



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

APRIL - JUNE 2024

This year, the Seventh-day

Adventist Church commemorates 150 years since Battle Creek College (now Andrews University) was established in 1874. The very same year, John Nevins Andrews (1829-1883) was sent to Europe as the church's first official missionary. Ellen White wrote that they had sent "the ablest man in all our ranks." Andrews was a scholar, linguist, former editor of the *Review and Herald*, past president of the General Conference (1867-1869) and author of the carefully researched book, *The History of the Sabbath and the First Day of the Week*. It is fitting that the flagship university in an educational system of 9,882 schools and tertiary institutions should bear the name of the first official missionary, because education and missionary work still go together.

The article in this issue of the ECN by Dr. George Akers on the mission of Adventist education is as relevant today as when it was first published. The enduring mission of Adventist education is to produce

Christians, provide quality education, and prepare professionals for service to the world church.

LISA M. BEARDSLEY-HARDY
DIRECTOR
GC EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT

EDITORIAL



THE MISSION OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION REFRESHING THE VISION

BY GEORGE H. AKERS, ED.D.

Editor's Note: George H. Akers served as Education Director for the Seventh-day Adventist world church from 1985 to 1990. Throughout his career, he served in many educational leadership roles, including as president of Washington Adventist University (then known as Columbia Union College). In this article, Dr. Akers offers keen insights into Adventist education that are still worthy of consideration today.

The problem with most mission statements is that they are written in the "is" mode, the descriptive. But the

whole intent of writing a mission statement is to focus on the "ought," which is prescriptive. So, the primary question to be addressed is not "What is it that we traditionally do?" but rather "What is it that we ought to be doing to accomplish our objectives?"

Like chart and compass, mission statements are indispensable in helping us determine if the winds and tides of time have blown us off course. And more important, to prompt us to action, to make mid-course correctional maneuvers when they are needed.

This article is unapologetically written in the ought mode.

Enunciators of mission are vulnerable, easily tagged by the front-line soldiers as romantic visionaries who are out of touch with the realities of the current battle. I hope, though, that this partial recital of bedrock commitments in Adventist education can help us refresh the vision together.

MISSION STATEMENTS

Ideally, a mission statement should be condensed to one or two short declarative sentences, or at most to a brief paragraph. I have had to struggle to achieve the brevity and clarity necessary to capture in so few words the Seventh-day Adventist mission in education. Our philosophy of education is comprehensive and complex and doesn't easily yield to the forces of super-reductionism. I am well aware, too, that oversimplification is dangerous because so many subtle and necessary nuances can fall through the cracks. But here goes:

The primary mission of a Christian school is to produce Christians and in our case Christians who are thoroughly grounded in historic Adventism.

Second, it endeavors to provide our children and youth with quality basic education so that they might effectively cope with their world.

At the college and university level, it undertakes to prepare professionals for service to the world church.

Administrators of Christian schools face the great challenge of ensuring that the mission priorities stay in that order. If we fail here, the creeping secularism and humanistic relativism of our times will swamp us. It is not easy to keep a school theocentric these days. It takes real effort by everyone involved with the institution—faculty, staff, board, and parents. Without constant reflection on and evaluation of our mission, Adventist education will fall into that almost incurable malady called institutional drift.

THE TRUE MEASURE OF A SCHOOL

The real measure of a school is what is happening to students there. That is, what kind of mind-set is the total press of the institution developing in its students?

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In the final analysis the overall purpose of our Adventist schools, from kindergarten through graduate school, is to give our young people a distinctly Bible-based, Christ-centered worldview.

One that is selfish, secular, and materialistic? Or one that is deeply spiritual, centered on God? Are the students coming out of the place committed to selfless service to their fellowman and extending God's kingdom on earth, or are they just looking out for “number one”? One doesn't need a Ph. D. in institutional analysis to find the answer to these questions.

An article by R. C. Sproul in *Christianity Today* echoed my concern in its title, “You Can't Always Tell a Christian College by Its Label.” Students spend half their time inside classrooms, and what goes on in a Christian school's classrooms must be qualitatively different from what happens at a good private or public school, or the school is not really Christian.

But it is not only the in-class perspectives that we must look at. The cocurricular activities are important too: the campus values, student heroes, and a multitude of other influences combine to mold the students' general outlook.

In his article Sproul says that the most important question we can ask about the place is whether the students emerge from it with a Christian worldview—the ability to see everything from heaven's point of view. Everything else is mere scaffolding and props.

This is why we are told that the work of redemption and education are one. The apostle Paul surely must have had this in mind when he appealed to the church at Rome to permit God to completely transform their whole outlook, so that they could begin to see things as God does (see Rom. 12:1).

This is indeed a tall order, but in the final analysis the overall purpose of our Adventist schools, from kindergarten through graduate school, is to give our young people a distinctly Bible-based, Christ-centered worldview to teach them to “think Christian,” if you please. And that mission certainly includes instilling in them the vision of a finished work of God on earth and calling to each student to respond personally to the gospel commission.

Our people have their antennas out, and they instinctively recognize whether our schools are fulfilling

their mission with respect to making Christians. Consequently, they expect that everything in the Adventist school should be focused on that overall objective. They know when a school has drifted off course or has selected another agenda. And it is they in the end who write Ichabod over the doorposts of a spiritually effete school.

Sensing this responsibility keenly, our deeply committed Christian administrators and teachers labor prayerfully to prove worthy of the sacred trust. They certainly deserve our support and words of encouragement. Have you hugged a teacher lately? Or in your personal devotions prayed earnestly for one?

DANGER OF “RELIGIOUS ADD-ONS”

Too many Christian educators, I fear, believe that a good Christian school is essentially the

same as a good secular school except for certain influences in the environment. To them it is the social context, the religious add-ons in structured campus life, such as Bible classes and required religious services, that give the institution its Christian influence. This approach reduces Christian education to mere social engineering and fails to get to the heart of things educationally.

Worse yet, it bifurcates a school, partitioning it unnaturally between the secular and sacred. This sends a false message to students, denying the integrated wholeness of all life under God. If schools can be divided and managed that way, so can individual lives, and students don't miss that not-so-subtle lesson. Such a ruptured campus scenario produces six-day secular Christians who have developed the fine art of playing church one day a week.

