



# 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

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2024

*“To each one some work*

is given. During the old year have you performed your appointed tasks with cheerfulness and fidelity, having an eye single to the glory of God? Opportunities and privileges have been granted you; what use have you made of these gifts entrusted to you by our Heavenly Father? . . .

“We are now entering upon a new year, and may it prove a beginning of years to us. If in the old year we have made failures, let us commence the new by rectifying these errors as far as we can. If the old year has borne into eternity a spotted record of opportunities neglected and privileges slighted, let us see that that of the new year is free from these blemishes. Its days are all before us; let us begin now to make the history of each as it passes, such as we shall not tremble to meet in the judgment. Let us fill each one full of loving, helpful work for others. Let us develop all our powers, and make of ourselves all that God designed that we should.”

ELLEN G. WHITE  
AUSTRALASIAN  
RECORD,  
JANUARY 5, 1914



EDITORIAL



## WALKING TOGETHER AGREEMENT IS AN AGENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR ACTION

BY PAUL H. DOUGLAS, GC TREASURER/CFO

*Note: This article comes from a presentation given on October 12, 2024, at the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee in Silver Spring, Maryland. Elements of the oral style have been retained.*

*We* have had a wonderful and blessed discourse on Bible truths and have looked at trends that give us indication these Bible truths are under attack. We came together in this place as leaders in special fellowship and communion to consider the times in which we live as we near the soon

return of Jesus Christ. Now, we go from this mountaintop not many days from now and back to our various locations of service. Though our various locations of service are separated by water, landmass, and time zones, we are leaders who must still walk together knowing what we have seen . . . we are still leaders who must still walk together knowing what we have heard . . . we are still leaders who must still walk together knowing what we must do.

For our reflection that will bring a close to our discourse, I call our attention to the inspired and prophetic word of Amos 3:3—“Can

two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (NKJV). In this inspired and prophetic word Amos, questioned ancient Israel, “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” Amos questions spiritual Israel today by asking the question, “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?”

Amos more specifically questions all of us today who are here at the 2024 Annual Council by asking the question, “In asking this question, Amos speaks to a people who have been delivered yet disobedient; he speaks to a people

who have been chosen yet not committed; he speaks to a people who have been blessed yet do not believe. Amos is asking, my fellow leaders, can *we* walk together unless we are agreed?

In framing this question in the imagery of a walk, Amos suggests that the people of God are going with someone; that the people of God are going somewhere; and that the people of God have something to talk about with someone as they are going somewhere.

I want to submit that this prophetic word of Amos is also for

us today . . . and it brings us to the realization that if the people of God are *not* in agreement in where they are going, and if the people of God are *not* in agreement about what they are saying while they are going, then the people of God are doing nothing more than just wandering around. Let me say this another way: If the people of God are *not* in agreement on the destination, and if the people of God are not in agreement on the discussion, then the people of God are on their way to destruction.

As we approach the closing

Recent data has indicated there is slippage among some Seventh-day Adventist members and even some pastors regarding key Bible doctrines. On Friday evening, October 11, and Sabbath afternoon, October 12, short presentations on these key doctrines were presented by scholars from the Biblical Research Institute (BRI), Geoscience Research Institute (GRI), Ellen G. White Estate, *Adventist Review*, and Andrews University. In addition, research data was presented indicating slippage in belief.

“Returning to Our Roots” by Ted N C Wilson, President

“The Heart of the Seventh-day Adventist Message” by Artur A Stele, General Vice-President; Presentation Slides

“Harmony and Interdependence of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs and Mission” by Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI Director

“The Bible” by Frank M Hasel, BRI Associate Director

“The Spirit of Prophecy” by Merlin D Burt, White Estate Director; Presentation Slides

“Creation: Distinctiveness and Value of the Seventh-day Adventist Message” by Ronald Nalin, GRI Director; Presentation Slides

“Sabbath” by Felix H Cortez, Andrews University professor; Presentation Slides

“Marriage and Sexuality: The Biblical View” by Alberto R Timm, BRI Associate Director; Presentation Slides

“State of the Dead” by Clinton L Wahlen, BRI Associate Director; Presentation Slides

“Sanctuary” by Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI Director

“Adventist Soteriology: How Does God Save Us?” by John Peckham, Adventist Review Associate Editor; Presentation Slides

