you are Jewish, and Jews are evil!"

I asked if she was joking. She replied, "It was not a joke! In the past whenever I heard anti-Semitic remarks in church, I tried to correct the pastor or evangelist who was speaking. But now that I'm older, I'm trying to get used to it!"

No wonder this fine Jewish convert has recently started reattending synagogue once a month!

Some Adventists "turn off" Jewish people by saying, "The Jews departed from God; so he gave their blessing to us!"

But Romans 11:29 (RSV) plainly states, "The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." But that stands true not only for the Jews but for all who are "grafted in."

For hundreds of years Christians in Europe justified all kinds of atrocities against Jews by saying they were Christ-killers. In Video Cassette #586849 and teaching materials entitled, "Jews and Catholics: From Fear to Friendship," Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 838 Fifth Ave., NY 10021, Pope John XXIII is referred to as the man behind the Vatican II (1962) resolution exonerating the Jews of the charge of deicide. Before his death, he declared in prayer that anti-Semitism was equal to the second crucifixion of Christ!

Could he have been right?

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# Understanding **PAIN** At a Conference Constituency Meeting

**Q.** How is attending a conference constituency meeting different from having a root canal?

**A.** When you go to the dentist, you expect the pain.

MICHAEL SCOFIELD

**B**eing a delegate to a conference constituency meeting is one of the least desired responsibilities of any church leader—administrator, minister, or lay person. Why is this? This article attempts to explain what goes on in these meetings, especially behind the scenes. It suggests what can be accomplished and what cannot.

The conference constituency meeting is the highest authoritative body of the conference. It is composed of the ministers and lay delegates from all the churches, as well as representatives from the various conference institutions, and other delegates as provided in the constitution. The primary function of the constituency meeting is to select officers and an executive committee for the conference, and to make any necessary changes to the constitution or bylaws. Occasionally, other major decisions are presented to the delegates, such as major sales or acquisitions of assets, and policy changes.

Because it is held every one, two, or three years, depending upon the conference, most of the power between these sessions resides in the conference executive committee.

The pathways of power and influence in the conference are rather complex.



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The conference constituency meeting is often a confusing and tedious experience for many lay delegates. For some, it is quite a negative experience. This is often because (a) many delegates are new and don't know what is going on, (b) many delegates have ideals of accomplishing things which are not possible or practical, (c) most delegates forget the significant differences in culture and values among the various churches in the conference, (d) much of the power and decision making is concealed from view—generally in the nominating committee or other committees, and (e) many of the decisions have been made by a small group of influential officers (conference president, union conference president, and others) before the constituency session begins.

For many years in the development of Adventism, the constituency meeting was a rather short, perfunctory session often held during the annual campmeeting session—the only time when all the potential delegates were likely to be together.

More recently, conference constituency meetings are held every two or three years, depending upon the constitution. They are often held in the



largest church in the conference or in an academy auditorium. The sessions may begin on a Saturday night and continue all day on Sunday. Some sessions have lasted longer than conference leaders expected, going into additional weekends.

Delegates include pastors plus delegates representing individual churches and various conference institutions. Often, all conference workers are ex officio delegates, as are members of the conference executive committee, union conference officers, and sometimes the union executive committee. Most constitutions also provide that any member of the General Conference Committee present is an ex officio delegate, and may vote on any matter.

Constituency meetings are often viewed by lay delegates as a negative experience because they discover how little they can accomplish toward whatever goals they may have for improving or changing something. Because of this experience, it is sometimes difficult for churches to get experienced members to endure the ordeal again. Sometimes delegates who view the process as futile may show up for the Sunday morning session but then slip away. Many constituency sessions have been brought to a grinding halt when there were no longer enough delegates present to legally continue business.

The session often begins with the selection of a "large committee" (usually composed of one delegate from each church), which selects the Nominating Committee and perhaps members of certain other standing committees, such as the constitution and bylaws committee. In some conferences the "large committee" meets a few weeks prior to the constituency session, so the nominating committee may have more time to consider and contact candidates, and possibly interview them. This is particularly valuable if there is a vacancy in the top offices of the conference.

The plenary sessions of a constituency session are large and difficult to manage. These sessions may be chaired by the conference president or the union conference president, or other conference officer as appropriate. Constituency sessions of larger conferences may also have an officer from the General Conference or Division office present, who may chair the plenary session.