Partitioning religion off into one corner has a negative impact on faculty as well. It gives the impression that some of the faculty may be excused from being true ministers of education. It places responsibility for the spiritual nurture of students on a specialized segment of the staff—the dorm deans, religion professors, and chaplains.

A partitioned campus does not fulfill the real mission of Adventist education. All of our teachers need to be involved in the spiritual guidance and development of their students, utilizing every opportunity, both in and out of the classroom, to nurture the faith life of their young charges. Christian teachers are in the inspiration business as much as or more than the information business. This is essential to the accomplishment of education's sacred mission to turn on lamps for God.



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Our educational mission is for our students to end up at the New Jerusalem, with admission to the heavenly school, with Christ and the angels as their tutors, to grow and learn forever.

So, we are quite fussy about the caliber of people we permit to teach in our schools. They are modeling the gospel at close range before callow, impressionable youth. We are well aware that we are dealing in soul stuff when we select teachers, and that we dare not be casual.

KNOWING AND DOING

Every school, or school system, revolves around one or two, or at most a few, central organizing principles. Discover these tent-pole tenets and you know what makes the whole place tick. If I were to choose a conceptual model for education in general, it would probably be an ellipse built around two organizing centers: knowing and doing. These two principles seem to hold all conventional schools together and focus them on their mission.

In a typical secular school, the Siamese twins of educational purpose—knowing and doing—are very evident. After all, coming to know is what schools are all about, isn't it? One goes to school to learn something, to gain useful information for coping with life, and hopefully along the way to gain an appreciation for the world's cultural legacy. The doing embraces the acquisition of skills

necessary for survival in today's world. This, then, is the straightforward mission of a secular school: to ensure that its students acquire both knowledge and skills for coping with life.

Who could argue with these relevant, laudable goals? They are educationally sound, right on target, as far as they go. But are they complete? . . . Just learning information and acquiring job skills is not enough; there must be more, much more.

Let us acknowledge quickly that Adventist education certainly embraces the ideals of knowing and doing. But the knowing and doing of Christian education extends upward to a special kind of knowing: that of knowing God personally, coming into a saving relationship with Him, and knowing that He can be trusted to guide and keep us. It also includes knowing about God's reasonable expectations for our participation in the divine-human partnership for salvation and knowing about the supernatural assistance available to ready us for graduation from earth school to the school of the hereafter.

Christian education has its own brand of doing too: students should learn to do the Master's work and get practice in helping God to extend

His kingdom on earth. They should learn to serve mankind selflessly and to live totally for God's glory. Adventist schools, then, are also assayed in terms of the extent to which their special genre of knowing and doing is accomplished.

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: "BEING"

But Christian education has a third ideal: that of being. Although implied in the religious faith/experience cited above, yet it is singled out for special attention in the school program. With this as the final complement, you might say that the tent of Adventist education has three poles: being, knowing, and doing.

What we're talking about here is a primary emphasis on Christian character development in every facet of the program of the Adventist Christian school. We extol it, study it, reward it. It might not be too strong to assert that this is the very cornerstone of Adventist education, captured best in the slogan "Character Determines Destiny."

Mission statements for good secular schools often focus on the marketplace, "the good life," or admission to graduate school. We don't deny these as legitimate goals,

but our educational mission is for our students to end up at the New Jerusalem, with admission to the heavenly school, with Christ and the angels as their tutors, to grow and learn forever. That's the cosmic dimension in curriculum planning. And that third dimension, being expressed in Adventist Christian education as conscious, focused attention to the developing spiritual personhood of the student, is what sets our schools apart in the whole field of education. The lack of commitment to this crucial area has left secular education adrift without moral compass.

THE MIGHTY TRIAD IN ADVENTIST EDUCATION

Because character development is so important, every level of Adventist education is designed to foster it. It is the bottom line in the Adventist educational balance sheet. This emphasis is absolutely central to the accomplishment of the Adventist mission in education. And this brings us to the mighty triad in Adventist education: the cooperation of home, school, and church in training our children for God.

Adventist education can never accomplish its mission if the professional educators work in isolation. Home and congregation must be powerfully involved also. Trying to determine which of those three critical components is the most important is like trying to choose which leg on a three-legged stool is indispensable!

If the family's lifestyle is worldly (particularly with respect to unregulated television viewing), the children and youth who attend church school are thrown into spiritual chaos. They find themselves living in two different worlds, each with its own value system. This produces a state of suspension and internal conflict. Many of them do not survive this battle, becoming mere numbers in the church's youth attrition statistics.

Children and youth need to know that they belong, that their church family prizes and dearly loves them, that they are truly in the house of sympathetic friends, not harsh critics. It encourages them to know that their Christian education is a responsibility with which the whole church identifies. It brings heart to struggling parents, too.

As home and church and school pull together, the enemy finds little area in which to work, and God fulfills His special promise to us, "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children" (Isa. 49:25).

Soon we shall hear the sweet words of commendation from the Saviour, "Well done. The precious jewels, the little ones I entrusted to you, are all in my eternal diadem; mission accomplished!"

This article first appeared in the June 1990 issue of Ministry,[®] International Journal for Pastors, www.MinistryMagazine.org. Dr. Akers passed away in 2017. Used by permission.





SPRING MEETING 2024 REPORT

April 9-10, 2024 • Silver Spring, Maryland



GC TREASURY REPORTS “VERY POSITIVE TURNAROUND”

By Marcos Paseggi

TREASURER'S REPORT

The current solid state of the finances of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) is a result of God's blessings and its leaders' conscious efforts to rein in expenditures while increasing funds for mission initiatives around the world, GC treasurer Paul H. Douglas said. His statement was part of the Treasury Report on the first day of the Spring Meeting of the GC Executive Committee (EXCOM) in Silver Spring, Maryland, on April 9.

“The financial position of the General Conference as of December 31, 2023, is strong,” Douglas said.

