



# General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter

An informative publication for members of the General Conference Executive Committee as a service through the office of the Chair

JANUARY 2020

*“So, tell me about the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”* This is a request I hear repeatedly as I represent the Church on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. People want to know: “Who do you represent? What values do you bring to the table?”

It’s a fascinating experience to introduce the Adventist Church to people who sometimes know little about us. Some confuse us with other denominations. Others associate us with vegetarianism and Sabbath-keeping. Others are only familiar with our long history of religious liberty advocacy. Still others are aware of our health care networks or schools but have only a vague sense of our beliefs.

This is our challenge. How can we as Christ’s ambassadors convey to key thought leaders the incredible richness of what it means to be Seventh-day Adventists, bearers of a special message and mandate?

In his article, Ganoune Diop reminds us of this often-neglected mission field—the public realm, made up of political, academic, religious and social influencers. It’s a difficult mission landscape, yet one in which we’re called to engage as we seek to “disarm prejudice”<sup>1</sup> and to educate society’s leaders “in the school of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

I pray that in this new year we will be, “a humble and bold witness” as Christ’s ambassadors, in whatever spheres of influence He calls us to.

—BETTINA KRAUSE,  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND  
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 452.

<sup>2</sup>Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Aug 21, 1900.

EDITORIAL



## 2020: GLOBAL PRIORITIES AND SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST FOCUS ON JESUS’ COMPREHENSIVE COMMISSION

BY GANOUNE DIOP, PH.D., DIRECTOR  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Entering a new year is an excellent time to assess priorities and focus on the road ahead. From a Public Affairs perspective, 2020 is set to be an eventful year.

In the global political world, emphasis will no doubt be placed on climate change and climate justice. Gender equity/equality will also be an international focus. The rise of persecution of Christians will most definitely be part of global conversation this year.

At national levels, the elections in the U.S. promise to impact several interrelated issues, not only domestic internal affairs, but also foreign policies, international affairs, and the intersections of public policy and morality.

### RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

In the current global context, the framing of rights is at times done in competition with one another. The misunderstanding of religious

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freedom (also called freedom of religion or belief), is part of the global landscape. Consequently, religious freedom is, unfortunately, positioned against other civil rights. Because of the accusation that religious freedom has become a tool for discrimination, it has become urgent to revisit the very nature of religious freedom and contribute to helping the global community recapture the centrality of this fundamental freedom. The Seventh-day Adventist church can play a pivotal role as it has consistently done since its beginnings and its charting of the first international religious liberty association in 1893.

Christian denominations, in attempts to be relevant to the global community, also engage in addressing topics that matter in the global arena. Leaders of many churches are mobilizing their members and call upon other leaders to partner to address global challenges. Seventh-day Adventists are prudent not to fall for the instrumentalization of what matters to the international community to promote ecclesiastical agendas.

## FOCUS ON MISSION

For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2020 is the year of a new quinquennium. It will be a time of assessment, of re-envisioning the path forward toward the future success of the mission God has entrusted to the care of His Church. This mission is challenged to be not only global but also comprehensive, neglecting no segment or sector of societies anywhere.

What will the focus of the coming quinquennium be? How will it be concretely related to mission? What kind of mission

model(s)? Will it be bold enough? Will it be comprehensive?

Will our strategic planning be mindful that of the approximately 8 billion people in the world there are only 2.4 billion Christians including 1.2 billion Catholics (see chart)?

The Three Angel's Messages destined to the whole world cannot be limited to a language only comprehensible to Christians. How will we engage other groups?

Will Seventh-day Adventists, as some voices at the fringe of the church advocate, retreat from the public space for fear of ecumenism and thus give up global comprehensive mission to all sectors of society? Will mission be restricted to so-called developing countries? Will the nomenclature of "unreached" encompass more than the 10/40 window to include secular, postmodern, post Christian societies of the Northern Hemisphere where church growth is facing its most serious challenges?

