



The People  
Around You



Ordination Is  
Not the Issue



Finding Work  
as a Female  
Pastor

# Adventist *Today*

WINTER 2009 • WWW.ATODAY.COM

## Tomorrow

American Adventism  
is in trouble. Here's  
what we can do.

BY ALEX BRYAN





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Adventist Today brings contemporary issues of importance to Adventist Church members. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor, and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an email to atoday@atoday.com. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals, \$19.50 for new subscribers, \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for address outside North America.) Voice: (800) 236-3641 or (951) 785-1295 Fax: (951) 785-1595 Email: atoday@atoday.com Website: www.atoday.com.

Adventist Today (ISSN 1079-5499) is published quarterly by Adventist Today Foundation, P.O. Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, P.O. Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright © 2008 by Adventist Today Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

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## Treading on Holy Ground

Andy Nash

I'm deeply grieved to see, within the Adventist Church, an increasing boldness among thought leaders to publicly raise doubts about significant points of Scripture. It's my conviction that if our most gifted thinkers would throw off doubt (and the doubters that surround them) and fully devote their minds to plumbing the riches of the Living Word, they would spur a powerful revival within the Adventist Church.

On his blog this fall, an Adventist religion professor reasoned that if we can set aside the biblical admonitions to women and slaves, we can do the same regarding homosexual practices. "On biblical grounds," he wrote, "I can disagree with specific teachings of Scripture, as clear as they may be, including the injunctions against homosexual practices. In short, homosexual orientation is not sin, nor is homosexual practice—though both are condemned in Scripture, reflecting apparently the Hebrew understandings of the times that produced those passages."

Note here that the writer wasn't arguing (as others have tried to) that the biblical text doesn't condemn homosexual *practice*; he was arguing that the text no longer pertained to our day. Would he say the same about the other practices listed in the immediate context of Romans 1—wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, malice?

I feel just as concerned to see the line of thought advanced that we're more knowledgeable than Jesus himself was. On his blog about Adventists and evolution, an Adventist thought leader responded to a comment that Adam and Eve must have been real individuals because Jesus and Paul referred to them as real individuals.

The thought leader replied: "Jesus and Paul believed in Adam and Eve' is an interesting statement. Of course, they did. They lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century of the Common Era and talked about Adam and Eve as literal individuals. What would you expect them to do? I believe in 'Adam and Eve' also—as very helpful metaphors. If Jesus and Paul lived today, they would use them as metaphors as well." Here again, he wasn't arguing about the meaning of a text; he was dismissing it as dated—because apparently he understands more about Adam and Eve than Jesus did.

Similar sentiments about how much Jesus understood can be found in discussions about the

authorship of Daniel. Adventist employees and thought leaders taking the position that the book of Daniel wasn't actually written by a prophet named Daniel (before the events prophesied), but was written after the fact, must then explain Jesus' personal reference to "Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15). One of the explanations offered: Jesus must not have known as much about Daniel as we do.

To position oneself as knowing more in A.D. 2008 than Jesus did in A.D. 28 is, in my view, very dangerous territory—holy ground that's being treaded, sandals on, by people in positions of influence.

I think I understand this group's motivation. They have a burden to help those who have grown up with simplistic answers find a way to reconcile their faith with the available secondary evidence. But must faith always wait on secondary corroboration? (Now that David's palace may have been found, are we allowed to believe in a real David?) And what about when these leaders *shake* people's faith? What happens in 20 years when the scholarship has moved, and they have damaged the faith of a young person who was listening at the time?

I find it remarkable that someone like Des Ford could be pushed out of the church for his *interpretation* of a difficult biblical passage (Dan. 8:14), and yet 25 years later, church thought leaders so freely cast doubt on the Bible itself, and even on Jesus.

Out of curiosity I emailed Dr. Ford to ask him what he thought about these things. Of the Daniel discussion, he wrote back: "This is an area where Cliff [Goldstein] and I agree. For about 100 years most scholars agreed that Daniel was written about 165 B.C. But in recent years with some first class scholars there has been a turnaround. . . . The drift in SDA thought [regarding] exegesis and related matters does not represent where the best evangelical scholars (outside Adventism) are."

Of the larger issue, Ford wrote: "The examples you use from men I respect present an attitude toward Scripture that the Christian Church has repudiated for 2,000 years. These men have given the Word of God a nose of wax. The best of evangelical scholars in other communions would be horrified by these departures."

To position oneself as knowing more in A.D. 2008 than Jesus did in A.D. 28 is, in my view, very dangerous territory—holy ground that's being treaded, sandals on, by people in positions of influence.



### We Need to Talk

Kudos to Chris Blake for his honesty and clarity in “We Need to Talk” (November-December). He has illustrated what may be the greatest challenge facing our church today: finding and practicing relevant faith. It is tragic that students being nurtured in the incubator of a church college campus could lose their faith when returning to home churches where

tradition rather than real Christianity is practiced. It is only too convenient to blame the local church for the death of faith in these young people.

But that would not answer the question of why their faith is dying, because the faith these youth see practiced at their college may be equally at fault by failing to instill in them a relationship with God that can survive returning to their home church, or to the world.

If we are to understand why these youth are losing their faith, we must first know what real faith is. Unfortunately, many Adventists I know—both in small local churches and on college campuses—define “real faith” in terms of their tradition-based corporate worship services. That misconception has been the root cause of many leaving the church when they

discovered in trying times that what they thought was faith was powerless to sustain them in their hour of trial. In contrast, it is those who discover that their source of faith itself and power to survive and grow amid trials is a personal relationship with Jesus through the empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit. So if we are to lose fewer youth, we must focus not on worship traditions, powerful preaching, and uplifting music but on building an intimate and personal friendship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

**WILLIAM NOEL**  
Madison, Alabama

### A Time to Laugh

Congratulations on your November-December issue. The caricatures and captions were hilarious. We just saw

## Adventist Today in 2009

We are all aware that the world’s economy continues to experience significant strains. Companies and businesses are seeking ways to reduce budgets in response to rapidly declining revenues. *Adventist Today* is no exception.

Although our print and online subscriptions increased substantially in 2008, income from these sources represents only about 50 percent of our annual budget. The other half derives from donations. Unfortunately, because of bleak economic conditions, the level of contributions to Adventist Today Foundation decreased dramatically in the later half of 2008.

In response to this rapid downturn, a core group of our dedicated supporters stepped up to the plate and in the last two months donated more than \$25,000. This allowed *Adventist Today* to finish 2008 in the black.

Despite this vote of confidence in *Adventist Today* and its future, major fiscal challenges lie ahead in 2009 and beyond. Because of the commitment of the Adventist Today Foundation Board to be prudent stewards of every dollar of income, a series of

decisions—some of them very difficult to make—have been implemented.

First, it was determined that despite the difficult economic climate, we will continue to develop our website, [www.atoday.com](http://www.atoday.com), and our electronic newsletter, *ATUpdate*. These two media permit all subscribers rapid access to information and news concerning the Adventist Church without waiting for the next issue of *Adventist Today*.

Second, to fund these developments, beginning with this first issue of 2009, the print and online versions of *Adventist Today* will appear on a quarterly basis. Instead of six issues being published over a 12-month period, there will be four. However, the permanent page count of each issue will be increased to 32. Existing print and online subscribers will receive the six issues promised, but these issues will be published over an 18-month period. For those renewing and for new subscribers, an annual subscription will provide four issues of a 32-page magazine and access to our website and our emailed *ATUpdate*. Online subscribers will continue to have access to *Adventist Today* for \$8.00 per year.

In addition to the printing and postage savings realized by the above action, we have made adjustments in our editorial and administrative

staff. *Adventist Today* Editor Andy Nash has offered to take a one-year leave while he completes his doctoral dissertation. Andy will be replaced by one of our contributing editors, J. David Newman, D.Min., who is a former editor of *Ministry Magazine* and current senior pastor of the New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fulton, Md. David will assume the editorship of *Adventist Today* with the second issue of 2009. Dr. Newman has graciously accepted this responsibility at no cost to the Adventist Today Foundation during his term as editor. The most difficult decision was to eliminate the position of office manager, a position held with great distinction for more than 15 years by Hanan Sadek.

It is the belief of all members of the Adventist Today Foundation Board that these cost savings will permit *Adventist Today* to remain fiscally stable throughout 2009 and 2010. During that period, we trust that all who hold a stake in *Adventist Today* will continue to believe in the value of having a reliable, independent source of information about our church and will continue to subscribe to *Adventist Today* and to donate to the Adventist Today Foundation. We sincerely thank you for your continuing support.

—Erv Taylor, Executive Publisher,  
[erv.taylor@atoday.com](mailto:erv.taylor@atoday.com)

Jaime Jorge in concert recently, and he did indeed [appear to] try to make his violin explode by his facial contortions, which the caricature captured to a T. We didn't know Kellogg's Corn Flakes were responsible for our decreased libido. Blame it on John Harvey Kellogg!

It looks as if Adventist theologians need to restudy our supersessionist theology (the replacement of Israel by the church) if Israel Church President Richard Elofer's understanding of Romans 11 is correct.

**BEATRICE NEALL**  
Ooltewah, Tennessee

Adventist Man and now the Adventist Caricaturist make me laugh out loud and bring joy to my faith. But let's keep it even and tease the liberals too—those leftie “movers to music” who couldn't tell truth from error if it sloshed their Shiraz over their sirloin steak!

**COLIN MACLAURIN**  
Melbourne, Australia

## Pastor Salaries

As I was reading the Letters to the Editor regarding pastor salaries (November-December), I find that some clarification is in order.

First, Adventist pastors do all get the same pay; they all start as interns (83 percent of the monthly base rate mentioned in Schwisow's article) and progress upward until ordination, when they are given 102 percent of the monthly base rate. However, each community wherein they are called to serve has a local cost-of-living index that may bump up their salaries based on the need to live in and serve that district. This cost-of-living factor is also provided to denominational teachers.

Also, the IRS treats the pastor's income the same whether it is one sum total or several parts added together to equal a

final sum. Hence, should a denomination give the pastor a housing allowance, it is just added to the salary in the eyes of the IRS and is treated as such. If housing is provided, such as a parsonage, it is required that a fair cost value be placed on that benefit, and the dollar value is then taxable. It is simpler bookkeeping to have just one sum to start with. The IRS prefers that the conferences grant year-end W-2 statements, even though the IRS considers them self-employed. The IRS lumps all denominational clergy into the same tax classification as it does U.S. military officers, hence the ruling.