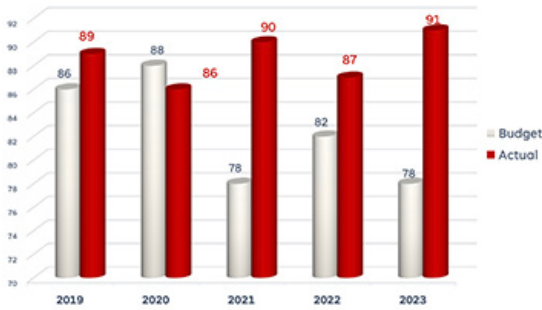
“We praise the Lord for the strong financial position considering the prevailing global economic conditions.”

A VERY POSITIVE TURNAROUND

Douglas explained that a very positive sign is that the GC ended the financial year with approximately US\$310 million in net assets, of which 92 percent were



Financially Assured: Treasurer Paul Douglas addresses the Spring Meeting delegates.
[ENNO MÜLLER/AME (CC BY 4.0)]

TITHE (in millions)

in cash and investments. “This is not our doing — this is by God and God alone. We have been reminded once again that in times we may consider as turbulent, that in the times we may consider as troubling — God is in control, and He will supply all we need for us to do what He has called us to do.”

Douglas explained that in 2023, the GC received approximately \$13 million more in tithe than the \$78 million budgeted. Offerings have also been recovering after the COVID-19 pandemic, Douglas said. “For the year 2023, we have exceeded the budget and prior year of 2022 by \$23 and \$10 million, respectively,” Douglas said. This means that in 2023, the GC received \$97 million in offerings, against the budgeted \$74 million.

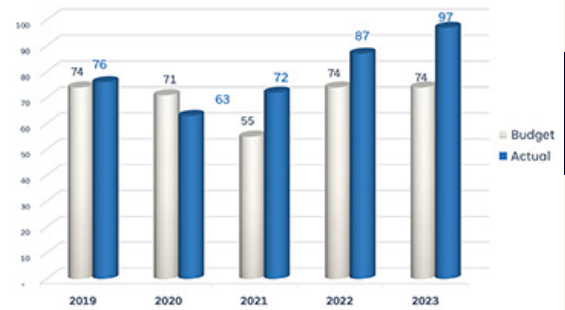
The steady increase in offerings means that in 2023, only 48 percent of the GC funding came from tithe, reverting a trend in previous years. “The relative equilibrium of tithe and offerings is due in large part to the generosity of our members to support our global mission and not just the local mission that is administered by the churches where they fellowship,” Douglas explained.

Undertreasurer Ray Wahlen presented on the GC Operating Cap in 2023 and the substantial savings the administration implemented, which helped to produce positive results.

EXPENSES, WORKING CAPITAL, AND INVESTMENTS

GC program expenses in 2023 amounted to \$172 million. While 43 percent of that amount was spent in mission strategy and support, 15 percent was spent in leadership development and accountability, and 13 percent in media and publications. Also, 9 percent was spent on educational institutions, and another 20 percent on other items. But despite inflationary pressures, Douglas said, “the General Conference was able to keep its expenses the same year over year, which is a testament to our careful attention to spending.”

The working capital and liquid assets figures were

OFFERINGS (in millions)

also positive, Douglas reported. According to him, these amounts focus on how readily an organization can respond to an emergency so its mission activities would not be disrupted. Douglas explained that the policy in force recommends “a minimum of six months for working capital and a minimum of three months that should be in liquid assets.” But for the General Conference, he said, “we have decided by an action of this body that our minimums should be set at 12 months and 9 months, respectively.” Douglas was happy to report that at the end of 2023, the GC had 13.9 months of available working capital and 11.1 months in liquid assets.

Regarding investments Douglas emphasized he “would like to praise the Lord for the significant turnaround in the value of our investments.” After a reduction in the market value of \$18 million in 2022 due to the volatilities in the financial markets, a rebound in 2023 has significantly increased their market value. “Yes, the financial markets are volatile, but I would like to assure the body ... that our investment philosophy is consistent with being proper stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us,” Douglas said.

SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS

In the next segment of the Treasury Report, GC undertreasurer Ray Wahlen reported on the Operating Cap for 2023, or the amount of money that the GC can spend annually according to policy. Wahlen was happy to share that in 2023, the GC operated at just 76.78 percent of the amount mandated by the Executive Committee.

According to Wahlen and unlike in previous occasions, where low points of spending were the result of financial crisis, in 2023 the primary reason for the low percentage spent was “due to total world tithe recovering from global economic downturns at a faster rate than the planned expense posture for office operations.”

This report, Wahlen emphasized, is “a testimony to the power of God and the faithfulness of His many



Christian stewards around the world.”

Douglas agreed. “In 2023, we can say God has continued to bless His church through the faithfulness of our members so we can be about our commission to reach the world for Christ.”

TWO MISSION IMPACT FUNDS

As an example of how the current solid financial state of the General Conference directly intersects with mission, Douglas referenced two specific funds connected to mission projects at various levels of the church.

The first Mission Impact Fund, which was implemented in 2021, commits resources to support mission projects generated by local churches, he reminded GC EXCOM members. By providing support to local churches whose project submissions are approved, GC leaders seek to emphasize their intent to inspire local churches, invest in the frontline mission of local churches, and impact the world for Christ, one community at a time, Douglas emphasized. He reported that in 2025, US\$5 million is available for allocation to that fund.

Concurrently, and for the

first time, a second Mission Impact Fund will see the allocation of financial resources to support world divisions and attached fields of the Adventist Church that implement a territory-wide evangelistic initiative in 2024, 2025, 2026, or 2027. In the case of this second fund, the focus will be on regions that submit a comprehensive plan involving their unions, local conferences, and local churches, Douglas explained.

He added that the investment per church entity highlights the intent of the GC to inspire church leaders and members in a territory-wide evangelistic initiative, invest financial and technological resources, and “impact the kingdom of God with a high harvest of souls who in turn become active disciples of Jesus Christ.” He added, “We are committed from the General Conference to support each division and each attached entity [to cover] up to 20 percent of the total program cost up to \$500,000 per entity.”

IT'S ALREADY HAPPENING

Among the major regional initiatives already planned is the East-Central Africa Division Evangelism Impact (EEI) 2025, which

will support evangelistic plans across the 11 eastern and central African nations comprising that church region, Douglas reported. “They have a bold plan, a Holy Spirit-empowered plan to double the membership of that division.”