“The Second Coming: The Fact and Its Importance” by Daniel K Bediako, BRI Associate Director; Presentation Slides

Members/Pastors Survey: Trends by Galina Stele, Women’s Ministries Director

“United in Message: How We Move from Here” by Ted N C Wilson, President

“United in Mission: How We Move from Here” by Erton C Köhler, Executive Secretary; Presentation Slides

“Harmoniously Moving Forward” by Paul H Douglas, Treasurer/CFO

chapters before Jesus comes again, we are seeing more and more people in our church around the world with varying levels of disagreement about what we believe and varying levels of disagreement on how we should behave as Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

However, instead of bringing into focus the emerging perspectives of disagreement, let me bring into focus seven enduring points of agreement we must have as we walk together towards the kingdom of God.

## WE MUST BE IN AGREEMENT

These seven points are not new to you, and during this Sabbath we have listened to these truths that we must believe in together now. We must walk together in these truths.

We must be in agreement:

- that God created this earth in six literal days, and on the seventh day He rested from His work and sanctified the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. (*Gen. 2:2-3*)
- that the Scriptures constitute the word and revelation of God and that its authority has not diminished because of time and should not be discarded because

of changing opinions. (*2 Tim. 3:16-17*)

- that there is a sanctuary in heaven where our God is ministering even right now on our behalf and applying His blood that was shed as a sacrifice for our sins. (*Heb. 8:1-2*)
- that salvation is only by grace and is a gift of God. It is nothing that we can merit, nothing that we can achieve but something that we can receive. (*Eph. 2:8-9*)
- that the dead are asleep and those who have died in Christ will awake when the Master calls them by name, for when the trumpet sounds, mortal will put on immortality, corruptible will put on incorruptible, death will die, suffering will be set aside, and all the former things will be put away. (*1 Thess. 4:13-17*)
- that the Spirit of Prophecy is a gift of God to His people and that the writings of Ellen White are from God and are as relevant to us today as they were yesterday. (*Rev. 19:10*)
- that Jesus

is coming again! He is coming in clouds of glory—no longer a suffering Savior but coming as a conquering King to receive His own. He is coming to set up an everlasting kingdom with a realm and a rule that is forever! (*Rev. 22:12-14*)

## WHO, WHAT, WHERE

My beloved leaders who are here today attending this 2024 Annual Council, there must be agreement among us as a people whom God has “Called to Be Faithful.” There must be agreement on *who* we are as Seventh-day Adventists, on *what* we are saying as Seventh-day Adventists, and on *where* we are going as Seventh-day Adventists!

So in all of North America and South America, in all of Asia and in Africa, in all of Europe and in the Middle East, in all of the islands and territories of Inter-America and in the South



Pacific, in the 10/40 Window and outside the 10/40 Window, there must be agreement on who we are; there must be agreement on what we are saying; and there must be agreement on where we are going!

Let us therefore agree to focus equal and greater energies on our shared purpose to proclaim to the world the word of God more than on the problems we may face as a Church, for God did not call us to preach about problems. God called us to proclaim the everlasting gospel into all the world as a witness to all the nations so the end can come. Preaching about the problems will not bring an end to the problems, but preaching *the gospel* will bring an end to the problems. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached” in Sydney and Seoul, Lisbon and London, Madrid and Manila, Kigali and Kingston, Brussels and Bakersfield....

Let us therefore agree:

- to declare there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.
- to lift up Jesus Christ and Him alone, and He will draw all men unto himself.
- to assemble ourselves not only for worship but for witness, motivating and provoking each in love to do good works.
- to allow the Holy Spirit to anoint our agreement with power so that we may do greater things than Jesus did.
- to uphold the Bible as the true, timeless, and trustworthy word of God. It is not the size of the Bible, but it is the substance and sacredness of the Bible!
- to “Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment is come and worship Him who made Heaven and earth the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:7, KJV).

My friends, can two walk together unless they agree?  
My friends, can *we* walk together unless we are agreed?  
Can we who are here at the 2024 Annual Council walk together unless you are agreed?

## POWER FOR ACTION

My dear friends let me put before you this point — when we are in agreement, the Holy Spirit provides the power for action. Jesus is coming soon, and He is calling all of us everywhere to action!

*Now* is not the time for argument about how we divide the money to be used for the mission of the Church; *now*

is the time for agreement on how we declare the message of the gospel so we can finish the mission of the Church.