I have been a denominational employee for 34 years, serving in four conferences in two unions, and I have never been asked to sign a document

about tithing. However, it is a part of the North American Division working policy that pastors set an example of Christian stewardship. For pastors to not engage in a stewardship practice, they are violating policy requirements and setting a poor example for their church members.

Ordination into the gospel ministry carries with it the proclamation: “this one thing I do.” Most conferences do not allow “moonlighting.” History has shown that the lines quickly get blurred when a pastor is receiving a salary to serve his church (this of course is to include time out for family, personal time, and time with God) and has another career placing demands on his time.

**SCOTT A. LEMERT**  
Assistant to the President  
Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

1/4 pgAd



BY ALEX BRYAN

# THE End of American ADVENTISM?

America is the **birthplace** of Adventism. But is Adventism now **dying** in America? Terminal or curable, we are in **critical condition**.

## CRITICAL CONDITION ONE: The Church Is Leaking...Fast

There is a *systemic* problem with the larger, American Body of Christ, of which we are a part. We are living (dying) in a post-Christian era. Just 17.5 percent of adult Americans now attend church on any given weekend. That's right: more than four out of five people will *not* be in church services this coming Sabbath or Sunday. This is the highest percentage for unchurched America ever, continuing a four-decades-long trend. We are catching Australia (8 percent) and Britain (6.3 percent) in a march to the sea of annihilation.<sup>1</sup> The church is in recession, depression, and, in some parts, concession. Scholar and lecturer Leonard Sweet tells us that "Christianity is dying in the West." Want evidence?

In Brussels, over 50 percent of the babies born are Muslim. In England, there are now more practicing Muslims than practicing Anglicans. Islam has become the largest European Religion (*not* Catholicism)... In Europe, Christians are almost an endangered species... the statistical center of Christianity today is Timbuktu, Mali ... the language of Christianity today is Spanish ... there are more Christian churches in India today than in the United States. By 2025, two-thirds of Christians will live in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.<sup>2</sup>

While the Global South and East are exploding, we in the West, including America, are imploding. There is

good news about the Good News in *other* parts of the world. But in America, *white flight* (and indigenous black, too) is the lead story.

I don't suspect many Christians (and Adventists) understand just how quickly and decisively we are headed in this direction. Spirituality is on the rise in America. People are seeking God (or should I say *gods?*). Have you checked out the Religion & Spirituality section at Barnes & Noble lately? The shelves are creaking under the weight of the latest religious ruminations. Oprah, Bono, Madonna, and the Internet are crazy for Jehovah, Jesus, Jews, mystics, and Muslims. In the meantime, however, the *Christian Church* is losing its market share. The societal thirst for spiritual meaning is intense. But somehow, even though we hold the Water of Life, we are not able to quench our generation's thirst. Culture's spiritual sex drive is high. Sadly, bookings for the heavenly wedding chapel—those pledging to join the bride of Christ and marry the God Groom—are low.

The baptismal tank is running dry.

### CRITICAL CONDITION TWO: The Church Is Getting Wrinkles

Adventism is geriatric. We are not the hospital maternity ward, but hospice. We are graying local churches headed for the grave. If advertising in denominational publications is any indication, planned Adventist retirement communities are now big business. Meanwhile, the young seem *not* to be our business. Has anybody noticed the age demographic of camp meeting? How about the predominant patrons of the Adventist Book Center? Who subscribes to denominational magazines? Who tunes in to 3ABN? With all due respect, *old people*.

Monte Sahlin and Paul Richardson tell us that the median age of an Adventist in America is 51 while the median age of an American is 36. Half of Adventist American whites are over age 60. In 1990, just 16 percent of North American Adventists were retired. Now 35 percent—more than one-third!—are retired. *Let these numbers sink in for a moment.*

"Are you making too big a deal of this?" I asked Sahlin.

"No, we're not," he replied. "And we're in especially serious trouble with indigenous populations. White Adventist Americans are one generation away from near disappearance, and African-American Adventists are probably two generations away."

The demographic demise of the Adventist Church in America is hard to overstate. Seventh-day Adventism, birthed on this continent some 160 years ago, by young people, has now *lost* its young. Unless our heading changes, we are traveling down an ever shorter road into a sunset of our own making.<sup>3</sup>

### CONDITION THREE: Local Churches Are Losing "It"

Friends of mine faced an unnerving dilemma a year ago. Having just moved to a major (million-plus) American city, they

were trying to choose a church. The final choice came down to:

(a) a congregation with a preferable (Adventist) statement of theological beliefs that met for worship on Sabbath (but other than that was pretty dead) or

(b) a church with a vibrant worship environment, culturally connected atmosphere, enthusiastic missional energy, deep relational health, thoroughly grace-centered pulpit, and an overall and potent sense of Holy Spirit-bathed ministry. The only significant problems with this church were a less-appealing theology (not Adventist) and no public gatherings on Sabbath.

My friends chose the Seventh-day Adventist congregation. But it hasn't been easy. The fellowship is old. Philosophy of ministry is harsh. Relationships are shallow and cold. Sense of *purpose* is kaput.

The church believes truth but "hath not the spirit." This place and these people will do for a time—but to be honest, the clock is ticking for my friends ... and for this church.

Another friend moved to a more rural area. The Adventist congregations to choose from were unappealing. To be, as a 20-something, the only worshiper under 50 years old is hard to embrace. And so my friend chose; she no longer attends any church, of any denomination.

Local churches are losing appeal. West, Pacific Northwest, Southwest, Midwest, Northeast, and down South I've heard a chilling refrain: "We keep looking for an Adventist church that has dynamic worship, that is grace-centered, that has strong mission, contemporary relevance, and openness to young people. We're just having a hard time finding a church like that."

To be, as a 20-something, the only worshiper under 50 years old is hard to embrace. And so my friend chose; she no longer attends any church, of any denomination.



This anecdotal evidence keeps me up at night. While there are certainly some great churches out there, who among us is claiming that we have a mission-rich, youth-plentiful treasure trove of congregations in North America?

## What Should We Do?

### First, we need a crate load of candor.

This begins with church leaders.

The Southern Baptist Convention has been touting itself as “the largest Protestant denomination in the United States,” with a membership of 16.2 million. But recently they made a *radical* adjustment. They counted church service attendance (participation) and found just 6.16 million actual congregants. The “books” were bloated by nearly 10 million inactives. And so the Baptists got honest.<sup>4</sup>

I long for a division, union, or local conference leader to speak with such candor. We claim 1.1 million Adventist members in America. But that *de facto* number may be more like 600,000-700,000. I long for the *Adventist Review* to speak honestly about the dire situation we find ourselves in, as well as the present successes and future hopes. I long for the General Conference Session in 2010 to be more than cheers, pom-poms, one-liners, standing ovations, and confetti. A prophetic people should tell the truth, *for that is what prophets do*. Bad news is always followed by good news, of course. But bad news can drive us to the gospel faster than platitudes. What if a Georgia Dome *acceptance* sermon, 18 months from now, by the newly elected North American Division president, started like this:

My fellow Adventists, I want to begin with a confession. We have chased the children from the lap of Jesus. And so, for the next five years, we must pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor to the task of revolutionizing our schools, our churches, our organizational structure, and, most of all, our spirituality.

Now *that's* a speech—seasoned with honest, prophetic words—that would invigorate and inspire a lot of people I know.

### Second, we must re-claim the local church as *the* church.

Nearly 11 years ago (in the spring of 1998), I wrote an article for *Adventist Review* titled, “The Local Church *Is* the Church. Period” about what I perceived to be the plight of local congregations in Adventist America.<sup>5</sup> I wrote that in comparison to Adventist hospitals, colleges, and conference offices, local congregations are dangerously *under*-resourced. I suggested that the health of the entire Advent Movement in North America rested on the health of local churches. I still believe this to be true.

A particularly troubling consequence of comparatively well-resourced hospitals, conference offices, and educational institutions is a movement of the most creative and gifted pastors

away from local churches to these preferred environments. Historian Malcolm Bull and journalist Keith Lockhart, in *Seeking a Sanctuary*, write that “[i]f by the time they [Adventist pastors] are forty they have not been appointed to conference offices or become notable evangelists, they may grow increasingly restless.” A majority of pastors say they often feel lonely and isolated in their local church leadership. Promotions in professional Adventist ministry are almost always viewed as *calls* to one of the Adventist mega-centers. And so, local congregations are left starving for both material and visionary leadership.<sup>6</sup>

A proposal: we need 500 new, well-led, well-visioned, well-resourced churches in five years.

This cannot simply be more of the *same*. We need an undertow, pulling pastors and teachers out of the institutions and back into local church leadership. Imagine *new* local churches birthed and shepherded by Dwight Nelson, Fredrick Russell, Nathan Brown, Shawn Boonstra, John McVay, Randy Roberts, Sam Leonor, Jon Paulien, and a host of other brilliant, creative, grace-bathed, and spiritually-gifted leaders. We need to *decentralize* with our best and brightest. I pray the Holy Spirit would storm the castle of our grandest academies and universities, hospitals and conference offices, plundering the personnel and taking prisoner those who could rock the world of American Babylon.

We also need, in this local church revolution, a major transfer of funds from the many layers of governance back into local settings. We need the kind of money that can help make missional soil rich and ripe. We need *financial fertility*. This is not the place or time to argue for major structural, organizational, and financial renewal. For now, let us simply say that *this is the year 2009* and we need a small, smart, high-tech, and highly efficient support structure to sustain the essential work of *saving* the Adventist Church from North American death, and then set it on a *prevailing* course of saving men and women for the kingdom of heaven. The hospitals and colleges and publishing houses are only important as the churches are important—and alive. The local church *is* the church.

### Third, we need to lower the spiritual driving age.

I believe our Adventist colleges and universities (of which I am currently a pastoral part) must play a significant role in the redemption and renewal of Adventism. Simply put, we need young, 20-something graduates who are prepared, upon graduation, to flood local congregations with energy, spirituality, relational passion, and missional skill. We need young men and women dedicated to Jesus Christ, Christianity, and the Adventist Church.

It seems to me this calls for an *educational* revolution.

This is what I mean: every collegiate (and possibly high school)

Adventist diploma ought to mean that the young person in cap and gown served a *full year* in domestic or international mission. I'm talking Peace Corps or Mormon mission-type service.