The plan includes engaging 33,000 sites for the proclamation of the gospel, Douglas shared.

Also, in the North American Division, Pentecost 2025 is seeking to plan, schedule, and implement “Three Thousand Proclamation Initiatives” for 2025, Douglas reported. “This is not just evangelism of making friends and having different health activities but actually proclaiming the Word of God,” he said. “The division is involved, its unions are involved, its conferences are involved, their members are involved, [and] the General Conference comes by to be involved, as it mobilizes resources for mission.”

A PARADIGM SHIFT

Overall, GC Treasury leaders explained, the latest moves are part of a paradigm shift that seeks to underpin concerted efforts to refocus on mission. “We need to be more intentional with strategy,” Douglas said. “If we really believe Jesus

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is coming soon, we must think and act differently. And we must ask and answer the right questions.”

Douglas emphasized that in the past, there were just slices of an appropriation pie, a silo approach in the church’s programs, and spending without accountability. “The idea now is being more intentional with our strategy, integrating our efforts and investing for mission impact,” Douglas said. “We will implement,

in the coming days and beyond, a model that will guide us on how to invest with impact.”

The goal is, Douglas said, to eschew activities that demand high investment and low impact, and low investment with low impact. “We need to fix and forget those kinds of activities,” he said. “Why are we here? What are we doing with the resources God has given us?” he asked.

Finally, Douglas emphasized, the church needs to move to activities of high impact, even finding activities which demand low investment but have a high impact, moving from areas that are “senseless and slack” to those areas that are “smart and strategic.”

—Adapted from *“Adventist Church’s Solid Finances Will Free More Funds for Mission, Leaders Say,”* in *Adventist Review*, April 10, 2024.



LEADERS APPROVE DOCUMENT THAT SEEKS TO SUPPORT ADVENTIST PASTORS, TEACHERS, AND MEMBERS

On April 10, members of the General Conference Executive Committee (GC EXCOM) voted to approve a document that seeks to support Seventh-day Adventist pastors, teachers, and church members in their efforts to respond to current theological and doctrinal challenges. The vote took place on the second and last day of Spring Meeting at the Adventist Church headquarters in

Silver Spring, Maryland.

Ted N. C. Wilson, GC president, acknowledged that the rationale behind the document is to provide “an initiative to help stem the tide, to stop the drift, to help reduce the slippage of church members, teachers, pastors, all of us who are tempted in some way to have a non-biblical understanding of the truths that we hold firm.”

For examples, Wilson listed “the belief that somehow my relatives

By Marcos Paseggi

IMPORTANT VOTE

Presenting the Issue: (above): Mike Ryan, assistant to the president for special projects, introduces the agenda item. [SCREENSHOT JULY 2, 2024]

who are dead are in heaven,” or “not sure whether the Holy Spirit or even the Son of God is from eternity,” or, “I’m not sure if Ellen White is really a prophet.”

After Wilson’s introduction, Michael Ryan, GC assistant to the president for special projects, provided some background and timeline that led up to the inclusion of the document as an agenda item for the 2024 Spring Meeting. He acknowledged that its rationale was the awareness of some “areas of concern, where there is some slippage in the Bible-based way of understanding some of the Adventist doctrines.”

Ryan shared how, in a series of meetings of the GC Division Officers (GCDOs) held September 30 to October 2, 2023, the leaders discussed and asked themselves, “What can we possibly do about this . . . so these truths are not only brought before our people but also proclaimed to the world?” He shared that three subcommittees worked to begin providing ways to tackle these issues. The work of these subcommittees “is not the end, but it will be a beginning by which we can have a clear understanding among our church members and in every venue, every entity, and we can also have a clear message that we proclaim to the world,” Ryan said.

At the same time, Ryan added, “we can celebrate the fact that the leaders in this room . . . have an eager desire for what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy has asked the church to do, and I praise the Lord for that kind of leadership.”

GLOBAL BIBLE AND MISSION CONFERENCES

A first subcommittee recommends the hosting of global Bible and mission

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conferences that encourage pastors, elders, theologians, and teachers to proclaim the Bible truth to church members, students, and the world.

The subcommittee recommended that the Biblical Research Institute, under the guidance of the Global and Bible Missions Conference Committee, take the lead in organizing these conferences. It also recommended that the event organizers prepare video presentations in major languages, with links that allow for feedback and to ask questions and receive answers, among other initiatives.

GLOBAL CONTENT AND MEDIA PROCLAMATION

A second subcommittee focused on Global Content and Media

Proclamation, recommending print and digital content production to reach every segment of the church. The goal is “to address pressing doctrinal and theological issues related to the authority of Scripture and the trustworthiness of our Seventh-day Adventist prophetic interpretation.”

Among other initiatives, they recommended a textbook on the prophetic gift, a book on the topic of Sola Scriptura (“the Bible only”), and a special volume on Bible interpretation.

STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The third subcommittee worked on recommendations for strengthening formal theological education, pastoral continuing education, and member religious education. Leaders explained that this is urgently needed because research is showing somewhat negative trends regarding members’ attachment to beliefs such as the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White, the investigative judgment, the Trinity, a literal six-day creation, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the remnant church. “It also shows an increase in the belief that the dead are in heaven, and belief that it is acceptable to go to a witch doctor,” they said.

Among other initiatives, the third subcommittee recommended ways to develop committed Adventist faculty for the future, developing clear criteria in faculty hiring for those who teach religion and theology, and reviewing core curriculum requirements for religion classes. It also emphasized strengthening the work of the International Board of Ministerial and Theological

Education (IBMTE) and other entities to support theological education within their territories.

TACKLING AN ISSUE

When the floor opened for comments, GC EXCOM member Harold Butler was the first to react to the document presented. “As a layman, as I talk to other laymen ... the major concern they have is the slippage in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” he said, talking through the Zoom videoconference platform. “And I am very happy about this item because it answers the question, What is the church doing about this slippage?”

renewed emphasis on Bible-based beliefs.

FORGETTING OUR HISTORY?

