

FEBRUARY 2017

Welcome

Welcome to the February issue of the *Executive Committee Newsletter*, a publication prepared especially for you as a member of the General Conference Executive Committee. We are thankful for your commitment and service to the world church and hope that you find this newsletter to be a blessing.

This month, our feature article, “A Biblical Basis for Church Governance and Authority” was written by Dr. Elias Brasil de Souza, director of the Biblical Research Institute. In his article, Dr. Brasil de Souza builds a strong Scriptural foundation showing how our church system of structure, order, and authority maintains our doctrinal unity and facilitates the mission of the church.

You won’t want to miss reading the two short mission stories—one from Myanmar, and another from a city known as “an evangelist’s graveyard.” And the “Did You Know?” sidebar brings you inspiring mission facts from around the world.

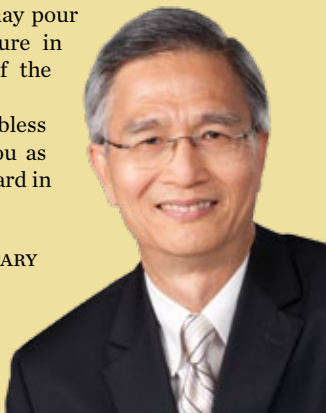
We hope that you find this *Executive Committee Newsletter* to be of an encouragement and blessing, and invite you to share it widely throughout your circle of influence.

If you have comments or questions, or would like to share a prayer request with other members of the executive committee, please send them to the *Executive Committee Newsletter* at ECN@gc.adventist.org.

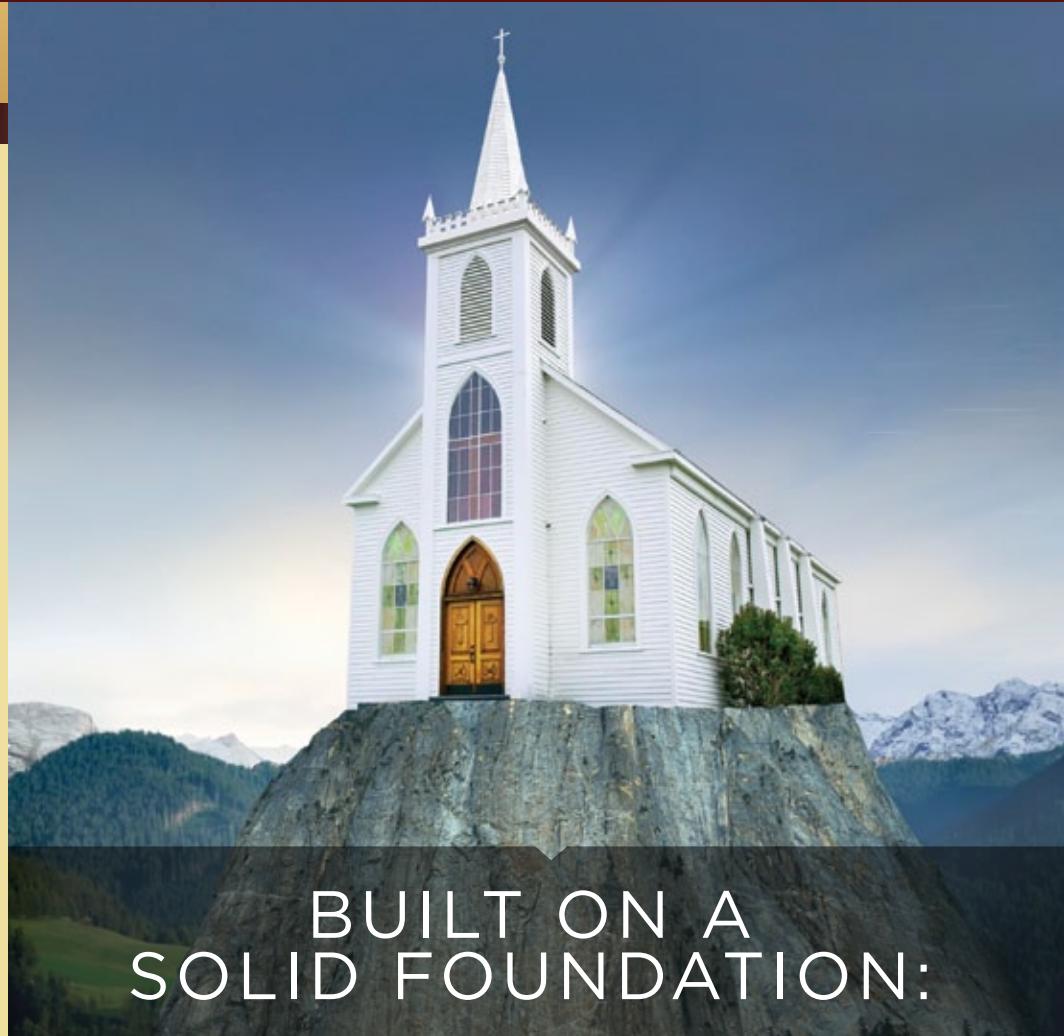
As you have no doubt noticed, world events are unfolding before us at breakneck speed. Turbulent times are ahead with “men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:26). Prophecies are being fulfilled before our very eyes. Surely Jesus is returning soon. Let us unite in “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5) so that the Holy Spirit may pour out in full measure in the abundance of the Latter Rain.