Teach for America is a wonderful model. The organization challenges the best students to devote two years of teaching elementary school in some of the most impoverished communities. The goal of the organization is genius. Alumni of this program, having experienced the plight of under-resourced children, are dedicated the rest of their professional lives to this educational mission. Simply put: hands-on experience creates lifelong passion, *including* financial investment in Teach for America.<sup>7</sup>

I'm convinced this type of commitment would far exceed the impact of current Adventist religion classes, required worship, and holy convocations. The testimony of student missionaries speaks volumes to the power of a year in service of Jesus and the church. I can't find data on the specific impact of missionary service on future behavior, but my guess, based on numerous conversations with missionary alumni, is that it is significant. (Translation: I bet missionary alums worship more, give more, serve more, and all-around support the work of the church more in statistical comparison to those who have not had such formative experience.) I've talked with enough children of missionaries and students who themselves were missionaries to know that exposure to the thrills and trials of hands-on ministry is powerful. *Encapsulation* is the word theologian Scot McKnight gives it. You are removed from the protected, pampered life and thrown into it.<sup>8</sup>

Why can't we, the Great Advent Movement, do whatever is financially necessary to make this happen? Or are we simply going to continue to instruct students in desk-and-chalkboard or pulpit-and-pew environments about the "28" and *Adventist Heritage*? While head knowledge about fundamental beliefs and denominational history is important, what are these without the spiritual cardio of missional exercise? I believe a major paradigm jolt is in order for a church that is scrambling to find safety as



FAMILY TIES: Alex Bryan with his wife, Nicole, and daughter Audrey.

the tectonic plates of culture quake beneath us. We spend some 40 percent of our tithe dollars on Christian education in North America, and we've got a 15-year age gap between Average American and Average Adventist! Something's got to change.

The impact of teenage service is not simply so that 25 years later the initial investment finds dividends. We need 18- to 22-year-olds trained so that 23- to 35-year-olds can start *leading* the church. Right away. Then. Now. We need pastorates, pulpits, committees, boards, and initiatives *filled* with *very young* adults. Not tokens. Not the one 27-year-old who is really a 77-year-old in a 20-something body. We need holy and hungry, spiritual and sassy, Christ-centered and creative young people. We need the kind who know a lot about the Bible *and* the culture. We need those who are friends of Jesus and who can easily make friends with those *outside* the church. A "piece of the pie" was okay in 1990. But times have changed, for the worse. Now we must give them the *keys to the bakery* before we have to put a going-out-of-business sign on the window.

Faith, Hope, and Love: These three I keep in my heart, mind, and soul.

I have faith that God has important work he still wants to do through the Adventist Church.

I have hope that church leaders will recognize the power of healing change over catastrophic calcification.

I have love for this spiritual family—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—around the world, but especially in America, where the Spirit conceived a community of high scriptural regard, cross-bearing discipleship, Sabbath celebration, and, yes, blessed hope. Can God use anyone to do the work of these important times? Sure. I say: why not us? **AT**

*Alex Bryan is the pastor for mission and ministry at the Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists in Collegedale, Tennessee.*

<sup>1</sup>Tom Sine, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press: 2008), p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard Sweet, *The Church of the Perfect Storm* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Methodism, a parent of the Adventist Church, is on course to shut down its last congregation in the year 2090—just 82 years from now. Accessed at [http://umportal.org/print\\_article.asp?id+4270](http://umportal.org/print_article.asp?id+4270) in an article by Donald W. Haynes, retired clergy member of the Western North Carolina Conference.

<sup>4</sup>*Christianity Today*, August 2008.

<sup>5</sup>Alex Bryan, "The Local Church Is The Church. Period." *Adventist Review*, March 19, 1998, pp. 8-13 (can be accessed through the *Adventist Review* online archival system).

<sup>6</sup>Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 290-301.

<sup>7</sup>I recently saw an interview with founder and CEO Wendy Kopp. The lifelong impact on those who serve in the program is enormous. See [www.teachforamerica.org](http://www.teachforamerica.org) for more information.

<sup>8</sup>Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 92-98.



## Three Adventist Dangers

By Alden Thompson

At the new year we should be cheerful and upbeat—unless scary things out there need our attention. Generally I am allergic to a steady diet of warnings. Indeed, I don't hesitate to “warn” my fellow Adventists of the dangers of feasting on warnings. But warnings are like criticism in general: how do we help those who are too critical? Do you wean them of their critical impulses by being critical? It's easy to become so critical of the critics that we become more critical than the critics we are criticizing.

Even when Ellen White urged that famous “critic” A.T. Jones “to follow other methods than that of condemning wrong,”<sup>1</sup> her urging came in the form of a gentle condemnation. Not many lines away, however, is a fruitful suggestion. She speaks of words that “will reform but not exasperate.” *Christ's Object Lessons* adds a further qualifier: “Under all circumstances reproof should be spoken in love.”<sup>2</sup>

Reforming without exasperating is a wonderful ideal. And sometimes we come close. But Scripture suggests that strong words do have their place. In one playfully serious passage, C.S. Lewis reflects on the dilemma. Perfect love casts out fear, he notes, “but so do several others things—ignorance, alcohol, passion, presumption, and stupidity.” He goes on to say that until we have advanced to that “perfection of love in which we shall fear no longer,” we should be very careful not to allow “any inferior agent to cast out our fear.”<sup>3</sup>

So here's a warning about three scary Adventist dangers.

**1. Fearfulness.** Ironically, I'm fearful of the epidemic of fearfulness that seems to be sweeping through Adventism. It may not afflict the typical *Adventist Today* reader, but it is dramatically shaping church life. We are afraid of ideas, afraid of deception, afraid of anything without the Adventist label. Usually that means being fearful of Adventists

who don't share our fears.

We should indeed fear evil. But fear almost everything? Where is the confident Paul who plunged into dialogue with the great minds of Athens? Where is the brilliant John Wycliffe whose “genius and the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge” commanded “the respect of both friends and foes”?<sup>4</sup> And where is the eager outreach of an Ellen White, urging us to take advantage of every “opportunity” to converse with others on points on which we can “agree”?<sup>5</sup>

None of that happens when we are afraid.

**2. Embarrassment.** If some Adventists are afraid, others are embarrassed. We want the church to look good, be successful, and put its best foot forward. Instead, it seems to stumble and grope. Cheer up. It's always been that way. But we're still God's precious children. If all we see is embarrassment, the gospel goes nowhere. Embarrassment kills evangelism even more effectively than fearfulness.

**3. Power.** Influence, position, and money are deadly temptations. While many Adventists are fearful and others are embarrassed, maybe our greatest danger comes when we are neither fearful nor embarrassed. When James and John asked for the top places in the kingdom, they were bold, unafraid, and not the least bit embarrassed. But their raw bid for power angered all the rest of their colleagues.

Let's pray for just enough fearfulness, just enough embarrassment—just enough of both—to keep us from using our influence, position, or money to seek our will instead of God's. That's a worthy goal for this new year.

<sup>1</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 121 (1901).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 337 (1900).

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, “World's Last Night” in *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 80 (1888, 1911).

<sup>5</sup> *Gospel Workers*, pp. 119-120 (1915).

We are afraid of ideas, afraid of deception, afraid of anything without the Adventist label.

# ORDINATION

BY BONITA  
JOYNER SHIELDS

## *Is NOT the Issue*

REFLECTIONS OF A FEMALE PASTOR

I SAT STARING AT MY COMPUTER SCREEN, STUNNED. AFTER A FEW MOMENTS, my disbelief morphed into tears. I wondered later if I was the first seminary student to cry at my computer after reading the works of an Early Church Father.

The term “Early Church Father” refers to early and influential theologians and writers in the Christian Church, particularly those of the first five centuries of Christian history. Some of the most recognizable names include Ignatius, Polycarp, Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. But on that day it was Tertullian who tore at my soul.

My encounter with this man who lived in a totally different time and place, many centuries ago, brought me face-to-face with the here-and-now and revealed to me a somber truth: our church’s resistance to female spiritual leadership and its refusal to ordain women into pastoral ministry are symptoms of a deeper issue. And until we address this deeper issue, I believe ordination a moot point.

### **Something to Cry About**

The writings of these Early Church theologians are typically placed in three categories: Ante-Nicene Fathers, Nicene Fathers, and Post-Nicene Fathers.<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, an Ante-Nicene Father who is considered the founder of Latin Christianity, wrote in the second and third centuries. Tertullian, who so eloquently expounded theological doctrines about the resurrection, the nature of Christ, and the Trinity, had this to say to a female audience:

“And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil’s gateway: *you* are the unsealed of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God’s image,



man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins?”<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian wasn't alone in his views. Augustine, a Latin theologian and Bishop of Hippo, believed that males represent the mind while females represent the concupiscence (sexual) nature.<sup>3</sup> Aphrahat, a Christian Assyrian author of the 4<sup>th</sup> century—who was possibly influenced by Tertullian—wrote that “From the beginning it was through woman that the adversary had access unto males. . . . for she is the weapon of Satan. . . . For because of her the curse of the Law was established.”<sup>4</sup> John Chrysostom, a late 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, commented on the text in Matthew 19 [stating that it is good not to marry] with these words: “What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger. . . . Therefore if it be a sin to divorce her when she ought to be kept, it is indeed a necessary torture; for either we commit adultery by divorcing her, or we must endure daily strife.”<sup>5</sup> Basil of Caesarea, also a 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, spoke about a husband's treatment of his wife: “However hard, however fierce a husband may be, the wife ought to bear with him. . . . He strikes you,

but he is your husband. . . . He is brutal and cross, but he is henceforth one of your members, and the most precious of all.”<sup>6</sup>

These views were not confined to the early church. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Heinrich Krämer and James Sprenger wrote a training manual for neophyte inquisitors in their pursuit to squelch witchcraft. Under the section titled “Why Superstition Is Chiefly Found in Females,” they offer up numerous reasons for this belief. One reason being that females are more carnal than males—especially since “there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib.” Another reason is that “females are intellectually like children.” Still another reason cited was that “when a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil.” Thus, the writers came to the following conclusion: “All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in females insatiable.”<sup>7</sup>

These views, and many like them, form the history of the Christian Church. And while today I doubt many people would overtly express these views, do we think that these views made no impact on their readers—especially with their being espoused by such influential theologians? Do we think that these views have not been transmitted through the “spiritual DNA” of the Christian Church? Do we think that by merely granting a credential of ordination to women that we will supplant these

## Why Men Should Not Be Ordained

By J. David Newman

The current argument in the Adventist Church over whether or not women can be ordained is asking the wrong question. The real question is: Why should men be ordained?