“I am thrilled that this measure’s been taken,” said GC EXCOM member Andi Hunsaker, president of Adventist Laymen’s Services and Industries (ASi), citing a renewed emphasis on educating church members. At the same time, Hunsaker said, she wondered if some of the current challenges in the Adventist Church don’t result only from lack of knowledge. “Part of the problem is that we as a people have forgotten our history. Unless

does not only include theologians but also historians.... History is crucial and shapes our theology today.”

MORE THAN A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

North American Division president G. Alexander Bryant commented that he appreciated “the broad approach that we are taking with this.” He added, “I hope it doesn’t get stuck just at a formal theological educational level, because I think that our challenge is greater than that.”

Tom Lemon, a general vice president of the GC, said he supported the document. He also



Speaking to the Issue: (left to right) G. Alexander Bryant, president, North American Division; Tom Lemon, GC vice president; and Mark Finley, GC assistant to the president, all speak to the issue. [ENNO MÜLLER/AME (CC BY 4.0)]

Ella Simmons agreed. “It gives me great delight to speak to this item,” she said. “For years, educational leaders have expressed concerns about this at an anecdotal level. But the data have provided the tangible evidence that allows this set of recommendations. I am thrilled and I praise God for the work that has been done.”

At the same time, Simmons and others after her suggested including science education as part of this

we remember our history, we lose our identity, and if we don’t have our identity which defines our mission, purpose, and reason for being, we as a church will continue to make the same errors,” Hunsaker said.

David Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research for the world church agreed. “I would like to commend the work of the [committees] and affirm the recommendations,” he said, “but I would make the plea that the work

suggested that the church avoid using it to assign blame to pastors or teachers. According to him, when sharing the document, the focus should be “to encourage our pastors, and to encourage our teachers. I am all for encouragement,” Lemon emphasized.

VARIOUS TAKES ON THE ISSUE

Mark Finley, GC assistant to the president for special projects,

said he appreciated “the spirit of the document and the spirit of the discussions we had.” Finley added that the discussions “were open, were honest,” and the document “is written in a way that can embrace rather than repel.”

Finley also emphasized that Adventist mission is extremely dependent on its message. “If there’s an erosion of confidence in some of our fundamental beliefs, that erosion will affect other beliefs,” he warned.

On a different note, Ginger Ketting-Weller, president of the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS), commented that while she supported the concern that motivated the document wholeheartedly, she couldn’t say that she supported the remedy on the section dealing with educational institutions. She suggested including educators in the discussions of policies and how to implement some of recommendations crafted by the

subcommittees. In doing so, Ketting-Weller agreed with GC education director Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, who had earlier asked for clarifications on some aspects regarding to the governance and management of educational institutions and their relation to the document presented. But for Biblical Research Institute director Elias Brasil de Souza, the rationale for the document is clear-cut. “We see trends on the horizon, and we need to be proactive,” he said. “This document seeks to be proactive.”

After more than two and a half hours of presentations and discussions, GC EXCOM members voted “to approve the recommendations from the special GCDO Recommendation Steering Committee as presented” by a margin of 125 to 29.

First published in [Adventist Review](#), April 15, 2024.



SPRING COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

NEW GENERAL VICE PRESIDENT ELECTED

On April 11, the General Conference Executive Committee (GC EXCOM) voted Pierre E. Omeler as a new General Vice President of the General Conference, filling the vacancy left by Maurice Valentine, who passed to his rest

on October 20, 2023. Omeler most recently served as president of the Atlantic Union Conference in the northeastern United States. Prior to his appointment as President, he served as the Executive Secretary (2016- 2021) and Vice President (2011-2016) of the Atlantic Union Conference. Omeler also held the

position of Director of Haitian Ministries (2008-2011) and Senior Pastor (1991-2008) in the Northeastern Conference. Pastor Omeler is known to be highly mission minded and has a passion for cross-cultural evangelism. He is married to Myra Norman, a registered nurse. They have

been married for 39 years and have three adult children and four grandchildren. For more on the Omelers see their **story** on page 15 of this issue of the *GC Executive Committee Newsletter*.

THREE NEW DEPARTMENT DIRECTORS VOTED

On April 10, the GC EXCOM voted to accept three recommendations of the Nominating Committee and elect three new departmental directors. The Executive Committee voted to accept Zeno L. Charles-Marcel as director of Health Ministries, Galina Stele as director of Women's Ministries, and Héctor Otoniel Reyes as director of Planned Giving and Trust Services at the General Conference.

Charles-Marcel, who has been serving as Health Ministries associate director, will replace current director Peter Landless, who is planning to retire on November 1 after a period of coordinated transition. Stele replaces Heather-Dawn Small, who died on January 2. Reyes will replace Dennis R. Carlson, who is retiring. To read the biographical sketches of the three new directors [click here](#).



A Prayer of Dedication: (left to right) Myra Omeler stands next to her husband, Pierre E. Omeler, new GC vice president; Galina Stele, new director for Women's Ministries; Héctor Otoniel Reyes, new director of Planned Giving and Trust Services, and Zeno L. Charles-Marcel, new director of Health Ministries. [ENNO MÜLLER/AME (CC BY 4.0)]

NEW ELLEN WHITE RESEARCH CENTER IN ASIA

The GC EXCOM accepted a recommendation from the Ellen G. White Estate Board to establish an Ellen G. White Research Center at Asia-Pacific International University in Muak Lek, Saraburi, Thailand. Audrey Andersson, a General Conference vice president and chair of the White Estate Board, presented the proposal for the Thailand-based research center. Officers of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD) that will oversee the center expressed strong support for the recommendation.

The Ellen G. White Estate currently provides a worldwide network of 18 research centers and four branch offices. The establishment of the 19th research center holds particular significance, regional leaders said, given the

scarcity of such centers in Asia, with only two currently in existence. Merlin Burt, director of the White Estate at the General Conference, stated, "I commend SSD's deep understanding and appreciation for the Spirit of Prophecy. We fervently pray for God's blessings upon this center as we progress together." The Executive Committee voted to approve the proposal, and the project is expected to be implemented as soon as specifications are finalized.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT ON A MISSION

A special dedication was held for members of the GC Treasury team going on a special mission trip to St. Croix. The trip, titled, "I Will Go Be His Hands" took place from March 30-April 17 and included a wide range of outreach activities, such as youth and children's programs, a health fair with medical professionals from Loma Linda Health offering free services, and a construction project for a Center

New for Thailand: Audrey Andersson brings recommendation for new Ellen G. White Research Center. [ENNO MÜLLER/

AME (CC BY 4.0)]





I Will Go! Treasury staff are dedicated for a special mission trip to St. Croix. [ENNO MÜLLER/AME (CC BY 4.0)]

of Influence focusing on outreach for youth and young adults. Preparing the way for the mission trip were four evangelists who presented programs across the island. As of the time of the treasury team’s dedication at Spring Meeting, 62 people had already been baptized as a result of these evangelistic meetings. Note: At the end of the two-week event, a total of 105 baptisms took place. Read the [follow-up report here](#).