How could mission to less affluent sectors of the world be encouraged while not neglecting the Northern Hemisphere? Will strategic planning provide blueprints for comprehensive evangelism whereby no segment of society will be neglected? Preference for the poor is not only a contemporary socio-economic

## RELIGIOUS GROUPS\*

Christians	2.4 billion
Muslims	1.9 billion
Secular/Agnostic/Atheists	1.2 billion
Hindus	1.15 billion
Buddhists	521 million
Chinese traditional religion	394 million
Ethnic religions	300 million
African traditional religions	100 million
Sikhs	30 million
Spiritualists	15 million
Judaism	14.5 million
Jainism	4.2 million
Shinto	4 million
Neo-Paganism	1 million

\*Includes other minority groups such as the Unitarian Universalism, the Rastafari and perhaps more.

category, it seems also that mission endeavors tend to overwhelmingly focus on the poor to the neglect of the more affluent people.

Ellen White gave counsel regarding this, and we will consider several items coming from her inspired pen.

## INSPIRED COUNSEL

"It requires much wisdom to reach ministers and men of influence. But why should they be neglected as they have been by our people?" wrote Ellen White in 1890. "... Should there not be a deeper study, and much more humble prayer for wisdom, that we may learn how to reach these classes?"<sup>1</sup>

Ten years later she pleaded: "The men in high positions of trust should be educated in the school of



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Fear of failure may stifle the boldness to witness to our educated contemporaries. Engaging learned ones is a must if we would fulfill the mission entrusted to the Church's care.

Christ. Do not shun these influential men.”<sup>22</sup>

During her lifetime, ministers of other denominations and persons of influence were neglected. Assessing the situation, she made the following appeal:

“God has a work to be done which the workers have not yet fully comprehended. Ministers and worldly-wise men are to be tested by the light of the present truth. The third angel's message is to be set forth before the learned ones of this world, judiciously, in its native dignity.”<sup>23</sup>

The character and native dignity of the message must be judiciously articulated before people so that they may not discard it as unworthy of their consideration because of our failure to present it in a logical and compelling way. At times, fear of failure may stifle the boldness to witness to our educated contemporaries. Engaging learned ones is a must if we would fulfill the mission entrusted to the Church's care. May 2020 be a turning point in a deliberate expansion of the scope of God's mission to which we are called to participate.

## BALANCING MISSION AND END TIMES EVENTS

Barriers to reach all people with the everlasting gospel are not just because of external prejudices. They are also erected because of personal prejudices.

These personal prejudices take the form of fear to

openly embrace Adventist prophetic identity, leading some to just want to be like others and avoid focusing on Seventh-day Adventist distinctive beliefs. This trend only insists on features of the gospel that we hold in common with other Christians. The world is thus deprived of blessings God intended to all people prior to the Second Coming. The neglected high priestly ministry of Jesus is one of those blessings entrusted to Seventh-day Adventists. The potential of relevancy is great. What matters to the world finds a wonderful intersection with Jesus as High Priest, restorer of justice. Comprehensive justice matters to God and to our contemporaries.

There are other kinds of personal prejudices which are informed by misunderstandings regarding the content of end time events.

Seventh-day Adventists, as indicated in the name itself, expect and anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as the climax of world history. The promise Jesus Christ made in reference to His Second Coming runs deep into the identity, message and mission of Seventh-day Adventists.

There is, however, another expectation along with the Second Coming which has at times taken center stage to the point of eclipsing the message of God's mercy and love calling the world to be mindful of God, to worship God alone, and to live completely for his glory.