The Adventist Church voted at Annual Council in October 1991 a “Theology of Ordination.” In that statement we read: “the Scriptures distinguish three categories of ordained officers—(1) the gospel minister, whose role may be seen as preaching/teaching, administering the ordinances, and pastoral care of souls and churches (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:1-5); (2) the elder (sometimes in Scripture called *bishop*), who exercises oversight of a local congregation, performing necessary pastoral functions as well (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5, 9; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5); and (3) the deacon, to whose care the poor and the benevolent work of the congregation are entrusted (Phil. 1:1; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).”

The statement then goes on to elevate the gospel ministry above the other two. “The gospel ministry: a special call. While elders and deacons are appointed on the basis of spiritual experience and ability . . . the gospel ministry, Seventh-day

Adventists believe, is a special calling from God.” This suggests that being an elder or deacon is not a special calling from God.

The statement gives no biblical basis for the ranking of the three callings by the Adventist Church. Being ordained as a deacon does not qualify a person to be an elder, even though the Scriptural requirements are the same (1 Tim. 3:1-11). If a deacon is to become an elder, that person must experience a second ordination. And if an elder becomes a pastor, that individual now must go through a third ordination. There is absolutely no hint in the New Testament that there were three different ordination ceremonies.

What many Adventists don't realize is that we inherited this practice from the Roman Catholic Church—which is ironic, given our preaching against so many positions of that church. The Catholics have deacon, priest, and bishop, each requiring an additional ordination.

What is even more fascinating is that “the word ‘ordain’ does not appear in the Greek New Testament. The word ‘ordain’ that appears in

the King James Version actually translates from a number of Greek words, including *poieou*, ‘appointed’ (Mark 3:14); *ginomai*, ‘to become, select’ (Acts 1:22); *titheumi*, ‘appointed, place, set’ (1 Tim. 2:7); *kathisteumi*, ‘cause to be, appoint’ (Titus 1:5); and *cheirotoneou*, ‘stretch out the hand, appoint’ (Acts 14:23). The English word ‘ordain’ has a Latin root, *ordinare*, which derives from Roman law and conveys the idea of a special status or a group distinct from ordinary people. That is why most modern versions do not use the word ‘ordain’—it does not give an accurate translation of the original meaning.”<sup>11</sup>

“The doctrine of spiritual gifts (as taught in Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; and 1 Peter 4:10, 11) teaches that God gives gifts for service to all without respect to race or gender. Included among those gifts are those of evangelist, prophet, teacher, and pastor.

“In harmony with the New Testament custom, Adventists appoint ministers, who, like the apostles and evangelists of the early church, look after the general interests of the church; and elders

deeply entrenched, albeit often unconscious, beliefs that females are [spiritually] inferior to males? That females bear the entire responsibility of sin for the human race? That males are symbols of intelligence while females are, well, *sex symbols*?

As Tertullian and the other Early Church theologians have shown us, the issues regarding women in ministry in our church go much deeper than ordination. The deeper issue is the devaluation of the female image of God.

### It Didn't Start With Tertullian

The belief systems of these theologians were not formed in a vacuum. This devaluation of females can be seen throughout secular history—especially in the form of female infanticide. Archaeological studies of infant remains conducted in ancient Rome reveal that “most infants died around birth. This along with the fact that these individuals were disposed of in the sewer rather than given regular burial was interpreted as evidence for infanticide. . . . When such societies practise (sic) infanticide, more girls than boys are likely to be victims.”<sup>8</sup> This practice continues in various countries even today.

The point of all of these illustrations is not to prove that all males are bad and all females are victims. Their purpose is to

reveal how far humanity has gone in trampling the feminine image of God underfoot.

The first chapter of Scripture states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man [Heb. *adam*, man, mankind] in our image, in our likeness, and let *them* rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26, 27, NIV).

It takes both male and female to most accurately reflect the image of God. Unfortunately, God’s people haven’t always embraced and valued this image. What more somber, painful image do we need of God’s people devaluing females than to picture the concubine of Judges 19 *willingly* being offered up by her husband to be sexually violated and fatally abused by a mob of perverted males? Or the Early Church theologians who blamed the first woman for man’s sins? Or the Adventist man today who finds no discrepancy between beating his wife and loving her “just as Christ loved the church” (Eph. 5:25, NIV)?

God’s people need to create a community that will cease to condone the oppression and abuse of females—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—by its writings, attitudes, and

(also called “presbyters,” or “bishops” in the New Testament); and deacons, who, like their New Testament prototypes, look, respectively, after the spiritual and temporal interests of the local congregation to which they belong.”<sup>2</sup>

Adventists are extremely inconsistent when it comes to the issue of pastors and Adventists. At the 1974 Annual Council, the church for the first time allowed women to serve as local church elders. No distinction was made between their ordination and the ordination of men. Both were ordained in the same way. This led many to say, “If we can ordain women to be local elders, why cannot we ordain them to be gospel ministers?”

Women had begun to serve in pastoral roles ordained as local elders but not as full gospel ministers. This led to a push by some for women to be ordained the same as men. At the same time, others felt women should not be serving as pastors at all. At the 1990 General Conference Session in Indianapolis, a compromise was reached. It was voted that women could serve as pastors but not be ordained as full gospel ministers. In addition,

to keep some kind of difference between them it was decided that women could marry, baptize, and lead the ordinances, but they could not ordain local elders, organize new churches, or unite churches!

I mentioned spiritual gifts earlier in this article. There are four main passages that speak of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12: 6-8; 1 Cor. 12, the whole chapter; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Peter 4:10-11), and none of them limit any of the gifts to a particular gender. In fact, it is suggested that any gift is available to any person as God may decide (1 Cor. 12:7). Among those gifts is the gift of pastor.

Now I know there are passages that speak to the role of women in the early church, which lead some people to conclude that women cannot be ordained. But if these passages are truly followed without reference to context, then women could not serve as deacons, elders, pastors, teachers of men, or participants in worship services. However, this article does not address these issues. I am simply trying to show that it is time for the Adventist Church to reject its Catholic heritage when it comes to ordination. It should stop using the word

“ordain,” which is not biblical and comes encrusted with overtones of privilege and separation. For example, the separation between laity and clergy with one group being superior to the other.

We should be like the early church. When we appoint leaders in the church, let us have a commissioning service with laying on of hands but give no grade to these ceremonies. The same ceremony is used for any church leader. There really is little difference between the pastor and elder except that one is full time, while the other is voluntary. The *Church Manual* indicates that in the absence of the pastor, the elder fulfills all the roles of the pastor even to the administering of the Lord’s Supper, and with the permission of the conference can baptize as well.

If we give up ordaining men, we solve the problem of whether or not we should ordain women.

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<sup>1</sup>*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, article on ordination  
<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

silence. God's people need to create a renewed vision of males and females working together and building each other up, representing more fully the image of God. God's people need to create a partnership between males and females to spread the gospel—without worrying about who's to blame for this mess we're in!

### Males and Females in Partnership

How do we go about creating a renewed vision of male-female relationships in the church? There are no easy answers, but I will to offer a few reflections on what I see as steps we can take to move in that direction.

Females are by no means responsible for these struggles that males have, but we must also accept responsibility for our actions. As sisters in Christ, by our behaviors and choices we can cease to add to their struggles in their relationships with us: by our modest rather than immodest dress, by our authenticity rather than manipulation through the power of our gender, and by our viewing males as partners and brothers in Christ, rather than “us against them.”<sup>11</sup>

**Confront the stereotypes and prejudices about females.** I once shared a book about ministering in the local church with a female colleague. After having read it, she offered up an honest and insightful commentary. She said, “Bonita, as I was reading the book, I thought to myself, ‘This is excellent!’ After she had

## MANY REASONS EXIST FOR WHY **BLAME** AND **OPPRES** IN OUR WORLD—AND IN OUR CHURCH. ONE OF

**Accept responsibility for our own actions.** The writings of Tertullian and the other theologians reveal that they viewed females as mentally and spiritually inferior, blaming them for bringing sin into the world and for causing their own temptations in their relationships with females. But this is what the tempter wants. He wants to divert our attention away from the true source of blame. A common phrase in our society is “The devil made me do it.” Well, at least we're going in the right direction with the blame! Ultimately, however, it stops with us.

Many reasons exist for why blame and oppression take place in our world—and in our church. One of those reasons is fear. And I believe that this fear is the underlying motivation behind the words of many of these Early Church theologians. We often ridicule, belittle, or seek to avoid those people or things that we fear the most. One man shared his fear regarding the dynamics of working with women: “I don't think you understand the pull that men feel in relation to women. When I feel that pull, I just have to run because I'm not sure what would happen if I didn't. And isn't that what the Bible says—to flee temptation? I don't know what else to do with everything that I feel.”<sup>9</sup>

This pull, this attraction, is real and often difficult for men. But I believe if we can create safe places in the body of Christ in which together males can openly discuss these struggles, thereby removing the power of the “secret,” they could accept their humanness, help each other with these struggles, and in the power of agape love partner with females in ministry. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7, NKJV).<sup>10</sup>

gotten about three-quarters through the book, however, she read the back of the book to discover that the author was a woman. She continued, “I'm embarrassed to say that when I discovered the gender of the author, even as a woman I began to discount her words.” The view of females as being mentally and spiritually inferior is not confined to the male gender. Unfortunately, females have also embraced this heresy. Could it be that, in addition to the prejudices and fears males bring to the table, females bring their own set of prejudices and fears?

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28, NRSV). Paul undoubtedly makes this threefold affirmation in response to the threefold distinction made in the morning prayers of male Jews at the time: “I thank God that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.”<sup>12</sup>

This text hits at the heart of ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender societal prejudices. The Adventist view relegates this text to merely the equality of salvation for these groups of people.<sup>13</sup> I believe it goes deeper than that. If God calls us to manifest this new paradigm in church fellowship, does it not seem logical that it would also manifest itself in church politics? If we were to truly live out this principle in the body of Christ, we would choose spiritual leadership based on spiritual qualifications rather than societal status. For example, the local professional (i.e., doctor, lawyer, etc.) would not be chosen as head elder merely because of his social standing in society. And the local janitor of that medical office or law firm may instead be gifted with spiritual leadership. If they belonged to the same church, the professional



would then be submitting to the spiritual leadership of someone “below” him socially. *That’s* the radical nature of the gospel!<sup>14</sup> However, in our current paradigm of church politics, besides the opposite of the above scenario often taking place, we exclude females because we confuse male headship in marriage—as God has called us to—with male headship of the church. *Christ* is the head of the church! Female spiritual leadership in the body of Christ does not negate the male headship of the marriage.