NEW VISUAL IDENTITY

Adventist Volunteer Services introduced their new visual identity to GC EXCOM members during Spring Meeting. The new logo emphasizes the unique privilege of being a volunteer missionary, helping to transform the world, and being transformed in the process. The new branding was based on research through interviews with both volunteers and non-volunteers, as well as benchmarking with other institutions and NGOs. “To identify and connect better with



volunteers and the church, we seek an identity that demonstrates and reinforces availability, joy, and multiple paths,” said Elbert Kuhn in his report. For more, [click here](#).



Mission History: David Trim, GC Archives director with Mario Brito, president, Euro-Africa Division. [ENNO MÜLLER/AME (CC BY 4.0)]

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF MISSION

Pointing out the upcoming 150th anniversary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s sending of its first missionary, J.N. Andrews to Switzerland on September 17, 1874, GC Executive Secretary Erton Kohler invited David Trim, director of the Church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, to explain further the origins and significance of the event. Holding in his hand a letter sent from Adventist believers in Switzerland in 1873, Trim called the document “one of the treasures of the GC Archives.” The letter was a request for the church in America to send a missionary to “propagate and direct the truth” in Europe. It was, explained Trim, the same type of call

the Apostle Paul received from the Macedonians to “come over and help us.”

Trim interviewed Mario Brito, president of the Inter-European Division, who explained commemorative meetings would be held this July in Tramelan, Switzerland, where the first Adventist church in Europe was built. Another commemoration will be held in a more central location in September. “We want it not to be just a commemoration,” Brito added. “We want it to have an impact. . . . to encourage our church to reflect upon the unselfishness of these missionaries, how they sacrificed, to challenge our young people to come and give themselves completely to the mission that God has entrusted to us.”

All presentations given at the 2024 Spring Meeting are available on the [GC Executive Committee website](#).

A MAN OF FAITH AND PRAYER

NEW GC VICE PRESIDENT ELECTED

By Gina Wahlen

Pierre Omeler was not looking for a new position. Serving as president of the Atlantic Union Conference in the North American Division since November 17, 2021, Omeler fully expected to continue leading God's work in the northeastern United States and the islands of Bermuda for the duration of the union's five-year term. However, with the untimely death of General Conference (GC) Vice President Maurice Valentine on October 20, 2023, the need for a new Vice President to carry on important missional leadership activities arose.

Known for his deep spiritual commitment, strong focus on evangelism and mission, Pastor Omeler came highly recommended as a dedicated leader. On April 10, 2024, the GC Executive Committee voted him as a new General Vice President.

"I count it as a privilege and honor to be able to serve, and am grateful to the president, Elder Wilson, and to the executive committee, for extending the invitation and voting," said Omeler. "I love this Church and to be able to serve and impact the Church in a global way. It's an opportunity that we thank God for. It is a privilege."

A PROVIDENTIAL MEETING

Pastor Omeler was born in Haiti and speaks French fluently. It was there where he met his future wife, Myra Norman, a nursing student from Oakwood College who came to Haiti to serve as a student missionary.

Since the age of 8, Myra had wanted to be a missionary, and set her heart on going to Africa one day. However, as the years rolled by and the opportunity drew closer, she realized she did not

have enough funds to buy an airline ticket to Africa. Trying to earn the required amount, Myra looked for various jobs, but was not able to raise the amount needed.

Nevertheless, she said, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Ps. 37:23, NKJV). "I heard people talking about mission opportunities in Haiti. I asked how much a ticket to Haiti costs, and it was the exact amount I had earned!"

While in Haiti, Myra served as an English teacher. It was there she met Pierre. Finding the new English teacher attractive, and realizing the importance for professionals to learn English, he eagerly enrolled in her class. Unfortunately, due to political unrest, Myra was unable to finish the term and had to return early to the United States.

The two met again when Pierre came to Oakwood University to major in theology, with a minor in biblical languages. Their relationship blossomed at Oakwood, and in 1984 they were married. The couple now have three adult children and four grandchildren.

FAITH, HOPE, AND PRAYER

Pierre Omeler earned his M.Div. from Andrews University and a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) from United Theological Seminary. In addition to his previous appointment as President of the Atlantic Union Conference, he has served as the Executive Secretary (2016-2021) and Vice President (2011-2016) of that union conference. Omeler also held the position of Director of Haitian Ministries (2008-2011) and Senior Pastor (1991-2008) in the Northeastern Conference.

Being a strong believer in prayer,



he started the "40 Days of Prayer" ministries while pastoring in Malden, Massachusetts. This prayer ministry is continuing around the world. He also authored the book, *The Joy of a Faith-Filled Life*, which addresses many issues of faith affecting believers from the time of Abraham to the present.

In considering some of the greatest strengths of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today, Omeler noted that our number one strength is hope.

"We are people of hope," he said. "We live expectantly for the hope and return of our Savior. And our hope in everything is based on biblical principles, that's our strength," he added. Other strengths Omeler listed included the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy, our educational network, our systematic giving system, and the diversity of the church. "We literally have people from all across the globe," he stated. "That makes us stronger."

He noted, however, that a potential weakness can come from this strength itself. "We're so diverse as a church—if we don't focus on what unites us, if we focus on what is different and what divides us, that is the weakest spot."

Nevertheless, Omeler is filled with hope. "Our strengths are more than our weaknesses," he added. "This is God's Church—that's how we have survived all of this time."

THE PURPOSE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST EDUCATION

Inspired Counsel for Leaders from Ellen G. White

“To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.”