In the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of

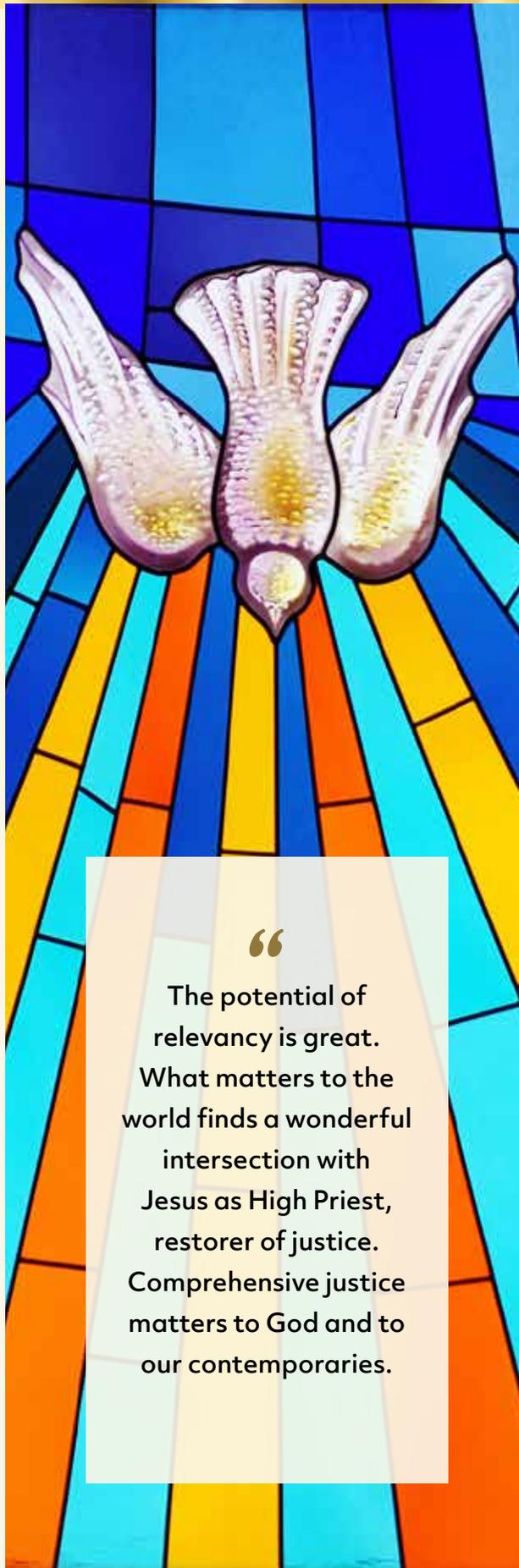
end time events, Sunday observance will be made compulsory. Because Sabbathkeepers will not yield to the enforcement of the Sunday law, the scenario predicts that there will be persecutions during an unprecedented time of trouble as referenced in the book of Daniel (Dan. 12:3). Ellen White repeatedly wrote about the foreseen events which she characterizes as the last act of the Great Controversy drama:

“The substitution of the laws of men for the law of God, the exaltation, by merely human authority, of Sunday in place of the Bible Sabbath, is the last act in the drama. When this substitution becomes universal, God will reveal Himself. He will arise in His majesty to shake terribly the earth. He will come out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity, and the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.”<sup>24</sup>

One should notice the work of God’s judgment is the good news of restorative justice for martyrs, those murdered because of their loyalty to Jesus Christ. This is alluded to in the fifth seal of Revelation chapter 6.

There is important information in the quote above that helps us understand the issues at stake:

- The universal imposition by law of Sunday as a substitute for the biblical Sabbath is considered the last act of the drama called the great



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**The potential of relevancy is great. What matters to the world finds a wonderful intersection with Jesus as High Priest, restorer of justice. Comprehensive justice matters to God and to our contemporaries.**

controversy.

- There is another key element in the unfolding of end-time events, predicted in Daniel 12—the prospect of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom of those who affirm God’s sovereignty by observing and celebrating God’s sign, symbol and seal—the biblical Sabbath.
- The people who will persecute God’s people are said to be Christians in coalition with states and governments’ agencies. These will be the future enemies of God’s people.

From these three premises, some Adventists deduce that the Adventist church should not develop relationships with other Christians. This is labeled as ecumenism, which they understand as a union of churches under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, or other ecumenical organizations. Any engagement, dialogue or partnership with other Christians is seen as betrayal of Adventist identity, mission, and message.

These beliefs and attitudes hostile to other Christians are unjust, unnecessary, and mistaken. They defy logic and run counter to God’s purposes and revelations in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White.