**Interpret Scripture through the lens of the gospel and responsible hermeneutics.** I recently listened to an Adventist preacher share his views on females in ministry. He strung together texts in Scripture that on the surface appear to exclude

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females from certain roles. The pastor then said, “These aren’t *my* words; I’m just telling you what’s in Scripture.” I find that to be an irresponsible use of God’s Word.

Scripture is not a book to pull proof texts from in order to prove our theological position. These were living documents given to living persons to reconcile them into a living relationship with a living God. As such, they must be understood within the *context* of that relationship in order to know how they are to apply to our lives today. Scripture has been (mis)used to “prove” some heinous things in human history. A little more than 150 years ago, Christians were quoting Scripture to support slavery as God’s plan for society.

It’s not in the scope of this article to discuss the theological arguments against females in ministry. However, one example of our not viewing Scripture through Christological eyes is the argument of rejecting females in ministry because the Old Testament priests were male. However, these priests were types of Christ, the ultimate high priest as revealed in the book of Hebrews, and, thus, they needed to be male. Yet if we were to take that argument to its logical and consistent conclusion, all male pastors today would be required to submit to a physical examination prior to ordination, as did the Old Testament priests (see Lev. 21). This would mean that no male could be a pastor if he were bald, had unkempt hair, was a dwarf, performed funerals (because dead people are there)—and the list gets *worse!*

If we are to interpret what God’s Word means for us today, we must confront our prejudices and biases, we must seek to discover what God’s Word meant to the original audience, and we must seek to read it through Christological eyes.

### A New Paradigm

Ellen White comments on Galatians 3:28 as follows: “It was not the apostle’s work to overturn arbitrarily or suddenly the established order of society. To attempt this would be to prevent the success of the gospel. But he taught principles which struck at the very foundation of slavery and which, if carried into effect, would surely undermine the whole system.”<sup>15</sup>

From their context of Galatians 3:28, I believe these words can also be applied to race, class, or gender. Jesus had females within his inner circle of followers. Paul labored side-by-side with females in spreading the gospel.<sup>16</sup> They lived and taught the gospel principles that strike at the very foundation of the devaluation of females and which, *if carried into effect*, could surely undermine the whole belief system.

Can you imagine a community of faith where we empowered males and females by our writings, attitudes, and voices? Where males and females strengthened each other for the work of the gospel? Where males and females partnered in ministry to give the world a more complete picture of God? Where *everyone* in the priesthood of all believers was ordained for ministry? Where Tertullian would no longer have the power to bring us to tears?

I want to be part of that community. **AT**

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<sup>1</sup> “Nicene” relates to the ecumenical church council held in Nicaea in Bithynia (present-day Iznik in Turkey) in A.D. 325. This council was convened by Constantine and included 318 bishops—one-sixth of all the bishops of the empire. Next to the apostolic council at Jerusalem, it has been called the most important and illustrative of all the councils of Christendom.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. III, “On The Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises,” p. 523.

<sup>4</sup> Aphrahat, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. XIII, Part II, p. 367.

<sup>5</sup> Denis R. Janz, editor, *A Reformation Reader*, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Basis of Caesarea, *The Hexaemeron*, Homilies 1 & 7, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Simon Mays and Marina Faerman, “Sex Identification in Some Putative Infanticide Victims from Roman Britain Using Ancient DNA,” *Journal of Archaeological Science* (2001), No. 28, pp. 555-559.

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Equal to the Task* (InterVarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, IL, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent treatment of the topic of males and females partnering in the power of love rather than fearing our sexuality, see Ruth Haley Barton’s book noted above, *Equal to the Task*.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller treatment of this aspect of males and females partnering as brothers and sisters in Christ, see Sarah Sumner’s *Males and Females in Leadership* (InterVarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, IL, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1982), p. 187.

<sup>13</sup> *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion on what it would look like for Jews and Gentiles to be “one in Christ,” see the commentary on Galatians 3:28 in *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William Eerdmans Publishing Company: 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 459.

<sup>16</sup> See Mark 15:40, 41; Luke 24:22; 1 Cor. 16; and 3 John as a few examples.

# My GOD *is* BIGGER

## FINDING A JOB AS A FEMALE PASTOR



BY FABIOLA VATEL

I AM A MINISTER. I BELIEVE GOD CALLED ME TO MINISTRY VERY early in life. However, like the young Samuel, my ears weren't yet tuned to God's voice. After passionately running away for a few decades, I finally accepted the call. Incidentally, it took me a little longer to confirm that God had not called me to traditional ministry.

### Trained to Serve

I graduated from Andrews University with a B.A. in English. Five years later I was back in Berrien Springs to attend the seminary. There weren't a lot of free-spirited, artist-creative types enrolled in seminary. There weren't a lot of women either. Almost daily I was approached by a colleague inquiring about my post-graduation plans, "since there are not enough jobs for *you*." I wondered what they meant. Label it outstanding optimism, naïveté, or sheer ignorance; I never once considered the possibility of unemployment after graduation.

Thanks to my strong sense of calling, prayers, tough skin, and great support system, my experience at the seminary empowered me. Almost two years before graduation, I assembled a reliable team of mentors and refurbished my résumé. I even took a few personality tests!

When conference officials came through the seminary to scout out potential candidates, I threw on my power pantsuit and confidently marched into the seminary conference room, attaché in hand and sporting a warm smile I knew I would make an impression. Some interviews bombed, some were exceptional, but none resulted in a hire.

Graduation came and went, and I still had no permanent position. I worked on reviving Freedom Ministries, Inc., a corporation I'd founded pre-seminary. All the while I continued to accept speaking engagements and writing assignments. Months went by. I called on more mentors and prayer warriors. I networked incessantly and overexposed myself.

Some encouraged me to "do my own thing," plant a church or solidify my speaking ministry. Others cautioned that "doing my

own thing" would secure me a spot on the Adventist blacklist. Something had to give. I was broke, full of student loans, and jobless.

### Young, Black, Single, Female, and Blonde

Slowly but surely, disbelief arose among friends and colleagues as they began to question my lack of employment.

"Uh, Fab? Got any skeletons in your closet?"

"What?"

"You know, is there like 'stuff' in your past that would keep someone from hiring you?"

"Dude, are you serious?"

"Look, I'm not trying to offend you, I'm just sayin'—"

"Saying what, man?"

"Fab, it's kinda weird that you can't find *anything*! I mean—"

"Hey, it's not like I'm just sittin' on my butt, you know!"

For months, I spent every waking moment in hot pursuit of employment. I applied to conferences, hospitals, and schools seeking pastoral, chaplaincy, administrative, or teaching positions. I even went to the mission field, but unfortunately had to return due to illness. As doors continued to close, I opted to seek employment outside of the Church since I'd worked in the public sector as a writer, counselor, and in public relations. I edited my résumé for the millionth time. I figured my master's would be a draw.

"What's a 'Master in Divinity?' Is that like spiritualism?"

"We're concerned you'd proselytize our clients, ma'am."

"Uh, so, well...no."

Okay, delete. I'll just say I have a master's degree, period.

"Sorry, ma'am, no."

Fine, I'll apply to other denominations. Maybe I could be like a "rent-a-pastor" for special events without compromising my beliefs.

"Pastor, we're excited about you joining our team!" A ray of hope flickered in my heart as Pastor Ron described my job description in his warm Southern drawl.

“Now all we need is for you to sign our ‘Statement of Beliefs’ form and...”

The words: *We believe that our dead loved ones are in heaven waiting the Lord’s return* pretty much crushed that deal.

Hey, at least I tried. I guess I’m back to square one.



Several conference officials highly impressed with my résumé blatantly expressed that the constituents were not ready for someone young, black, single, and female.

Disbelief began to take over me.

What’s up, God? I sat on my bed one day, legs folded Indian style, facing my bedroom window peering out to the clear sky above, elbows resting on my thighs as I fiddled around with the loose threads on my comforter. I carefully dissected all the possible obstacles that could stand in the way of me getting a job in the Adventist Church.

Okay, my appearance. I can only do so much! I’m black, and that’s a fact. I’m female, fact. My hair is short—intimidating to some? Maybe. Some might think I’m gay or on chemo.

Next.

I’m blonde. Last time I checked, there were lots of blondes employed in the Church. Is the brown skin/blonde hair combination unsettling?

Next.

I’m single. \*Pause.\* Any takers?

Next!

I’m young. Thanks to the health message, I look even 10 years younger than I am.

Are those really barriers, though? Alright, Fab, think about *real* barriers. I failed Hebrew a couple of times. Does that mean I’m incapable of expounding the Word or not called to lead a flock? I speak French fluently, if that makes any difference. I never really balanced a church budget before. What else? What about my personality? How do I come off? How do people perceive me? What do I need to tone down? What do I need to build on? Should I go back to school? Should I go back overseas?

I went on like this for hours. Hours turned to days, and days eventually turned to weeks. Pinpointing my deficiencies almost became an obsession. It was like trying to complete a complex puzzle without having the original picture as a model. Each day was filled with more online applications, more cover letters, a million follow-ups, and endless rejection letters or rejection phone calls:

“We’ll keep your application on file for up to a year.”

“Sorry, the economy is really bad right now; we’re on a hiring freeze.”

“If we hear of anything, we’ll let you know.”

“We just hired a woman; we want to see how that’s going to work out.”

“We know that God has a special place for you in ministry; thanks for thinking of us.”

## Moving On

I had a choice. I could either react negatively, marinate in my disbelief, and allow anger, hostility, and bitterness at the system to take over, or I could choose to respond positively. Given my personality, I chose the latter.

It occurred to me that despite the fact that I followed the textbook-perfect way of seeking employment, and despite my talents and calling, there simply may not be any room for me in my own Church. It was time to carve out my own path.

These days, I choose to focus on my strengths and how to develop even more skill and expertise. Unemployment allowed me to read voraciously, attend excellent equipping seminars, and digest numerous audio books. I finally re-established my speaking ministry.

I am convinced that I need not fit into a traditional mold to accomplish what God has called me to do. Many of my male and female pastor friends have also come to this conclusion. Our cross-cultural appeal allows us to minister to people that most Adventists would run away from. Although we do quite well ministering to the faithful and those who know Christ but choose to reject him, we work best among those who don’t know him at all. As long as there are souls to save, we have a huge job to do.