—*Education*, pp. 15-16)

“The Holy Scriptures are the perfect standard of truth, and as such should be given the highest place in education. To obtain an education worthy of the name, we must receive a knowledge of God, the Creator, and of Christ, the Redeemer, as they are revealed in the sacred word.” —*Education*, p. 17

“As a means of intellectual training, the Bible is more effective than any other book, or all other books combined. The greatness of its themes, the dignified simplicity of its utterances, the beauty of its imagery, quicken and uplift the thoughts as nothing else can.”

—*Education*, p. 124

“He who co-operates with the divine purpose in imparting to the youth a knowledge of God, and molding the character into harmony with His, does a high and noble work. As he awakens a desire to reach God’s ideal, he presents an education that is as high as heaven and as broad as the universe; an education that cannot be completed in this life, but that will be continued in the life to come; an education that secures to the successful student his passport from the preparatory school of earth to the higher grade, the school above.”

—*Education*, p. 19

“The best education that can be given to children and youth is that which bears the closest relation to the future, immortal life. This kind of education should be given by godly parents, by devoted teachers, and by the church, to the end that the youth in turn may become zealous missionaries for either home or foreign fields. They are to be earnestly instructed in the truths of the Bible, that they may become pillars in the church, champions for truth, rooted and grounded in the faith. They are to know whereof they believe, and to have such an experience in divine things that they will never become betrayers of sacred trusts.”

—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 231

FROM PNG FOR CHRIST FACTS, LESSONS, AND PERSPECTIVE

By Glenn Townend, President, South Pacific Division



At the time of writing there have been 300,000 people baptized and deciding to be baptized because of the PNG for Christ evangelistic program – April to May in more than 2300 sites. Yes, you heard it right! These are day of Pentecost numbers. It is estimated from local counting at sites that about one quarter of the country’s population attended one of the meetings. Such numbers in a country of 10-12 million population have never been seen in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church anywhere in the world.

As a participant in PNG for Christ it was amazing to see people streaming forward, many times in the rain to respond to the call to follow Jesus, and to accept Biblical truth. The Holy Spirit was really uplifting the love of Jesus and a life of truth in Him. I know the church there expected to grow but not to this extent. The numbers make me speechless; an inner spiritual emotional gratitude wells up within me. I honor an amazing God and marvel at what He has done. I also admire the incredible faithful dedication of the local church leaders and members all over PNG.

There were thousands who attended the meetings nightly. Site attendance varied from 300 to 13,000. Each site had baptisms – some were 5, others 82, 143, 338 – only a few

sites had baptisms in their thousands. We baptized in pools, tanks, rivers (some crocodile infested), extremely cold fast flowing streams, and the ocean. The baptisms were well organized – local churches had given approval for those being baptized. Most people baptized had been prepared by the church over months before the actual baptism.

A WELL-PREPARED OUTREACH

PNG for Christ was truly a harvest event in the disciple making process. Some baptized had grown up in Adventist homes and now as young adults were making a choice to change their life’s direction (I had parents in tears seeing their children finally decide to respond to the God they cherished), some were students at Adventist schools, others were former Adventists. Few from other backgrounds and who responded at the program were baptized. As the new people responded they were told they would be part of Bible study groups and they would be baptized at a later date. There were as many of these such people as those baptized. Potentially there hundreds of thousand baptisms in the next year as the church works to disciple these people for Jesus. Please pray for the 450,000 members (before the PNG for Christ event) who now have hundreds of thousands of people to care for. This

“ Potentially there is another 300,000-plus baptisms in the next year as the church works to disciple these people for Jesus.

is a mammoth task. Churches are full to overflowing each Sabbath and new groups and congregations are meeting in homes, under trees, in halls – in any place they can secure.

The church in PNG had prepared well for the PNG for Christ program with the support of the SPD. The idea of having multiple sites of public preaching of the last day gospel was proposed by the GC TMI focus in 2016. At that time PNG wanted to be involved and began preparing for April/May 2020. Prayer was a priority – in groups, walking, early in the morning, any time – the constant prayer for PNG for Christ created local ownership and involvement which overflowed in incredible generosity (Acts 2:43-47).

The church was very conscious that it did not want to have the programs with just one evangelist in a huge stadium. Historically these events had baptisms in the thousands, but the local church people did not know the people and many of them drifted and became what PNG people call ‘backsliders’. They wanted to have multiple sites and have people prepared for baptism before the harvest programs – people that they knew. They were focused on Jesus commission of making disciples not just members (Matthew 28:19,20).

USING THE HARVEST METHOD

With the support of the SPD Discipleship Ministry Team the local Union and Conference/Mission departmental people the leaders began teaching the harvest model of disciple making – where to receive a multiplying harvest of disciple making disciples you must follow a gardening sequence: prepare the soil or heart of the people, sow the seed of the word of God in the heart, cultivate and

nurture what God is doing by watering (prayer and Bible reading) and pulling weeds (dealing with temptation). The public programs would be the harvest and then the new disciples would be trained and challenged in mission.

The departmental teams taught church planting by using the Discovery Bible Reading methods – which anyone can do. Pray, read the Bible, discuss what they heard and answer basic questions that a facilitator asks that enables a person to grow. This method relies on the power of the word and the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit in the people’s life. Adventist World Radio also did training in personal evangelism.

The Covid pandemic stopped the PNG for Christ harvest TMI event in 2020 – but that is when the explosion of growth started. Churches and other public gatherings were closed to stop infection, but the local people began to put into practice the Discovery Bible Reading groups. People in PNG were allowed to meet with small groups in their homes. 6,000 new groups were formed in 2020. The SPD was the only Division in the world to grow that year because of the growth in these groups. I saw many of these groups in many parts of PNG in visits from 2021 onwards.

Eventually the PNGUM estimated from Mission reports that there were over 10,000 new churches started through the DBR method. Growth was incremental until now. But we see the results of that personal disciple making work in the numbers from the PNG for Christ in 2024.