May the Lord bless and encourage you as we continue forward in His mission!

—G.T. NG, SECRETARY
*Seventh-day
Adventist Church*



EDITORIAL



BUILT ON A SOLID FOUNDATION:

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, *Director, Biblical Research Institute*

Church governance and authority have become a hot topic as the values of individual freedom and authenticity drive some contemporary ideological agendas. As we reflect on this, we should let Scripture inform our understanding and perception of the church.

A close look at the creation account shows how meticulously God brought the world into existence and that by naming, organizing, and structuring the world He enabled it to function according to His purpose. As the climax of His creation work, God created humanity to care for Creation. Created in God’s own image, the edenic couple were to model God’s

own leadership and organizational style in their dealings with the created spheres placed under their responsibility. From whatever perspective we look at creation, we see structure, organization, and leadership.

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the covenant with Israel established at Sinai, detailed attention is given to the organization and structuring of the people around God’s presence in the sanctuary. A sizable portion of the Pentateuch deals with the building of the sanctuary

GMP REPORT: THE ELEPHANT-PROOF CHURCH

What do you do when the world's largest land mammals go on a rampage to destroy everything in their path?



Aye Aye is a Global Mission pioneer serving in a small village in Myanmar.

You pray! Recently, villagers in Myanmar found themselves in the middle of an angry elephant attack, so they gathered together and did just that.

This village is the home of a Global Mission pioneer (GMP) named Aye Aye. For years, he and his family were the only Seventh-day Adventists in the region. As a boy, he longed to go away to school, but his parents didn't have the money to send him.

"My parents taught me to talk to God about everything," says Aye Aye, "so I asked Him to help me get an education. I was so grateful when He provided a way for me to study."

Before Aye Aye left home, he committed his life to Jesus and promised to serve Him when he completed his education.

After Aye Aye graduated, he was excited to return to his village where he had dreamed of starting and nurturing a new congregation of believers. He began by visiting people in their homes and holding a children's Bible study.

It wasn't long before others in the village were curious about what the children were learning. Aye

Aye shared the gospel with them as well, and now most of the villagers have accepted Jesus.

One evening, two angry elephants came tearing into the village. "We tried to scare them away," says church member Daw Tin Htay, "but they weren't afraid of us. I climbed a tree to hide and stayed there all night!"

The rest of the villagers ran to the church, where they gathered together to pray. "The elephants ran all over the village," says Aye Aye. "They even came right up to the church, but they didn't try to harm anyone inside. We knew God was watching over us."

Now when the villagers share the Advent message with those living nearby, they tell the story of a God who is mightier than the angriest elephant.

Please pray for Aye Aye and his group of new believers as they work to plant more churches in Myanmar. To learn more about Global Mission, please visit Global-Mission.org.

—RICKY OLIVERAS
Videographer
Office of Adventist Mission

(Continued from page 1...)

along with laws intended to nurture the relationship between God and His people. An institutional priesthood was put in place to administer the ritual services and instruct the people. Interestingly, even the order and position of the tribes around the tabernacle were prescribed in detail.

While Aaron and his sons were established as the priesthood, the tribe of Levi was entrusted with specific functions related to the care, operation, and transportation of the tabernacle. Such detailed instructions conveyed a strong sense of God's holiness and the importance of organization for Israel's journey to the promised Land.