I am blessed with the precious gift of unshakeable faith, consistent optimism, determination, and an amazing sense of humor. Despite the fact that many of my experiences the past year have not always been humorous or pleasant, God has done a remarkable job preserving my sanity!

New Thought writer Emmet Fox once said that “it is the Law that any difficulties that can come to you at any time, no matter what they are, must be exactly what you need most at the moment, to enable you to take the next step forward by overcoming them. The only real misfortune, the only real tragedy, comes when we suffer without learning the lesson.”

God has blessed me with the precious gift of growth through disappointment. He has entrusted me with deeper understanding of his sovereignty. I’ve gained a greater passion for his Word and a better picture of my calling.

I’ve learned that human disappointment precedes divine victory. The word *impossible* does not exist in God’s vocabulary. He eagerly transforms situations in my favor. A closed door for me is an opportunity for him. A “no” in the natural is a “says who?” in the supernatural.

God is big. God is bigger than any obstacle. God is bigger than the status quo. I have a God-ordained ministry designed by the Creator himself! I couldn’t ask for a better boss. **AT**

# The People

Recently my journalism students and I were discussing Jean Dominique-Bauby's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, a short memoir in which Bauby, former editor of the French magazine *Elle*, described being paralyzed from head to toe by locked-in syndrome. Bauby's only remaining

movement was blinking his left eyelid. This, in fact, was how he wrote *Diving Bell*: by blinking his left eyelid to signal to his transcriber each letter he wanted. (Bauby died two days after the book's publication.)

Bauby told how some of the most deep and meaningful letters he received, while in the hospital, were from the people he had known only superficially. "Their small talk," he wrote, "had masked hidden

depths. Had I been blind and deaf, or does it take the harsh light of disaster to show a person's true nature?"

My students and I got into a discussion about the people around *us*—the people we see only periodically, on a surface level. We decided to interview these people, asking them the same types of questions



# Around You

**What if you knew  
what they were  
really thinking?**

**BY ANDY NASH**

about life, society, and God. For unity's sake, we selected eight people whom I see occasionally (but don't know well) in the Chattanooga area, where I live.

The students scattered, set up interviews (most not mentioning their connection with me), and brought back the following conversations. As the guy who knows these people only superficially, I found the

interviews most interesting—and in many cases, surprising. I was particularly struck by how busy these people are, how much they have on their minds, and how alike we truly are.



*Of course, the patients who pass away—you remember those. I had a lady—she was going to turn a hundred, and she invited me to her hundredth birthday party and she passed away the month before.*

—SHANNON

**Shannon: Dental Hygienist, Early 30s, White**

INTERVIEW BY RACHEL FEHL

*Shannon grew up in Martinsville, Va., and moved to Tennessee shortly after getting married. As a kid, Shannon wanted to be a pediatrician. When she was 8, her home was broken by divorce, so she wanted to reach out to kids hurting from similar circumstances. Although her career plans changed, her desire to help others hasn't.*

**What brings you the most joy?**

The fact that you actually can help people prevent things and that you get feedback from patients. Watching the patients grow, you know, like the kids. Patient education, basically.

**Have you had any particularly memorable experiences with a patient?**

Yes, I have. One guy said a prayer with me when my husband was having a hard time finding a job. That really touched me, and he found a job like a week later. [voice gets shaky] That was pretty touching. Of course, the patients who pass away—you remember those. I had a lady—she was going to turn a hundred, and she invited me to her hundredth birthday party and she passed away the month before. So just stuff like that. You always have memorable experiences of really hard patients that are difficult to work on, and that only makes me strive to make them like me.

**Who is your hero or role model?**

I would say my parents. I wouldn't have said that when I was 20, but now looking back [laughs]—I'm 30, I'll be 31 on Sunday—they did what they could do to raise me, and they really did instill principles and values and morals in me that they might not have necessarily done for themselves [voice gets shaky], but I learned from them. They're my parents.

**If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?**

Maybe that I would have more drive for some of the things that I've always wanted to do.

**What would you do?**

Maybe sing. To be able to get up in front of an audience. I like to do it like a closet singer, you know, or a shower singer.

**What is your view of God?**

I was never really religious growing up, but there has to be a reason for everything, so . . . I'm not really religious, I don't go to church. I believe in a God—in God. I just don't know much about him, honestly, and that's sad to say at 31. I've been invited [to church] a lot by patients and people that I work with, and I just honestly—I know this is bad—I've read some of the Bible, but I know you need to make time for that and I guess I'm just lazy [voice gets a little shaky]. That's horrible. And that's just being flat out honest. So ... [laughs]

**Chai: Cook, Chinese Food Take-Out, Late 20s, Asian**

INTERVIEW BY STEPHANIE EDWARD

*Chai, one of the cooks at China Kitchen, always has a smile on his face for customers. It never falters, even after a long day like this one.*

**What makes you happy?**

My most happy times are with my family. My wife, my kid.

**What has been your most memorable experience with a customer?**

A couple of years ago, at Christmas time, an old lady, probably 70 years old, she tipped me, like, \$20. Yes, I still remember that. [laughing]



**Who is the most important person in your life and why?**

That would be my mom. Because she always takes care of me and teaches me to be a good person.

**What do you live for?**

I think I'm living for my family. That's why I'm working hard, you know, seven days a week, 12-hour days. Everything I do is for my family.

**Describe your perfect day.**

My day? Perfect day? [sighs longingly] That I could be with my wife and my kid shopping at the mall. Happy hour, you know [smiling].

**Who is God to you, or who is the higher power that you worship or believe in?**

That would be my religion? Buddha. Yes.

**What is your greatest worry or concern? What do you worry about?**

Right now? Economy. Because everything gets worse.

**Hmm, bad for the businesses?**

Yes, yes, for everything.

**What did you want to be when you grew up?**

[chuckling] I wanted to be a policeman. I always thought that policemen were cool. To me, you know. Yes, everything. Handsome. Cool. Just cool. [laughs]

**If you could change something in your life, what would you change?**

My age! [starts laughing] I want to be young. I want to be when I'm like 8 years old.

**You were happier when you were a child?**

[starts laughing again] Yes, yes. Always good. Nothing to worry about. Always want to be a kid. Just don't want to grow up.

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**Sharon: Manager, Subway Restaurant, Early 50s, White**

INTERVIEW BY EMILY YOUNG

*Sharon works 55 hours each week as a manager at Subway. She is divorced and has a son and a daughter, both in their mid-20s. She has lived in the Chattanooga area all her life. She is a dedicated Jehovah's Witness.*

**What did you want to be when you grew up?**

[laughs] Different things. When I was little, I wanted to be a nun. I'm not Catholic, knew nothing about Catholicism. A writer, that was my biggest thing. I loved journalism in high school.

**Do you feel that society is getting better or worse?**

It's worse. Just based on my religious beliefs, prophecy, the gradualism of things getting worse, and Satan is getting more control.

**What brings you the most joy?**

Probably my religion and my kids.

**Who is your hero/role model and why?**

I don't know. I love to learn from people and see the good.

**Describe your perfect day.**

That's a tough one, because you immediately think vacation, but not necessarily. I would think it would probably be some ministry work in the morning, taking a big nap, and probably having dinner with my kids.

**What do you worry about most?**

Another tough one. [long pause, starts to cry] I'm one of those people...I don't know...Let's see. [laughs through tears] I think too deeply is what it is. [goes to grab a tissue] I don't know. I guess people not having a spiritual opportunity. That would probably top the list.

**What's your view of God?**

Well, that he's a loving God. That he doesn't want anyone to be destroyed. That he allows opportunity for repentance. That he's extremely merciful, much more than we could ever even hope to be. Thank goodness.

**If you could change something about your life, what would it be?**

Good gracious. Well, if I could I would have much more time for spiritual things because this job just eats up the time. There is no time. It's really, really hard to stay balanced.

**Do you mind if I pray with you before I go?**

I'd rather not, but I appreciate it.

*Uhh, boy, I don't worry about a whole lot. I worry about my kids more than anything. About their health, well-being, and their progression in education.*

-SHANE

**Jonathan: Presbyterian Pastor, Mid-30s, White**

INTERVIEW BY ADRIENNE VERNON

*A golfer. An avid reader. A husband. A father of two. Jonathan is a Presbyterian pastor of seven years whose ministry pervades his life. He felt a clear call to ministry while a freshman at Wheaton College in Illinois. After graduating, Jonathan served in youth ministry for a couple of years until pursuing a master's degree at Princeton Theological Seminary.*

**What did you want to be when you grew up?**

I thought, if anything I might be a teacher. There are a lot of teachers in my family.

**How do you see God?**

Well, first of all, we know God through the scriptures, but as I look at the scriptures, I think there are two aspects of God that come out. One is God's transcendence. Just his greatness, holiness. But at the same time, he's also immanent. He's with us. He's near. He's approachable. He's a friend.

**What brings you the most joy?**

I think joy comes from knowing you're right in the center of God's will and you're doing exactly what you know God wants you to do. So it can be experienced by trying to be a husband and a father, and that's being right where I'm supposed to be. When I'm doing the things I feel called to do as a pastor, I feel God's pleasure because I know I'm doing what he wants me to do.



**What do you worry about most?**

Wow. What do I worry about most? [sighs...pauses] Well, I guess I tie a lot of myself into my work and into the church. It's something, like I said, that gives me great joy, but I worry when things don't go well at church or when somebody leaves the church. But I have to say, and this isn't just the standard Sunday school answer, but I honestly don't feel like I worry a whole lot. I really just have a sense that the Lord's got control of things.

**Who is your hero or role model?**

Probably those men who were my teachers in high school and college especially. I always admired people who were very competent, capable, intelligent, accomplished—that sort of thing—but also had humility at the same time.

**Do you believe that society is getting better or worse?**

Hmm. [sighs] Let me think and pause for a minute on that one. I don't believe in any spiritual or moral progress to man. I think we are fundamentally sinful, flawed people, and in some ways, nothing has probably changed over the years. I'm hesitant to be all doom and gloom.



Maybe in our own society [things] may seem to be more negative, but if we look globally, I think we've seen some wonderful changes. So let's not just look at America or the West—that may be a little more depressing to us. I don't know. I teeter on the brink from optimism to pessimism about where our world is these days.

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### **Shane: Certified Financial Advisor, Late 30s, White**

INTERVIEW BY RENEE CEROVSKI

*Shane grew up in Washington, Ind., but went to the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga on a basketball scholarship and played in the NCAA Tournament. Shane and his wife, Kylie, have four young children.*

#### **What did you want to be when you grew up?**

Probably a professional basketball player. My father was a high school basketball coach, so in essence I grew up in a basketball family.