*Now* is not the time for argument about the methods to be used for ministry; *now* is the time for agreement on the mission to go and make disciples who will make other disciples for Christ.

*Now* is not the time for argument about what makes us feel comfortable; *now* is the time for agreement about what makes us focused on our commitment to the cause of God.

*Now* is not the time for argument on social media about who did what and why they are evil; *now* is the time for agreement that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God!

*Now* is not the time for argument about where a person is from and to which family he or she may belong; *now* is the time for agreement that everyone has been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.

*Now* is not the time for argument about the foundational truths of what we believe as a Church; *now* is the time for agreement to proclaim the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

*Now* is not the time for argument; *now* is the time for agreement!

Our prophet shared with us these words: “We have no time, no words to spend in controversy. . . . There is need of sanctified energy. The armies of heaven are on the move and where is the human agent to co-operate with God?”<sup>1</sup>


My friends, “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” Can *we* walk together unless we are agreed?

Let me declare to you today, my dear friends, our agreement is an agency of the Holy Spirit for action.

We need to move from argument to agreement  
We need to move from agreement to action. We can finish this work!

## INSPIRED COUNSEL

“Everything in our world is in agitation. Events are changing to bring about the day of God, which hasteth greatly. It becomes those who are now in positions of trust not to catch the spirit of confusion, and drift, drift, they know not where. God’s people need thorough conversion of heart, revealing harmony amid the disorderly elements of the world. In the general discord there should be one place where harmony and unity should exist because the Bible is the study book. When its principles are followed, it becomes a bright



Each of us is just one note, but when we join two notes together—join church leaders together, join church entities together, join church strategy together, we will achieve harmony of action.

light shining in a dark place.”<sup>2</sup>

“Suppose Christ should abide in every heart and selfishness in all its forms should be banished from the church, what would be the result? Harmony, unity, and brotherly love would be seen as verily as in the church which Christ first established. Christian activity would be seen everywhere. The whole church would be kindled into a sacrificial flame for the glory of God. Every Christian would cast in the fruit of his self-denial to be consumed upon the altar. There would be far greater activity in devising fresh methods of usefulness and in studying how to come close to poor sinners to save them from eternal ruin.”<sup>3</sup>

### A GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

My fellow leaders, heaven is watching us from above; 22 million members of this church are

watching us from around as a cloud of witnesses. We cannot call God’s people into agreement if we are not in agreement about who we are as a chosen people of God who have been called to be faithful. We cannot call God’s people into agreement if we are not in agreement about what we are saying as part of an end-time prophetic message. And we cannot call God’s people into agreement if we are not in agreement about where we are going to the promised land of God’s eternal and everlasting kingdom. We cannot call people into agreement if we ourselves are not in agreement!

For the musicians in the room, you know there are eight notes on the musical scale. When you play one note, you get musical sound; when you play two notes, you get musical harmony, and when you play three notes, you get a musical chord. The musical chord gives a certain sound, a complete

sound, a compelling sound. The musical chord is a compelling sound to the musical ear because there is a progression the chord must make, and if it does not make that progression there is a disconnect between what is being heard and where the musical chord is going.

For us leaders in the room today, we can draw some instruction today from the musical chord—each of us is just one note, but when we join two notes together—join church leaders together, join church entities together, join church strategy together, we will achieve harmony of action. Above all, my friends, when we allow the Holy Spirit to join the two notes of our agreement, we have a certain sound that is founded on the word of God, we have a complete sound that is faithful to the entire word of God, we have a compelling sound that is focused on the soon coming Kingdom of our God and King!

For “There’s a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar, for the Father waits over the way to prepare us a dwelling place there. . . . We shall sing on that beautiful shore the melodious song of the blest; and our spirits shall sorrow no more—not a sigh for the blessing of rest. . . . To our bountiful Father above, we will offer a tribute of praise, for the glorious gift of His love, and the blessings that hallow our days.”<sup>4</sup>

My friends, when we walk in agreement together, we can sing in agreement together, “In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore. In the sweet by and by we shall meet on that beautiful shore.”

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Southern Africa*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> White, Manuscript 126, 1899.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> Sanford Fillmore Bennett, “In the Sweet By and By,” public domain.