NURTURE AND RETENTION TRAINING

The SPD and the GC funded roofing iron for the new churches at PNGUM request. The SPD funded

Tok Pidgin and World Changer Bibles, picture rolls with ASI and Godpods with AWR. With the PNGUM there was training for nurture and retention as well as disciple making all through 2022 and 2023 with the SPD Ministry and Strategy team. In fact, the whole 2000+ pastors to volunteer pastors at the Pastor’s Summit who met at Kabiufa in July 2023 focused on the garden model and Discovery Bible reading and other simple disciple making methods. The SPD Institute of Public Evangelism taught on preparation, presentation and follow up to public programs too.

At the PNGUM request the SPD ordered more Bibles and resources for doctrinal and discipleship Bible study, godpods and picture rolls – we thought we ordered enough. Oh, we of little faith! God blew us away!

MORE THAN IMAGINED

I am still rejoicing and marveling at what God has done – and the fact that some of us from the SPD and the world church were invited to participate and see the deep, methodical, and passionate spiritual commitment of the church in PNG was awe inspiring. God did more than they and we ever imagined. And we all have a personal story to tell – find someone who went and listen to them.

The apostle Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:20,21 (ESV) has been answered before my very eyes, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen”

Pastor Glenn Townend is the South Pacific Division president. This article was first published in the Adventist Record, June 13, 2024.



CHECKUP

7

REASONS TO GET A CHECK-UP

As leaders, it is sometimes a challenge to find time to take care of ourselves. Nevertheless, taking care of our health is vitally important. As the saying goes, if you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else! An important aspect of maintaining good health is having regular check-ups with your health care provider. Here are eight compelling reasons why you should have an annual physical exam:



1 EARLY DETECTION OF HEALTH ISSUES. Annual physical exams allow for the early detection of potential health problems before they become serious. Early diagnosis can lead to more effective and less invasive treatments, improving outcomes for conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and certain cancers.

2 MONITORING EXISTING HEALTH CONDITIONS. For individuals with chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or hypertension, regular check-ups are essential to monitor the condition and adjust treatment plans as necessary. This helps in maintaining the stability of the condition and preventing complications.

3 PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES. During a physical exam, healthcare providers can offer guidance on diet, exercise, and other lifestyle factors that significantly impact overall health. This preventive advice can help individuals make informed decisions to enhance their well-being.

4 BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER. Regular visits help build a trusting relationship between the patient and the healthcare provider. This continuity of care ensures that the provider is well-informed about the patient's medical history and can provide

personalized care, improving both treatment and preventive measures.

5 REVIEWING AND UPDATING MEDICATIONS. Annual physical exams provide an opportunity to review and update any medications you are taking. This ensures that prescriptions are still necessary, effective, and not causing adverse effects or interactions. It also allows for adjustments based on any new health conditions or changes in your health status.

6 MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT. Physical exams often include a discussion of mental health, allowing for the identification and management of issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Early intervention in mental health can significantly improve overall quality of life and prevent the development of more severe conditions.

7 HEALTH SCREENINGS AND TESTS. Depending on age, gender, and risk factors, annual exams may include various health screenings such as blood pressure checks, cholesterol levels, blood glucose tests, and screenings for cancers (e.g., mammograms, prostate exams, and colonoscopies). These screenings are crucial for early detection and prevention of serious health issues.

If you haven't already done so, why not schedule your appointment today?

Sources: Mayo Clinic (<https://mayoclinic.org/3Vtio6d>); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://bit.ly/cdchealthcheckups>



THE BACK PAGE

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

1 A broadcast license for a low power FM station has recently been granted to allow Adventist broadcasting into a previously unreached area of the Navajo Nation, located in the area of the United States known as **“Four Corners”** where the four states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah meet. This will expand the work of the FM radio network known as Diné Adventist Radio (DAR). Learn more about this exciting new development [here](#).

2 Little evangelists in Ecuador [led 61 new friends to baptism](#) during the *Evangelismo Kids* (Evangelism Kids) prayer week from May 11-18, 2024. More than 300 children in **southern Ecuador** were the main preachers for the week, with the theme, “God Knows, He takes care of you.”

3 Seventh-day Adventists in **Bonaire**, an island municipality of the Netherlands in the Caribbean,

recently gathered to witness the first ordination ceremony ever to take place there. More than 200 church leaders, members, family, and community residents met at Antriol Seventh-day Adventist Church on the premises of the original site of the first church building in Bonaire, as Jurvensley Koots was ordained to the gospel ministry. The ordination is a landmark for the Bonaire Mission, which was organized in 2017.

4 Seventh-day Adventists in Spain gathered to worship, reflect, and recommit to mission at the “Back to the Alter” mission rally held June 14-16 in **Madrid, Spain**. The event, cosponsored by the Spanish Union of Churches and Safeliz Publishing House drew more than 4,000 church members and leaders in person, and thousands more watching the livestream, for a weekend of spiritual renewal and commitment, focusing on faithfulness to God’s Word.

5 In the heart of Hêvié Akossavié, a neighborhood famed as a stronghold of voodoo in **Cotonou, Benin**, Hensley Mooroooven, GC undersecretary, led the Pentecost 2024 evangelistic series April 14-27 under the theme “Hope for a Troubled World.” On the final day, 16 pastors baptized 238 candidates. A US\$35,000 donation was given by the GC and some private donors for the construction of an Adventist church in Hêvié. A plot has already been acquired, and within six months, the new church will be opened and organized.

6 The first Adventurers’ Fair of the Gulf Field was held at the field’s headquarters in **Ras Al Khaimah, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, on March 24. Themed “Jesus Knows, He Takes Care of You,” the event was attended by a crowd of about 400 Adventurers, parents, teachers, and leaders. Ten clubs across

the UAE acted out biblical parables in each of their booths as a way of showing their love and understanding of Bible stories. They also participated in several other fair activities including a puppet show, sack race, tug of war, lava walk, relay and other physical activities.

7 Designed to address inquiries and clear up misconceptions about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the AI Chatbot “Adventist Church GPT” has been unveiled by the Digital Evangelism Department of the Korean Union Conference, in **Seoul, Korea**. The AI service furnishes information encompassing Adventist doctrine, history, beliefs, and lifestyle. Beyond providing accurate details, it offers education and counseling services connected to Bible correspondence schools. Available 24/7, its prompt responses aim to benefit church members and the general public alike.