#### **Who is your hero or role model, and why?**

Oh! Uh, that's not an easy question; I don't have a good answer for that. I think my mother and father. They instilled a work ethic in me. It never occurred to me to have a hero, I guess, just people throughout your life that you look up to, that you respect, that you want to emulate.

#### **What is your view of God?**

What is my view? Uh, the first thing is that I believe in him, and the Trinity—the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And that Jesus died for us; that's the belief.

#### **What brings you the most joy?**

Probably at this point in my life, to watch my kids grow up and enjoy themselves with my wife. I think that's what gives me the most joy right now.

#### **What do you worry about the most?**

Uhh, boy, I don't worry about a whole lot. I worry about my kids more than anything. About their health, well-being, and their progression in education. I've got a couple kids in school, and you worry: *Are they getting it? Are they learning?*

#### **Do you think that the world is getting better or worse?**

Oh man! I want to say it's both at the same time. It has gotten worse, but there's the possibility that it is and it can get better.

#### **Describe your perfect day.**

I have no idea. To be able to sleep in. That would be the start of it. To spend the majority of the time with my family, with my kids. Umm, I don't know. As far as details on the perfect day, I don't have those. I've never really thought about what the perfect day would look like.

#### **If you could change something about your life, what would it be?**

Mmmm. I don't think I would change anything. You go through life with things that are good, bad, and indifferent, but I don't think you have regrets about that; it's what your life becomes.

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### **Tish: Hairstylist, Mid-30s, White**

INTERVIEW BY JACQUELINE LILES

*With a cheerful nature and sweet Southern accent, Tish answered the following questions over the buzzing of hair clippers as she worked on a client's hair. When the interview was over, she looked up and said, "That's it? I was just getting warmed up!"*

#### **Have you always wanted to do hair for a living?**

I wanted to be a psychologist. I've always known that I wanted to help people, though. Always.

#### **So when did you decide to do hair?**

When I couldn't finish college [laughter].

#### **What do you like most about your job?**

Being around people. I get to be creative. Let's see. Good money; I work three days. My clients are my friends. I'm a very social person.

#### **What brings you the most joy in life?**

Work. My family. I love being around my family. And helping people—any way I can.

#### **So you really like to help people, and your work gives you an opportunity to do that. In what other ways do you like to help others?**

Like, for instance, my neighbor called. She had a slight heart attack, and I told her that if she needed anything whenever she got home that I'd be willing to come up there and cook a meal or cook a meal at my house and bring it up there. Or even shampoo her hair just so she feels good.

*I don't even know where to begin. It's so different. I don't know. The people, the style of living. Here in the U.S., people work, work, work. It seems like that's all we do here. No time for anything.*

**-ORLANDO**

**What do you worry about the most?**

My daughter—how I'm raisin' her. I guess my family. I guess everybody's health and where the world's goin'. My daughter's future—let's see, it's just totally different than it used to be even when I grew up, and I'm not that old!

**If you could change something or anything about your life, what would you change?**

I need a piece of paper! I wish I were a morning person. I mean, really, that's huge. I'm a night owl, and it's hard when you have a child because you know they gotta be on a routine. And if you're not on a routine, they're not on a routine. That would be one thing.

**What's your view on God?**

I love God. Wonderful. As a matter of fact, I'm trying to get closer to him right now. I actually was reading a book last night that my friend got me on how to pray. To me, you don't have life without him.

**Can you recall a day that you really enjoyed?**

We went to Florida. It was me and my best friend and her kids and her husband and another friend of mine. We went on this canoe ride, and it was just very relaxing and fun. I'll tell you another one: just havin' all my family together. We like playing board games and karaoke. I just got my husband that Play Station 3, the Rock Band 2. I do have very hard days. But I would say that one sticks out—the canoe ride on the little river.

**Chelsey: Gas Station Clerk, 20, Black**

INTERVIEW BY HANNAH KUNTZ AND CHRISTINA WEITZEL

*Even though she's only 20, Chelsey has a lot more responsibility than an average young adult. A preacher's kid, she's lived in Chattanooga her whole life, and while she currently works full-time at a BP gas station, she plans to go back to school soon to become a recreational therapist. She has dreams to get out of Chattanooga, where she says there's nothing to do other than ride around and waste gas.*

**Who is your hero?**

My mom. She has raised three kids [with] no government assistance or any of that. She's bought three cars for three kids on top of hers.

**What is one of the things you worry about most in your life?**

I worry about my mom constantly. And then a big worry of mine is my friend. She's 19, and she's got a daughter. The little girl's 2, and ever since day one my friend has not been any kind of mom. So I've had her [the girl] since she was 4 months old. Her name's Lila.

**What do you think about current society—is it getting better or worse?**

Worse. The economy is whacked. I hope and I pray that Bush gets out and Obama does something. That [the election] was a day of history, you know, but I just hope he doesn't get assassinated.

**What is one of your life goals?**

I guess to raise the baby and make sure she is grown; so probably keeping myself maintained as far as I can in order to raise her physically, mentally, and financially. A gas station does not raise a kid or a 20-year-old.

### What is your spiritual outlook and your view of God?

I do believe in God. I do believe in hell and heaven. I do believe that. I do believe in forgive and it will be forgotten, just do not keep forgetting.

### If you could change something about life in general what would you change?

I was a hellion. I would have done what I did a whole lot different.

### What inspires you?

I really wish I could help overseas. And there's like overseas kids that are dying, going to sleep hungry. It makes me sick. I wish I had a never-ending cash flow and could just go and feed [the kids]. That's a big hope and dream.



## Orlando, Server, Mexican Restaurant, 44, Hispanic

INTERVIEW BY KATHERINE WILSON

*Though Orlando is currently working near Chattanooga, his heart is in his native Puerto Rico with his wife and two children. He also has two grown children from an earlier marriage.*

### What did you want to be when you grew up?

Well, I had wanted to do a couple of things such as boxing and baseball. I would always be outside playing with the rest of the kids from my neighborhood. But yeah, then I got married and had kids, so that was the end of that.

### What are some cultural differences that you see between Puerto Rico and the United States?

I don't even know where to begin. It's so different. I don't know. The people, the style of living. Here in the U.S., people work, work, work. It seems like that's all we do here. No time for anything.

### Why did you come to the U.S.?

I came to work. I want to save enough money here and then go back to my family in Puerto Rico. There are more opportunities here, but I do miss Puerto Rico a lot. I am planning to go back in 2009.

### What is your view about God?

He exists. I don't go to church, but I know that he is alive because, hmm, because we see what he has created. It's hard to explain, but he is alive.

### If you could change anything about your life, what would it be?

Change about my life? Nothing at all. Life is somewhat like a journey, and you never know what to expect. I would not change anything because then I would not have learned what I know today. You

understand? Life itself is a university. If I were to change things, then I would not be the person I am today.

### Who is your role model?

Definitely my mom. My dad also, but mainly my mother. She is a strong woman, and she has taught me a lot about life. When I was a child, she would tell me to do the right thing, but me as a child, I never listened to what she told me. I would always end up doing my own things, then realizing that she was right and I should have listened more.

### Describe your perfect day.

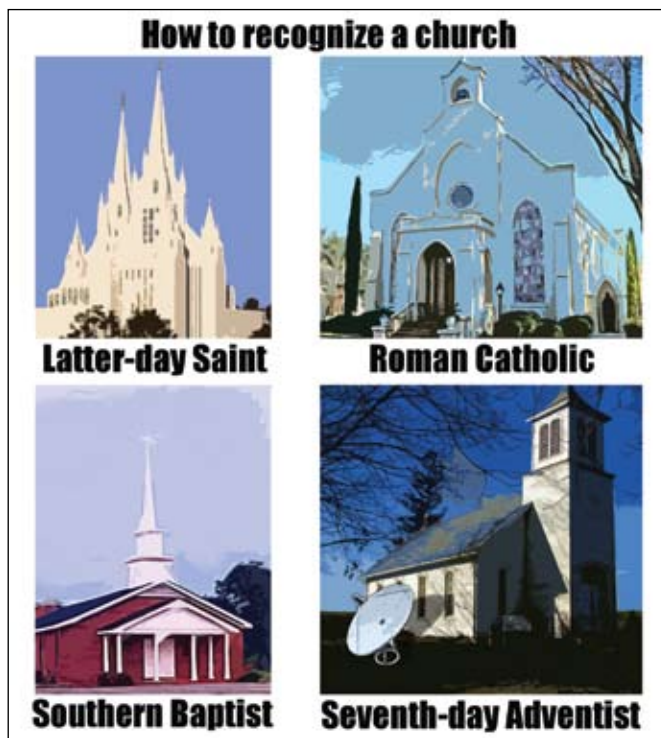
Wake up in the morning and not have to go to work. I would spend the whole day at home, but not here, in Puerto Rico. A day with the family is always a perfect day.

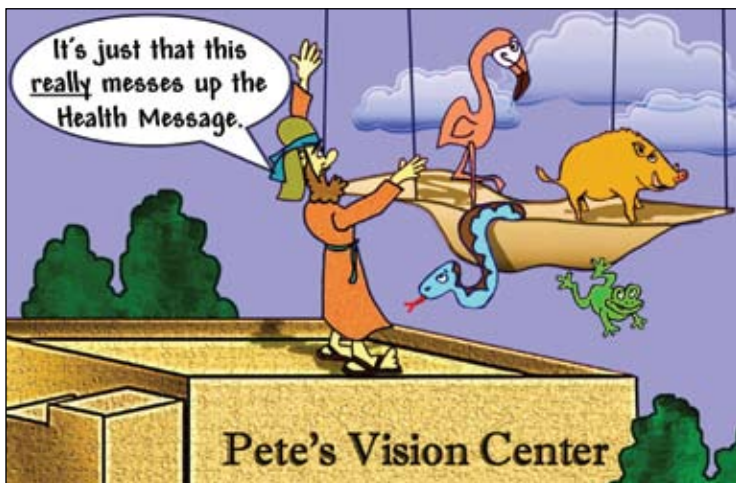
### If you could give us young people some advice about life, what advice would you give us?

[thinks for awhile] I would tell you not to rush life. People say life is short, but take your time. Don't get married at a young age. I have a 21-year-old daughter who just gave birth to her second child today. Why do they think they need to rush into things? Teenagers are having children at 14 and 15. They do not enjoy life to the fullest. Don't get married till later. There is no rush. There are so many experiences to go through, especially when you are young. Get an education, travel, do things you enjoy doing. **AT**



# By the Adventist CARICATURIST





Wallace began to suspect foul play when he found yet *another* needle in his haystacks.