# GOD IS FAITHFUL AND WANTS US TO BE FAITHFUL

**A**s never before, God is calling Seventh-day Adventist church leaders and members to be faithful to Him, General Conference (GC) president Ted N. C. Wilson said in an appeal during his pastoral address on Sabbath, October 12.\*

“In this contemporary world of ever-changing values and slippery moral slopes, we are to stand firmly on solid ground with our feet planted on the sure Word of God,” he emphasized.

This year commemorates 150 years since the first official missionary, John N. Andrews, and his family arrived in Switzerland, something that Wilson pointed out. “We are called to follow faithfully in this amazing example of selfless mission service wherever we are around the globe,” he said.

## RELYING ON CHRIST’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Our call to faithfulness to God’s Word and His truth is based, Wilson said, in our complete reliance on the righteousness and power of Christ. Grounded in Him, our faithfulness will affect every practical aspect of our lives, he emphasized.

“Let us live faithful Christian lives, allowing the righteousness of Christ to work in us to show a lifestyle full of godliness and mission outreach,” he said. “Through His righteousness, we can show a lifestyle of biblical standards, health reform, righteousness by faith in Him, faithfulness to His Word in all



Ted N. C. Wilson, GC president, preaches the Sabbath sermon, October 12, during Annual Council 2024 [Tor Tjeransen/ AME (CC BY 4.0)].

things, and simplicity of action and behavior.”

## A UNIQUE MESSAGE AND MISSION

Wilson also emphasized that we are called to hold to God’s intended mission for the Adventist Church. “We are a peculiar people . . . a unique people with a unique message on a unique mission. God is calling us to be faithful to Him, His Word, to the Advent message, and to the proclamation of the three angels’ messages which focus on Christ’s righteousness and His beautiful Ten Commandments,” he said. Those

commandments, he added, reveal “that His character is based on His everlasting love for each of us” and that “this love shows the centrality of Christ in our lives and His complete role in our salvation.”

God’s call is also a call to mission, he said. “We are to be part of global Total Member Involvement to reach the world, saying to the Lord, ‘I Will Go.’”

## THE POWER OF PERSONAL WITNESSING

In the context of this divine call to faithfulness, Wilson highlighted the power of our personal stories to

connect and reach out to others. “The personal stories and witness of each of us are to be shared with the world as we faithfully testify of Jesus and His saving power.”

Against that background, Wilson shared that while attending a recent board retreat at Loma Linda University Health (LLUH), he heard a testimony that he wanted GC Executive Committee (EXCOM) members to listen to. He then called Giorgia Maghelli to the pulpit. Maghelli, a medical student at Loma Linda University, shared how she experienced God’s faithfulness in her life.

## A SPECIAL TESTIMONY

Maghelli, who was born in Italy and lived in Scotland and Ireland, shared how she first got acquainted with the Adventist Church through YouTube videos on prophecy and later through Ellen White’s books.

She shared how the opening sentence of *Patriarchs and Prophets*—“God is love. His nature, His law, is love. It ever has been; it ever will be”—appealed to her heart. “[It] reeled me in,” Maghelli acknowledged. “It opened up a whole new world for me.”

Maghelli then shared how, through a series of providential events, she was introduced to international evangelist Mark Finley and his wife, Teenie, and later to Andi Hunsaker, an Adventist physician who is currently president of Adventist-Laymen’s Services and Industries (ASi). It was a journey that eventually led her to Loma Linda

University, where she is learning how to use the Adventist health message to alleviate suffering and bring others to Jesus.

“The blessings and miracles have almost been too great for me to contain—they fill me with a sense of awe and gratitude,” Maghelli said.

## UNITED FOR MISSION

In closing his message, Wilson reminded EXCOM members and those following the program online that God has provided all that is needed for our salvation. Thus, “all that is needed is for us to be faithful in proclaiming His last-day message of hope, warning, and redemption.” He then quoted Ellen White, who, in her book *Selected Messages*, wrote, “God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. He has appointed that His church on earth shall stand perfectly united in the Spirit and counsel of the Lord of hosts to the end of time” (Book 2, p. 397).

Wilson closed by appealing to every church leader and member to join him in these efforts. “Are you willing to be part of global Total Member Involvement in sharing God’s message to the world?” he asked. “You are chosen for mission and called to be faithful. . . . May God bless each of you as you are faithful to Him. Maranatha!”