Ellen White, after clearly envisioning the difficult time of trouble to come *in the future*, advises the church:

“It is our duty to do all in our power to avert the

threatened danger. We should endeavor to disarm prejudice by placing ourselves in a proper light before the people. We should bring before them the real question at issue, thus interposing the most effectual protest against measures to restrict liberty of conscience.”<sup>5</sup>

Advocacy for freedom of conscience is deeply encouraged by this declaration. This advocacy is not driven by fear of whatever the future holds, but rather by a commitment to God’s principles and values.

### HEART OF MISSION: UPLIFTING JESUS

So, how to engage all people in the public space, ministers of other denominations, religious leaders of other religions, government officials, atheists, agnostics, secular people of all persuasions?

As with all genuine witness, it is about presenting Jesus Christ, uplifting Him to others so He may, through His Holy Spirit, attract them to Himself.

“We want more, much more, of the Spirit of Christ, and less, much less, of self and the peculiarities of character which build up a wall to keep us apart from our fellow human beings,” Ellen White wrote. “We can do much to break down these barriers by revealing the graces of Christ in our lives.”<sup>6</sup>

In *Gospel Workers*, we read, “Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel’s message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in this message, is to be proclaimed, but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out.”<sup>7</sup>

### HOW TO ENGAGE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS MINISTRY

Ellen White gives practical insights which can function as a roadmap regarding how to engage others in the public space:

“All coarseness and roughness must be purged from us. Courtesy, refinement, and Christian politeness must be cherished. Guard against of being abrupt and blunt. Do not regard such peculiarities as virtues, for God does not so regard them. But seek in-all things not to offend those who are not of our faith. Never make the most objectionable features of our faith stand out prominently, when there is no call

## JUDGMENT ERRORS TO AVOID

In considering this topic there are some unfortunate hermeneutical mistakes we would do well to avoid, including:

- bringing the future into the present and considering the future persecutors of God’s people the same as present-day Christians and states.
- believing present-day Sunday keepers have already received the mark of the beast.
- trying to project the present into the future. Only God masters time. Fear of future persecutions should not take away the fruit of the Holy Spirit, including peace and love.
- looking at non-Adventists as enemies. This is an expression of obscurantism and sectarianism that discredits our identity, mission and message. It is incompatible with Ellen White’s counsel urging us to dispel prejudice and show ourselves to others in a favorable light without compromising in any way our identity, mission, and message. Therefore, no hostility, no antagonism, and no hatred of anyone.

for it. Such a course is only an injury to the cause.

“All should seek to have the softening, subduing influence of the Spirit of God in the heart, —Christ-like tenderness and love for souls. Those who are sent to labor together should put away their peculiar notions and set ideas, and seek to labor together, heart and soul, to carry out God’s will. They must plan to work in harmony in order to work to advantage.”<sup>8</sup>

## BENEFITS OF MINGLING WITH OTHERS

There is much to be gained in mingling while maintaining the integrity of our identity, mission and message including:

- presenting ourselves in a proper light and on our own terms.
- dispelling prejudices.
- winning peoples' confidence and trust that we are blessings and assets for the good of the entire human family. Our services become genuine assets to society: health, education, humanitarian, human rights, and various ministries.
- the opportunity to be witnesses as Jesus commissioned all his disciples.
- preparing the world for the Second Coming, which is the overarching goal of the book of Revelation.
- the opportunity to witness to the weekly special celebration of God during the Sabbath, remembering the Sabbath is a celebration of God's gift of life, freedom, and fellowship.
- contributing to what matters most to the world, especially in reference to justice and the special connection it has with Christ's restorative heavenly High Priestly ministry.

Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are to follow the principles, virtues and graces of Jesus Christ: wisdom, tact, refinement, courtesy, politeness, tenderness, love for souls, and a complete commitment to God's glory. We must put on the whole armor of Christ's righteousness and break down barriers by revealing Christ in our lives.

## CONCLUSION

The work of engaging others in the public space is fundamentally about presenting the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a favorable light, building a good reputation, breaking down barriers, dispelling prejudice, sharing a humble and bold witness so as to reveal the graces of Jesus Christ so people may fall in love with their Creator, the One who loves each person so deeply that he came to redeem us at such a great price—His own sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.