Some causes of difficulty in such sessions are (a) the amount of material to be covered, (b) the frequent lack of preparation of delegates, and (c) the sheer number of delegates who may take interest in a matter, and wish to speak to the floor regarding it. In addition, many delegates don't understand how the conference works or lack the business skills required to analyze the financial statements.

**Constituency meetings are often viewed by lay delegates as a negative experience because they discover how little they can accomplish toward whatever goals they may have for improving or changing something.**

Basic parliamentary rules are usually exercised, with a parliamentarian often appointed to assist the chair through the procedural thicket. The size of the voting body (often up to 500-800 delegates) often requires limits on the length of speeches be set. The chair has a difficult job navigating through parliamentary procedure, and balancing the need to complete the business of the session with the desire of passionate (and often ill-prepared or inarticulate) delegates to express their opinions about a matter.

In recent years, some delegates have demanded a clear delineation of the role of the chair as an impartial facilitator of the procedures. They do not want the chair to show conspicuous bias, to comment extensively on the matter under debate, or to attempt to unfairly influence the matter. This sentiment has resulted in conference and union officers, when not functioning as chair, having to use floor microphones to express their personal opinions. This is far different from the power and influence they had 40 years ago in such sessions.

The General Conference provides a model constitution which conferences are encouraged to adopt, but some conferences have experimented with constitutions which were significantly different from this model. In the mid-1980's, the constitution committee of the Southeastern California Conference, for example, proposed that the president/secretary/treasurer titles be replaced with a president/vice-president concept. This was ultimately rejected by the body of the constituency when union officials argued passionately against the proposal.

One source of tension in constituency sessions arises out of the fact that this is the only opportunity many delegates from different churches in the conference have to interact with each other. However, where churches participate in running a single church school, school board members who are also delegates may already know each other and thus understand one another's values and needs.

In the past 40 years, needs of subgroups of churches and members have received greater attention. Ethnic and lingual minorities seek greater representation in conference leadership, and argue for their particular needs. Some of these battles can become heated and ugly.

Some conferences have attempted to smooth the way for the constituency meeting by holding "pre-sessions" in various regions of the conference, allowing the potential delegates an opportunity to meet, see, and hear incumbent officers and departmental directors, and to pose questions or proposals which they would like to see the whole constituency session address.



A delegate's handbook is usually prepared, containing short reports from each officer and department, a list of the churches, financial statements, a copy of the constitution, and the text of any major proposals. Often these binders were handed out at the actual constituency session, but now some conferences realize the desire of delegates to have more time to study this material and provide it in advance.

#### Constituency Session Nominating Committee

The nominating committee has the rather challenging task of identifying candidates for key offices and the executive committee, when incumbents are deemed inadequate or are leaving. The nominating committee identifies one candidate for each of the offices, including president, secretary, treasurer, and lesser constitutional offices such as assistant treasurer, department heads (Sabbath School, youth, public relations, stewardship, education, ministry, etc.), and the executive committee.

The nominating committee then submits the single candidate for each office before the large constituency body, which may approve or reject the nomination. Never are two or more candidates presented as a choice for the delegates to select from. If one candidate is rejected, the nominating committee must reconvene and select another.

Chosen as early in the constituency session as possible, the nominating committee generally meets in closed session, although they may invite (or allow) individual delegates to come in to speak regarding particular candidates. The task of "guarding the door" to the nominating committee's deliberation room is often assigned to a union conference official subordinate to the union conference president chairing the committee's deliberations. This way, the union president has "his own man" watching the door and maintaining the flow of delegates who wish to speak before the nominating committee. I observed a situation in which a union departmental man was instructed to fly back from Hawaii, where he was conducting meetings, for the sole purpose of guarding that door. The considerable expense reflected the importance of this exercise of power.

If there is no dissatisfaction with an incumbent president, his name is usually sent to the constituency floor promptly so he may be reelected and resume chairing the constituency session and/or sit in on the rest of the nominating committee's deliberations. However, if there is a vacancy or the incumbent president is considered to be doing a poor job, the search for a new president can be lengthy and difficult.

The union conference president (organizational-ly above the conference) has historically played a key role in the nominating committee. Many con-

**I observed a situation in which a union departmental man was instructed to fly back from Hawaii, where he was conducting meetings, for the sole purpose of guarding that door. The considerable expense reflected the importance of this exercise of power.**

ferences assume that he will be a member of the nominating committee and chair it; some mandate this in their constitutions. This gives him considerable power in the resultant selection of candidates for all offices. And thus, they may be beholden to the union president.