\* This article is abridged from “God is Faithful and Wants Us to Be Faithful,” General Conference President Says,” *Adventist Review*, 12 Oct 2024.



Giorgia Maghelli, a medical student at Loma Linda University, tells her conversion story as part of Elder Wilson’s sermon presentation [Tor Tjeransen/ AME (CC BY 4.0)].

# MOVING MISSION FORWARD

A review of a recent mission trip set a singular tone for the Secretariat Report at the Annual Council on October 13.

The report would be “a precious time to share with you a picture of our church and its worldwide mission,” GC secretary Erton Köhler said. Köhler and his team reported church growth and other figures but went beyond statistics to review the genesis of Adventist mission to the world, discuss the current state of missionary deployment, and share some of the possibilities and challenges for the months and years ahead. Köhler began with the testimony of a departmental mission trip to Cuba.

## AN UNFORGETTABLE MISSION TRIP

Köhler described how, in a first, almost 30 leaders and workers serving in the GC Secretariat office participated in a mission trip to Cuba in late July and early August. The initiative combined the efforts of the GC, the Inter-American Division, and the Cuban Union Conference (CUC). Secretariat also enlisted a partnership with Maranatha Volunteers International, a supporting ministry of the Adventist Church.

Köhler shared how “Hope for Cuba” included five evangelistic reaping campaigns that resulted in 76 baptisms and 217 enrolled in Bible studies. A special project also benefited more than 300 children, he reported.

Through a combined effort of all entities and bodies involved, church leaders donated five video projectors to be used in evangelism, supported the planting of two new churches, and helped repair and paint one church in Havana, Köhler shared. GC Secretariat also donated a new van for the



GC Secretary, Erton Köhler, wore a T-shirt during his presentation that illustrated a recent mission trip to Cuba.

CUC, after the only vehicle the field owned had accumulated more than 650,000 miles (more than 1 million kilometers).

As part of the trip, the Brazil Publishing House donated much-needed paper for the church’s Cuban printing press, Köhler reported. Thanks to the local support, “our time in Havana was unforgettable,” he said.

## WHAT MEMBER STATISTICS SHOW

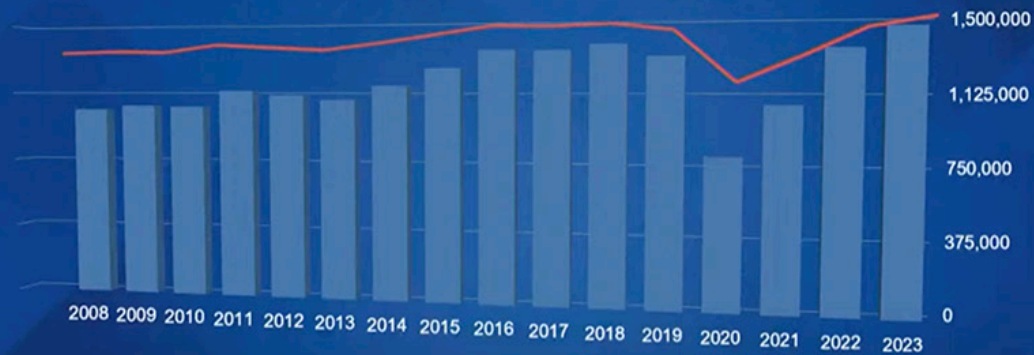
Accessions to the Adventist Church have fully rebounded after the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to David Trim, director of the GC Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. In 2023, the church welcomed more than 1,465,000 new members—more than 4,000 a day, or one every 21.5 seconds. “In fact, 2023 saw the largest number of net accessions of any year in Adventist Church history,” Trim said.

At the same time, more than 836,000 left the denomination in 2023 (excluding deaths), the third highest figure ever recorded. “The four highest losses have been in the last five years,” Trim reported. Thus,





## ACCESSIONS (15-Year Trend, Year End)



David Trim, director of the GC Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, gave an updated report including accessions and losses.

he added, “accessions alone do not count for church growth. We have to find ways to disciple more members if we want our net growth to become more explosive.” Currently, the percentage of members who leave is closer to 43 percent, he reported. Regarding the ratio of Adventist members to world population, there is currently one Adventist per 350 people (compared to 519 per church member in 2000).