Our testimony is that love is stronger than death. Jesus conquered death and is stronger than death. His resurrection establishes Him above all else. He destines all who receive Him to everlasting fellowship in love. Love cannot be forced. It is an invitation to everlasting life. For an invitation to be credible, God created freedom. In fact, the whole Christian faith is predicated upon the gift of freedom.

The Apostle Paul said it well: "For freedom Christ has set us free, stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1, ESV).

This is the story we tell. Wishing you a blessed New Year of successful mission endeavors in 2020 until Jesus comes.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 562.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, August 21, 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 391.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 452.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, "The Best Manner of Working," *The Atlantic Canvasser*, Dec. 18, 1890.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *To Be Like Jesus*, p. 285.



# CHECKUP HEALTHY LEADERS!

BY DR. ZENO CHARLES-MARCEL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, GENERAL CONFERENCE HEALTH MINISTRIES

It should be no surprise that God's principles for true success in leadership are universal.

Yet, to see the evidence from the results of the study of secular leaders can be a bit daunting.

Jim Collins (Stanford University) reports on his study of leaders in the book, *Good to Great*. The most effective leaders he designated as "Level 5." These exceptional leaders seem to be all cut from the same cloth regardless of the industry they were in or the size of the company. Collins' findings are empirical, not ideological, and these outstanding leaders had qualities that cut against the grain of secular wisdom. They were often quiet, reserved, self-effacing and even shy, but they instructed people based on principle and with inspired standards more than an inspiring personality. Look at these characteristics and see if they resemble anything you have seen before:

## CHARACTERISTICS OF LEVEL 5 LEADERS:

**Humility:** they never aspired to be larger-than-life heroes

**Modesty:** they were not desirous of a pedestal or unreachable icons

**Mission-driven:** they had a strong adherence to the mission and inspired others to come along

**Disciplined:** they exhibited a high degree of self-control and sharply focused on the important

**Self-sacrificing:** they channel their ambition for a cause in a



spirit of self-sacrificing service

In *Leadership Gap*, Lolly Daskal observed that leaders rise to their positions relying on a specific set of values and traits. She states that daily (healthy) habits can help anyone become a more successful leader. Interestingly she declares that great leaders share the habit of taking care of their health: physical, mental and, yes, transcendent! Physical fitness, healthy diet, adequate sleep, and good stress management accompany better thinking, reasoning, and stamina and are associated with greater resiliency! She claims that almost every successful leader she has studied takes time each day to pause

for meditation, prayer, or quiet reflection. Imagine that! Have we heard this before: Physical activity, rest, recreation, wholesome eating and sleep greatly affects all aspects of your life?

No wonder the General Conference leadership team engaged in a special Healthy Lifestyle experience last January that has had a ripple effect from their personal lives and families to their personal ministries and now on to the unions, conferences, and other institutions within their territories. We desperately need to come to grips with who we are and whose we are! God has entrusted much to Seventh-day Adventists, and to whom much is given, much is required. Shalom!

# DIVINE INTERVENTION

BY ANDREW MCCHESENEY, ADVENTIST MISSION

**T**he retired 67-year-old professor arrived at Bulgaria's national police academy with his last three copies of *The Great Controversy*, by Ellen White. His mission: Enter the heavily guarded campus and deliver a book to the police academy's commander.

It had been a busy week for Jivko Grushev as he presented *The Great Controversy* to university leaders across Sofia, Bulgaria's capital. After delivering about 100 books, Jivko had three left in his bag. He walked up to the police officer guarding the police academy's gates. Just as he arrived at the gates, he watched a black limousine drive out.

Greeting the police officer, Jivko said he wished to visit the commander.

"The commander isn't here," the officer said.

He had just left in the black limousine.

"Then I would like to speak with his secretary," Jivko said.

"What do you want to discuss with her?" the officer asked.

The question was unexpected, but Jivko immediately replied, "I would like to discuss a certain donation with her."

The officer wrote down Jivko's personal information and waved him onto the campus. Walking to the academy's mammoth administrative building, Jivko wondered whether the officer had called ahead to announce his visit.

At the lobby's entrance, Jivko found a small gate and a glass booth for a police guard. The gate, however, was open, and the glass booth was empty. Several

police officers spoke animatedly near a gray marble staircase in the lobby. Jivko boldly walked through the gate and asked the police officers for directions to the secretary.