Such organization caught the attention of the surrounding nations. As they beheld that former band of slaves camping, marching, and battling through the wilderness, they could not but recognize the work of a powerful God.

The words of Rahab to the Israelite spies exemplifies what the ancient nations may

have felt as they attempted to come to grips with the reality of an organized people marching toward Canaan: "And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).¹

Admittedly, no one would advocate such an earthly priesthood or military mission for God's people living this side of the cross. However, having said that, we must recognize the validity of the principle that lies behind the Old Testament account of God's dealings with Israel. So, in the New Testament, God's people also operate within a kind of structure or order.

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus entrusted twelve apostles with authority to lead His people in preaching of

the good news (Matthew 9:1–6). The number twelve shows that the New Testament church stands in continuity with the twelve tribes of Israel. On another occasion, Jesus commissioned seventy disciples to go in pairs to the places He wanted to visit (Luke 10:1–16). In choosing the seventy (or seventy-two according to some manuscripts) the Lord was establishing a plan for carrying on the gospel mission in an organized way. Interestingly, Moses had a similar number of elders to rely on as he led God's people to the promised land (Numbers 11:16–17, 25; see also Exodus 24:1, 9–14).

Jesus' selection of the twelve and the seventy indicates that some kind of organized leadership was necessary to conduct the mission. Some people claim that Jesus never intended to form an institutional organization (i.e., the church). But a close look at the gospel narratives shows that Jesus organized a group of apostles and disciples to carry out missionary work.

AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION

After Christ ascended to heaven, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and rapid growth of the church, the apostles were led toward further organization (see Acts 6). When controversy arose between Jewish and Gentile Christians, a council was convened in Jerusalem (Acts 15). A consensus was reached, a decision was made, the congregations accepted the decision, and the early church continued to focus on the mission of proclaiming Jesus to the world.

So, thanks to that organized procedure of gathering, discussing, deciding, and abiding by the decision they had made, the apostolic church could move forward. And as the church spread

to different regions of the Greco-Roman world, a more formal kind of church governance was established with some offices and functions more clearly delineated in order to foster doctrinal and mission-based unity.

A few aspects become clear as we examine the New Testament. Each congregation had an established leadership composed of elders who (especially in larger settings) were assisted by deacons (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1). The elders administered the Lord's supper, exercised discipline, resolved disputes among the brethren, and gave instruction in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). Also, according to the New Testament, the church officers were elected by the members of the congregation (e.g. Acts 6:5-6) and examined and confirmed by the elders (Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:14).

So the apostolic church soon understood that in order to remain a cohesive and effective body of believers they needed some kind of governance. And, in choosing a system consisting of elders and deacons, they were guided by the Spirit to apply principles already contained in the Old Testament and exemplified by Jesus.

CHURCH AUTHORITY: A RELIC?

At this point, the question emerges whether church structure and governance is still something to be taken seriously. Some might argue that church authority is a relic of a medieval past that needs to be discarded. The current zeitgeist frowns upon notions of authority

and power since they may be regarded as driven by oppressive ideologies. However, as we look upon this issue from a biblical perspective, a couple of points stand out clearly.

First, the Bible does not portray organization and systems of authority as bad in themselves. Although the Scriptures often show that systems of power and authority have been distorted by sin, it also demonstrates that when properly exercised power and authority can be a blessing.

For example, in dealing with Israel, the Lord worked within structures of authority. God Himself established the Israelite priesthood and kingship with its attendant responsibilities. And the people were organized by God in ways that required an institutional leadership. Jesus

A system of church authority and governance is required in order to maintain doctrinal unity and to implement the mission of the church.

himself, as noted above, related with his followers within a framework of organization and authority which consisted of twelve apostles and a much larger number of disciples.

AUTHORITY DERIVED FROM JESUS

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus said: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). And it was on the basis of this authority that Jesus granted the church the authority to carry out the mission. Therefore, the authority of the church is derived from Jesus (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; John 20:21-22) and is to be exercised in harmony with God's word.

Based on this conviction, the apostolic church established a system of church governance—including that of ordaining leaders as Christ had ordained His twelve disciples—in order to advance the mission entrusted to them by the risen Lord. Recently the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a result of an in-depth study of biblical principles, approved at the 2014 Annual Council a "Consensus Statement on a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination."²

Second, a system of church authority and governance is required in order to maintain doctrinal unity and to implement the mission of the church. Thus, compliance with decisions made by the legitimate representatives of the church organization is not optional. Although the Holy Spirit may be invoked to justify divergent practices by some individual segments of the church, the Spirit works in



DID YOU KNOW?