In one sense, such power is beneficial, in that if no suitable candidate is found from within the ranks of conference workers, the union conference president may have knowledge of available candidates from other conferences in his own union or elsewhere. In such a role, union conference presidents act as "brokers" of information about candidates. This knowledge gives them considerable influence.

The ability of union conference presidents to dominate the work of a nominating committee is also exercised in how they conduct the proceedings. Their power is further leveraged when the work of the nominating committee is constrained to short periods of time (often less than 18 clock hours—even less deliberation time should they choose to sleep that Saturday night), thus precluding communication by committee members with potential candidates who may be out of state, etc.

For many years, the common practice was to try to complete all this work in 24 hours, which meant that some candidates for critical positions were never interviewed, nor were their resumes evaluated, nor their willingness to serve even ascertained. If some delegates were first informed of their selection as nominating committee members on Saturday night and were thus unprepared for the deliberations, they had to rely solely upon the union president for this information and advice, which was probably something he had been thinking about for some time prior to the constituency session.

This kind of power and influence has resulted in backlash in several conferences. In the Southeastern California Conference the nominating committee is now allowed to do its work over several weeks.

At one meeting a union conference president was specifically excluded from the deliberations, over his strident and vocal protest. Calmer heads now understand the value of the union conference president as a source of information, but many still wish to separate his advisory role from that of chairing the nominating committee.

Delegates who understand the process and environment of the meeting can more realistically manage their expectations and endure constituency meetings without severe loss of faith, hopefully accomplishing their important goals and objectives in a responsible manner.



# Touch

*He pulled me to his side and then, for the first time in over 30 years, he leaned his head against my breast. "I'm dying Nanny," was all he said.*

NANCY J. SMOLKE

**E**arly in the morning of January 28 I fell asleep at the wheel of my Plymouth Horizon and slammed headfirst into a bridge. Fortunately I remember little of the actual accident; impact and pain is the extent of it. Collectively I spent 10 days in the hospital. I have frightful memories of that time, but finding myself alive meant I must act accordingly. It is foolish to demand healing if I'm flat on my back looking for trouble.

Out of all the nurses, I cherished but one. Her name was May. She talked the whole while she was with me. She sympathized with my pain, groaned when I groaned and winced when I winced. Most importantly (and this is the crux of the matter), May touched me. I don't mean her kindness touched me (it did), I mean May literally touched me. She stroked my head when I shuddered. She rubbed my arm when I cried. When chills set in, she hurried off wordlessly. In my morphine haze I thought I had lost her. Not so. May returned with a blanket fresh from the oven. She tucked me in like a long-lost child. Her lovely hands instinctively smoothed the furrows in my brow and closed my weary eyes.

May was not the only hero in my misery. Every night my friend Janice drove straight from work to the hospital. When I was at my worst, Janice cradled me in her arms. Each night she made it a point to touch me in some tangible way. She rubbed my back, massaged my battered legs, combed my hair. Her hands were never far from me, even if it meant to simply sit and stroke my cheek.

Afterwards I asked her why she dedicated herself in such a way. "It did you good," she said, "and it did me good to see that." The truth of my friend's testament took me back to the previous summer and my experience with David.

David was my younger brother. We shared the reality of a brutal upbringing. I taught him how to survive, he taught himself how to fight. David grew up cocky and cute, while I, failing to win decisive battles on the home front, simply grew old. We separated until, at the age of 32, David was diagnosed

with inoperable cancer. He asked if I would come "home" and help him face an early grave.

David was not a great one for being touched. He was tough, period. I respected the way he faced the grisly effects of this horrible disease, but I kept praying for a break. When would he need more than a witness? The answer came two days before his death.

Out of the blue David arose from a three-day coma and asked for food: a piece of toast with strawberry jam and a little peanut butter. Did we have any fresh fruit? He wanted watermelon and a bit of chocolate. Is the milk good? Pour a bowl of cereal and chop a banana up in it. I joyfully prepared his meal, anxious to tell everyone of his sudden and remarkable recovery. David hoarsely called my name, "Nan?"

"Hmmm?" I said, poking my head around the corner. He mouthed the word "white." Two weeks earlier I had slipped him some of my whole wheat toast and he had spit it out in disgust. He gave me a suspicious look and wagged one finger in my direction, smiling broadly. We talked, watched TV and talked some more. At ten-thirty it ended.