"That way," an officer replied gruffly, pointing to the gate and out the exit. Jivko walked out the gate but remained in the building.



ON A MISSION: Jivko Grushev, 69, stands on a balcony at the headquarters of the Bulgarian Union of Churches Conference in Sofia, Bulgaria.

"Lord, I came to bring Your light here," he prayed. "Please intervene."

At that moment, a man in his early 30s descended the gray marble staircase. His eyes met Jivko's and seemed to be saying, "Wait a minute." The man walked over to the police officers and spoke to them.

Jivko couldn't take his eyes off the man. He had never seen such an imposing, dignified-looking police officer. The man was slender and handsome. The man wore black like the other officers, but his clothing was of a much higher quality. No epaulets decorated his shoulders.

When the man finished speaking with the officers, he looked at Jivko with warm eyes as if to say, "It is finished." Then he walked out the gate, passed Jivko, and exited the building.

The gruff officer rushed to the guard booth, and a female officer joined him. The two officers asked in unison, "Are you going to visit the secretary?"

The female officer jotted down Jivko's personal information, and the gruff officer said, "I'll take you to the secretary." He ran up the marble stairs as if being chased, skipping two stairs at a time. Jivko struggled

to keep up. At the top of the stairs, the officer opened a door and stared at the floor as Jivko entered. He closed the door from the outside.

Jivko introduced himself to the secretary and placed his three books in front of her. "These are gifts for the commander and his deputies," he said.

As he left, Jivko joyfully thanked God for helping him to accomplish a seemingly impossible mission. His mind returned to the handsome police officer with warm eyes. The man had appeared just in time to solve his problem. The books never would have been handed over to the secretary without his help.

Jivko had no doubt that the man was an angel sent by God so he could share the message of salvation. He remembered how Hebrews 1:14 describes angels, saying, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"

## Kari Paulsen, wife of Pastor Jan Paulsen, Passes to Her Rest

**O**ur sincere condolences to Pastor Jan Paulsen, former president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to his family, and to all who knew and loved Kari Paulsen. Mrs. Paulsen passed away January 10 in Oslo, Norway, with Pastor Paulsen by her side. She served alongside her husband on several continents for many years, despite the limitations of chronic illness.

"Mrs. Paulsen was a very capable person and a strong support for Pastor Paulsen in his life and their ministry together over many decades in different parts of the world," wrote Pastor

Ted N.C. Wilson in a statement of condolence. "What a hope we have in Christ's soon return when we will see all those who have died in Christ and we will all be transformed into eternal youth through the Life-giver Himself. May the Comforter come especially close to Pastor Paulsen and the entire Paulsen family. Jesus is coming soon!"

Kari Paulsen's inspiring story is told in her memoir, *Against All Odds*, published in 2015 by Pacific Press. Funeral services were held in Mjøndalen, Norway, on January 20. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested donations be made to the Life Hope



Kari Paulsen, right, with her husband, Pastor Jan Paulsen, greet delegates at the 2010 GC Session.  
[PHOTO: JOSEF KISSINGER]

orphanage and school in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; donations may be sent via PayPal to

[reinpaulsen@gmail.com](mailto:reinpaulsen@gmail.com).

To read more about Kari Paulsen and tributes to her, [click here](#).



## GC SESSION FAQs

**A**s we approach a General Conference Session, questions frequently arise from church members and others. Here are a few of the more common questions to share with your constituents. These and more Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are available on the [2020 GC Session website](#).

**Why does the Adventist Church hold a business session every five years? What is the purpose of the GC session?**

General Conference Session is a global spiritual gathering and a constitutionally required business meeting that has been held every five years since 1970. Its purpose is to vote on global leadership, set the direction of the Church for the

next five years, and vote changes to the Constitution, Fundamental Beliefs and the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*.

**How much does it cost? Couldn't they find another way to do the business of the Church that would save money, travel, and time?**

The General Conference World Budget each year sets aside \$1.4 million for the direct cost of the Session venue. That's \$7 million, which is less than 8 cents a year per member. Including indirect costs, such as air travel, lodging and programs of local administrative units, the total cost for Session is approximately \$20 million, which is less than one dollar per member.