Then by sheer luck, scientists from the Geoscience Research Institute discovered the *Secret Raptor*, changing Adventist beliefs forever.

**Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685**

1.Publication Title: Adventist Today. 2. Publication No.1079-5499. 3. Filing Date: December 08, 2008. 4. Issue Frequency: quarterly. 5. No. Issues Published Annually: 4. 6. Annual Subscription Price: \$29.50. 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: Adventist Today, 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Biology, Annex 1. Campus Box 128, Riverside, CA 92515. Contact Person: Ervin Taylor. Telephone: 951-785-1295. 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Biology, Annex 1. Campus Box 128, Riverside, CA 92515. 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor; Publisher: Elwin Dunn, 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Campus Box 128, Riverside CA 92515. Editor: Andy Nash, 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Campus Box 128, Riverside, CA 92515. Managing Editor: Debra J. Hicks, 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Campus Box 128, Riverside, CA 92515. 10. Owner: Adventist Today Foundation non-profit. 4500 Riverwalk Parkway, Campus Box 128, Riverside, CA 92515. 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: none. 12. Tax Status: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months. 13. Publication Title: Adventist Today. 14. Issue Data for Circulation Data Below: January/February 2009. 15. Extent and Nature of Circulation: a. Total No. of Copies, Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months 2000: No. Copies of Single Issue Published nearest to Filing Date: 2000. b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail): 1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies), Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1597; No. Copies of Single Issue published Nearest to Filing Date: 1597. 2) Mailed In-County Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies); Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: N/A; No. Copies of Single Issue published Nearest to Filing Date: N/A. 3) Paid distribution outside the Mails including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS; Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 10; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 10. 4) Paid distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail) ; Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 90; No. Copies of Single Issue published Nearest to Filing Date: 90. c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1),(2),(3), and(4) Average NO. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1697; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 1697. d) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (by Mail and Outside the Mail 1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541; Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: N/A; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: N/A. 2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541; Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: N/A; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: N/A. 3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail) Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: N/A; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: N/A. 4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means) Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 100; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 100. e. Total Free or Nominal Distribution (Sum of 15d (1),(2),(3) and (4); Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 100; No. Copies of Single Issue published Nearest to Filing Date: 100. f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e); Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1797; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 1797. g. Copies not Distributed ( See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3)); Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 203; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 203. h. Total (Sum of 15f and g); Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 2000; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 2000. i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100); Average no. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months; 93.43; No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 93.43. 16. Publication of Statement of Ownership, Publication required. Will be printed in the Fall 2009 issue of this publication. 17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner, Hanan Sadek, Office Manager 12/08/08

**7 QUESTIONS**  
for...Tami and Jeff Cinquemani *By Marcel Schwantes*



Jeff Cinquemani is the associate pastor for Florida Hospital Church, a vibrant and progressive Adventist church community in Orlando with close to 1,000 members. Tami Cinquemani, his wife, currently serves as its worship director.

Their church is known for dynamic and creative outreach to their community. But Jeff and Tami had no idea that “outreach” would reach global proportions, thanks to a video on YouTube that made headlines, literally, on CNN’s *Headline News* and put Florida Hospital Church on the map.

The video? Well, three pastors’ wives at Florida Hospital Church often end up being the topic of conversation in their husbands’ sermon illustrations. So they returned serve. Vicki McDonald (married to senior pastor Andy), Amy Achata (married to youth pastor David), and Tami collaborated on making a parody music video to poke fun at their husbands. They revamped Carrie Underwood’s popular “Before He Cheats” with their own rendition of “Before He Speaks.” It was only intended to be shown at their annual church retreat. But then it was posted on YouTube...

160,000 hits later and counting, the CNN segment, the buzz in the blogosphere, and the church’s media team had a new problem on their hands: how to outdo themselves. They did just that, producing another hilarious satire called “Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Pastors.” Pastor Jeff provided lyrics. Excerpts:

*Mamas, don’t let your babies grow up to be pastors.  
Don’t let them tape sermons  
And buy them ole books.  
Keep them from pulpits and potlucks and Rook.*

Jeff and Tami explain how it all happened and the impact these videos have made.

**How did the idea get started, and who wrote, directed, and lent the wonderful voice to the songs?**

**TAMI:** The pastors’ wives video was a “wild hair” idea I had in the shower one day while listening to the original Carrie Underwood song. I ran the idea by the other pastors’ wives, and we produced it as a surprise for our husbands at our annual church retreat program. When it became such a hit, we knew we had to make another!

Jeff and I had written the lyrics for “Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Pastors” years ago. Jeff sang it on the video with church member Caitlin Marcellino, an amazingly versatile talent and also the soloist on both videos. Stanley Pomianowski, our talented media director, did the shooting and editing and recorded Jeff and Caitlin singing.

**“Before He Speaks” has garnered national attention. What has the feedback been like?**

**JEFF:** We actually were quite surprised at how that video took off. To be honest, I was blown away when I saw it for the first time. Most of the responses have been positive, and as a collateral blessing we were glad that so many resonated with the theme of the video, even though it was not really written because of some pre-existing pastoral confidentiality problem (a question we have been asked by some). As you can see, they have no problem with exposure to the public! I’M KIDDING...

**TAMI:** We continue to receive great response. Some did take it a bit more seriously, and there were a couple of comments offering sympathies for the pastor’s family who may not be happy about having their foibles laid before the congregation.

**In what ways has the attention received from your videos impacted the Florida Hospital Church?**

**JEFF:** I guess the best impact has been how our younger members have jumped on board to become a part of what they believe to be a ministry where they can truly contribute. It is the expression, the creativity, and the connecting that I think has them excited about finally being a part of something that is not a token contribution, but rather a relevant medium to their friends in and out of their church. I believe the potential of where the Lord could bring this is beyond all of our imaginations.

**TAMI:** I think the great thing that happened was that it branched out and “scratched an itch” with a variety of churches and denominations. The Florida Hospital Church feels very strongly about the benefits of networking with and supporting Christians of all denominations.

**In the “Mamas” video, I’m curious about your choice to risk offending by using sarcasm and tongue-in-cheek humor rather than keeping it safe. Some have said the video is “bad-mouthing pastors.”**



**JEFF:** Well, if you go back to the original lyrics, it is actually a song that romanticizes cowboys. I wrote those lyrics because I am a pastor and, though at times I do romanticize it myself and would never change my calling, there is still a fair amount of pain and joy that goes along with this profession—for me as well as my family. So although it was satirical, I do feel strongly that if a pastor “runs” his career at the cost of always sacrificing his own family, he runs down a disastrous path. Some have alluded that we have hidden agendas with this video to promote certain issues. I would just

# Adventist Man

like to invite them to one of our brainstorming sessions. These videos are much more about involvement and inclusion than about hidden agendas. However, I believe that when we have instigated provocative conversations between differing generations, and believers and nonbelievers, we have succeeded. I believe that through our learning—and, yes, our mistakes—a generation of pastors will arise who will connect and learn to become even more relevant to their world than we have been, which may not be saying a lot (and that is not sarcasm).

**Do you get requests from other churches to produce parody videos? What can we expect next from the Florida Hospital Church?**

**TAMI:** We are fortunate that other churches have shown an interest. We definitely plan on continuing to make them and have several ideas already on the drawing board. However, where we really want to expend our energies is in producing video worship products of excellence and quality.

**Changing topics a bit, Tami, you've done some paid modeling work over the years in Orlando. For Adventist women in the modeling environment, is it a difficult balance to stay true to your principles?**

**TAMI:** There are definitely a number of jobs that I won't even consider, but my agents know I'm a Christian, and they've always been very understanding of my choices. The important thing for anyone considering this path is to be very up-front about where you draw your lines from the very beginning of your relationship with your agents.

**Florida Hospital Church is known for its ability to play together—to have a good time. How important is the social aspect of a church family?**

**JEFF:** If we are able to laugh at ourselves, I believe it is a pretty good barometer of how authentic and real our congregation is. Yes, there are always going to be those hard times that church families have to go through, and we are no exception. However, if we as a body of believers can find those times where we sit back and say, "you know, it's not about us," I truly think we would grow and find that our smiles just might become contagious.

## Fundamentals Creed "Celebration" Clones Linketts or Big Franks?

**Have the 28 Adventist fundamentals become a de facto creed?**

"In the beginning, God created *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*"

*Oops, sorry! Wrong opening.*

When the original scroll appeared in a Maryland cave in 1980, perhaps the most important Adventist fundamental was the opening sentence of the preface: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed . . ."

In other words: "We will not use this document as a test for fellowship, as has historically been the case with the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and for Rocky, the bruising Apollo Creed. We promise (really truly!) to accept only the Bible as a measuring stick."

Objections had been raised, even by Adventist Man, that the new document could possibly be employed as a creed (something Adventist pioneers fiercely opposed). But those objections were hushed with bland assurances: "No, mercy, no—that will never happen. The document is merely a summary."

That was then.

The fundamental beliefs document is currently used as a creedal statement for employment in some Adventist schools, churches, and conferences—the precise result we were all assured would never take place.

*Oops, sorry, James and Ellen, Joseph and J.N., Uriah and Stephen, Willie and Edson! Wrong ending.*

**Why are so many Adventist "celebration" churches so predictable? Are they cloned?**

Yes, they are. Adventist Man believes they were secretly cloned by Jesuits during the decade prior to the cloning of Dolly the sheep on July 5, 1996.

Since then, all "celebration" churches feature a "cool" tieless pastor, "praise music" with endless repetitions of Bible texts, prayers that overuse the word "just," large multimedia screens, and a tacit disdain for the "status quo."



**Which is better—Linketts or Big Franks?**

This question has transfixed the world's epicures for eons.

A typical Worthington Loma Linda (a secular/sacred mix) can contain 10 Linketts or eight Big Franks, giving the initial impression of providing more Linketts for the money. However, if one considers the actual bulk of "vegetable and grain protein" placed on each bun, then the far more rotund Big Frank offers better value. The rest is, naturally, a matter of taste.

Of course, many hot dog purists scornfully scoff at the very idea of a vegetarian hot dog. They prefer eating *unadulterated* hot dogs—made from pig and cow genitalia, eyeballs, ears, lips, anuses, brains, intestines, and any raw skeletal muscle that gets caught in the drain.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

*Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has "the answer." As a former member of "the remnant of the remnant," Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com)*