"I'm tired Nance," he said. I lowered his bed, gave him his injection, checked the morphine pump, helped him with the urinal and tucked him in. As I stood near his bed putting the syringes away, David reached out and took my arm. He was nearly asleep. I stepped closer. He pulled me to his side and then, for the first time in over 30 years, he leaned his head against my breast. "I'm dying Nanny," was all he said.

We stay there, frozen in my mind, bridging the distance between us.

For someone like me, who grew up spinning from the back-hand and a swift kick, touch, kindly touch is a radically new experience. The first dictum in medical education, "Above all, do no harm," is a code that can just as easily be violated drough doing nothing at all. One thing is for certain, if you decide to reach out and touch someone, you may alter a life...for good.



Nancy Smolke is a freelance writer with a BS in communication. She writes from Fair Haven, Vermont where she lives with her teenage son Casey.



# Seminary States Position in Women in Ministry

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

**A**fter the 1996 defeat of women's ordination at the General Conference session in Utrecht, feelings ran high.

According to Nancy Vyhmeister, professor of world mission at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, people from opposite ends of the ordination spectrum blamed or praised the seminary for what they respectively saw as the "win" or the "defeat." People blamed the seminary for sending two representatives with opposing viewpoints.

At the annual convention of the Association of Adventist Women held in

"Then do something about it," one union president said. Dr. Vyhmeister, dean of the seminary and Nancy's husband, agreed and said that the Dean's Council would decide what to do.

The outcome of that decision was a fifteen-person committee which formed to study the subject of hermeneutics and ordination. The members consisted of two people from each of the six seminary departments, two students, and chairperson Nancy Vyhmeister. The members were: Michael Bernoi, Walter B.T. Douglas, Jacques B. Doukhan, Roger L. Dudley, Jon L. Dybdahl, Jo Ann Davidson, Richard M. Davidson, Robert M. Johnston, Jerry Moon, W. Larry Richards, Russell L. Staples, Peter M. van

chapters, and in May, 1997, the last manuscript arrived.

"We found ourselves praying more than discussing the book," Nancy admits. "There was so much at stake, and we didn't want to raise hackles."

They sent the book in manuscript form to twenty people for their opinions. Some were helpful, some were not. One person never returned the critique.

When the book was finally ready for printing, it still didn't have a name. Nancy passed Andrews University president Neils-Erik Andreassen in the hall one day and said, "What do you think of calling this book *Women in Ministry*?"

Go for it, was his essential reply.

## Dissenters Don't Prevail

The nearer press time became, the more feedback the committee received from unhappy people. One person called Nancy and told her she was hurting herself and causing trouble for the seminary by editing this book.

But the naysayers did not have the last word. "With the total support of the university and the seminary administration and with the support of about 90 percent of the seminary faculty, the book came out," Nancy said. The book also has the support of the ministerial department of the General Conference.

The book's prologue explains the committee's hermeneutical method in approaching this study on ordination. "We believe that scripture is the word of God," Nancy said, "and we believe in the unity of scripture."

The committee looked closely at both what women do in scripture and at what scripture says women shouldn't do. They became convinced that New Testament women had very important positions in the church including baptizing, leading, and deaconing. All God's people were gifted for ministry.

Junia, for instance, was well-known to the apostles, Nancy explained. "Older

**"With the total support of the university and the seminary administration and with the support of about 90 percent of the seminary faculty, the book came out," Nancy said.**

Loma Linda, California, last month, Nancy said that the truth is that the seminary had nothing to do with the seminarians who spoke at Utrecht. Those people were invited by "someone else," and they agreed to speak long before the seminary knew anything about the arrangement.

Less than a month after Utrecht, several North American Division union presidents met with the seminary faculty.

"You let us down," they said in essence; "you're against women's ordination."

## Seminary Favors Women's Ordination

Every representative of the seminary who was attending the meeting insisted that they were not against women's ordination. In fact, Nancy said, about 90 percent of the seminary faculty favor women's ordination.

Bemmelen, Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, Randal R. Wisbey, and Alicia A. Worley.

After much prayer and brainstorming the committee decided that their study should result in a book. They took "a quarter-and-a-half" to designate topics and writers. In the fall of 1996 the committee began meeting regularly to discuss and edit the manuscripts which were beginning to come in. As they read the manuscripts, the committee discovered new areas which they hadn't covered in their initial chapter assignments. As the school year progressed they expanded their book from 16 to 20