No other denomination comes together on a worldwide basis to elect leaders, hear reports, and receive offerings from everywhere to be distributed everywhere. In order to maintain worldwide unity of the Church, it could cost 10 times this amount to replicate the type of infrastructure needed to gather and communicate.

**Do you have to be a delegate to attend the GC session? How many delegates are there?**

GC Session is an open meeting—

anyone can attend—but only delegates and invitees have the ability to speak and only delegates may vote. This year, nearly 2,700 voting delegates are expected to attend. Each union nominates delegates to represent its field. In addition, delegates representing major church institutions are selected.

**How can members benefit from attending the session?**

Attendees gain an understanding of the world church and how it operates. They will literally see people from more countries and language groups than any other meeting in the Church and possibly in the world.

**Describe a typical day at GC session from beginning to end.**

For those working behind the scenes, the day starts with a Steering Committee to determine the agenda items for the day. The first public meeting is morning worship, followed by a business session that lasts until lunch. There is another business session in the afternoon. In the evenings, world regions have a chance to showcase mission, challenges and opportunities, all presented with the color and flair of national dress and music. Throughout the day, exhibits are available to view in the convention center, offering ideas and resources for a wide variety of ministries.





# THE BACK PAGE

**Directions:** For more information on an item, click on the corresponding number on the map.

**1** The island of **Puerto Rico** was hit hard by a series of earthquakes, culminating in a 6.4 quake on January 7. The earthquakes caused power outages, destruction of property, injuries, and at least one death. Although six Adventist members' homes were destroyed, no major damage to Adventist schools, churches, or the Adventist hospital on the island have been reported. Pastor Jose A. Rodríguez, president of the church in Puerto Rico, had the opportunity to speak on several radio stations on the island, encouraging listeners to stay calm and trust in God.

**2** In preparation for the new year, Adventists in **Vsevolozhsk, Russia**, memorized large portions of Scripture and met for an evening of Bible recitation, titled "Your word is a lamp to my feet." Parents and children worked together in memorizing Scripture. The

youngest participant was not quite three years old. During the program, many beautiful Psalms, passages from the Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount, the Creation story, and more were shared from memory. Music presentations were interspersed between the recitations. All were excited to start the new year in this way and plan to continue memorizing Scripture.

**3** More than 800 delegates from 23 countries attended the **third Literature Evangelist (LE) Congress**, held in **Boksburg, South Africa**. The theme of the congress, organized by the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, was "In His Presence: Onward in Service." The theme, "encapsulates the fact that it is only the presence of God which empowers us to serve and guarantees success to Literature Evangelists

who are led by the Spirit," organizers said. A number of LEs were recognized for their years of service, ranging from 5 to 40 years.

**4** Massive flooding affected more than 30 million people in **Jakarta, Indonesia** and surrounding areas in early January. Water surges of 3 meters (10 feet) high, landslides, and electrocutions contributed to the devastation. **ADRA Indonesia emergency response teams conducted rapid assessments** immediately to provide help to families affected by the flood. Based on these initial assessments, ready to eat food, emergency shelter repair kits, beddings, and medicines were distributed to displaced families by ADRA.

**5** On January 12, the Taal volcano in **Tagaytay, Philippines**, erupted, affecting countless people and several Adventist

institutions in the nearby area, including the **SSD** headquarters, **AIAS, AUP, 1000 Missionary Movement, Philippine Frontier Missions**, and others. In the aftermath, numerous volunteers helped with clean-up efforts, and students and faculty of **AIAS** donated money, clothing, and relief supplies to those in need. Others have taken water to villages and some have joined **ADRA** in their relief efforts.

**6** Many staff of the **Sydney Adventist Hospital, Australia**, have been personally involved in firefighting efforts as volunteers during the massive outbreak of bushfires in Australia. Some served as firefighters while others volunteered their medical services to those in need. In addition, hospital staff donated A\$10,000, matched by another A\$10,000 by the hospital, to support the Red Cross bushfire relief appeal.