- In 2017, 500 evangelistic campaigns will be held across China. This is something that has never been done before.
- More than 1 million books on health and wellness (with a clear spiritual component) will be distributed throughout China this year. And church planting in that country will continue with more than 200 new locations.
- Thousands of people across Eastern Europe are hearing the Three Angels' Messages for the first time as they attend **TMI evangelistic events** now taking place in Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine.
- In 2016, 362 employees at the world headquarters (including GC, ADRA, ARM, and NAD) completed a total of 197,502 physical activity miles (317,848 km.) as they participated in the **Adventists InStep for Life** physical fitness program. Physical activity miles include walking, running, biking, and other activities.
- Although Boston, Massachusetts is sometimes known as "an evangelist's graveyard," area churches came together for soul-winning activities, including **Compassion Boston** and **It Is Written's Revelation Today** series, resulting in 78 baptisms and 1 profession of faith.
- A **Reach The World International Leadership Conference** will be held in Budapest, Hungary from May 10-13, 2017. The Conference will address issues impacting children, women, and families, and is sponsored by the Departments of Children's Ministries, Women's Ministries, and Family Ministries of the General Conference.



(Continued on page 4 ...)

and through the body of believers as a whole and the leadership established by them. That the decision made by the Jerusalem Council became normative for the church at large becomes clear from the statement that as the apostles “went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4). Also, because “God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33), Paul instructed the church at Corinth to do things “decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

ULTIMATE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY AND POWER

When pondering these issues we should always bear in mind that authority and power ultimately derive from and originate in God because He is the Creator and Savior. Therefore, human authority is always limited and rela-

tive and is to be exercised according to the model established by Christ. So whether we exercise authority as church officers or members, we should always remember the overriding principle that the greatest is the one who serves (Luke 22:26–27) and the most powerful is the one who takes the towel and washes the other’s feet (John 13:13–15).

No power or authority within the church can claim independent or unilateral legitimacy in view of this model of interdependence established by the Chief Shepherd. Church officers at all levels in order to be “examples to the flock” will be ready to carry forward the mission of the church and

also to submit to the collective wisdom of the body on matters about which some may not fully agree in order to move forward together. Then, “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).

1. All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV. Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

2. Available at: <https://www.adventistarchives.org/consensus-statement-on-a-seventh-day-adventist-theology-of-ordination.pdf>



BOSTON BAPTISM: “YOU PEOPLE LOVED ME”

When she came out of the water her smile said “elation” and her raised arms said “victory!” But not long before, things were very different.

Cathy’s life got off to a rough start. When she was just five years old, her violently abusive father almost killed her. A subsequent beating left her badly injured, unable to have children in later years. Her childhood and young adult life were marked by sadness and pain, a dark cloud seeming to hover constantly over her. Finally, this past April, she decided to end her life.

But God had other plans for Cathy. Two It Is Written Bible workers following up a mailing of Bible study interest cards knocked on Cathy’s door. Figuring she had nothing to lose, Cathy had mailed in an invitation to study the Bible.

After working through several of the study guides, the Bible workers invited

Cathy to attend It Is Written’s meetings at a local church.

From the moment she stepped inside the church, Cathy felt welcomed and accepted and attended every meeting. As the meetings at the church came to an end, the Bible workers invited Cathy to the final week of meetings presented by It Is Written Speaker/Director John Bradshaw.

Someone came to her door and shared Jesus with her.

One Sabbath morning in October, Cathy joined some 3,000 people from throughout the greater Boston area at the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center in the culmination of what some have identified as the largest evangelistic event in Boston in over 50 years.

More than 50 local churches hosted the Revelation Today meetings. That final Sabbath, Cathy signified her full surrender to Jesus in baptism.

As she told me her incredible story and recounted the difficult time she had experienced, Cathy wiped away tears and said, “But you people loved me. I’ve finally found the family I’ve never had.”

I’ll never forget her words. “But you people loved me.” Someone came to her door, shared Jesus with her, and encouraged her to connect her life with the Holy Spirit’s leading.

There are many more Cathys waiting to be loved into the arms of Jesus.

— JOHN BRADSHAW
Speaker/Director
It Is Written, a North American Division
media ministry