Trim also shared that globally, 30 church members are needed to produce one accession. It’s a statistic that, he said, shows “how effective our church is in reaching people.” He then discussed regional differences, stating, “Every division has its own mission field. . . . This highlights again the need for Mission Refocus, with missionaries and resources deployed within divisions but also between divisions,” he said.

### A STEP-BY-STEP UNDERSTANDING

Moving on to the genesis of Adventist mission, Köhler took the

podium once more to emphasize how church leaders and members in the mid-19th century went through several stages until they were ready to embrace the call to worldwide missionary endeavors. He recounted how in 1874, under then GC president G. I. Butler, leaders voted to send J. N. Andrews to Switzerland as the first official missionary.

Despite meager resources and a lack of structure, the church moved forward in faith, Köhler emphasized. “No crisis should stop the advance of world mission. God is the owner of the church and the mission. He always opens doors for His mission to advance,” he said.

Köhler called church leaders to keep the Adventist mission legacy, now 150 years old, “alive and strong, working in an integrated way to prepare this world for the second coming of Jesus.”

### MOVING MISSION FORWARD

In the last section of his report, Köhler referenced *Mission Refocus*, an initiative of the GC to redirect

more funds and resources to the worldwide mission field. This emphasis on frontline mission service has required financial adjustments at all church levels, he acknowledged, but it’s already rendering tangible results.

This new emphasis has resulted, among many other initiatives, in the reopening of the Baghdad Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iraq, which had been close since 2003. This was achieved thanks to a family deployed to serve in that area of the world, Köhler reported. “Mission Refocus is not a dream or a project anymore; it is a reality!” he said.

### THREE MISSION WINDOWS

Köhler then delved into what he called “three mission windows” present in every church region around the world. They include the 10/40 Window (a region of the world where most of the world’s population lives but where Christians are a minority), the Post-Christian Window, and the Urban Window.

All three represent the most

challenging areas for mission, Köhler emphasized. “Every one of your divisions has all three windows in its territory. You may not have 10/40 Window countries, but you do have large unreached or low-reached territories or people groups,” he said. “Something needs to be done urgently in each one of these territories.”

He mentioned specific people groups around the world that represent a big challenge for Adventist mission, including the Hausa in Nigeria, the Bamar in Myanmar, and the Somali people in northern Somalia. He also singled out the Bengali in Bangladesh, the Mahratta in India, and the Northern Uzbek in Uzbekistan. All of them include millions in population, many of whom have never heard about Jesus and His truth.

Köhler also called attention to post-Christian nations affected by increasing secularism, including New Zealand, Czechia, and Greece. Among urban centers, he singled out Naples, Italy, with more than 21,000 residents per Adventist church member; Durban, South Africa; Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Guadalajara, Mexico.

“It is time to reorganize our priorities, our meetings, our agendas, our strategies, all our resources, and focus them on our mission,” Köhler said. “It is time to take on the most challenging places and people groups within our territories.”

### A SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

Mission requires investing resources in it, Köhler emphasized. However, when we tackle our mission challenges, God will send the resources we need, Köhler said. “Money must follow the mission,” and not the other way around, he added. Thus, “we can move

forward with boldness, trusting in the owner of the mission.”

Twenty-first-century church leaders need to relive the spirit of sacrifice of Adventism’s early pioneers, Köhler said. He shared that even now, the Adventist Church has faithful missionaries giving and even losing their lives in the mission field. “They are keeping alive the spirit of sacrifice in our days and motivating all of us to commit our best to the worldwide mission,” he said.

As an example of that “life commitment to mission,” Köhler introduced the family of Gary Roberts. Missionary pilot Roberts and his family dedicated their lives to mission in Papua, Indonesia. But it has been at a high cost, he acknowledged.

“First, they lost their son to malaria while in the mission field when he was still young,” Köhler said. “Later, Gary’s father, also a mission pilot, was killed in a plane crash while serving in the mission field. This past summer, Gary himself was faced with an inoperable brain tumor diagnosis. And yet, even in his battle with a terminal illness, Gary’s faith stood strong.”

Köhler reported that after Gary Roberts died on July 24, his brother Eric expressed his desire to replace him as a mission pilot. “He will be the third member of the Roberts family to dedicate his life to mission,” Köhler said.

With a special prayer for the Roberts family, Köhler closed his report. EXCOM members voted overwhelmingly to record receipt of the report.

\* This article is abridged from [“GC Secretary Calls Leaders to Redouble Efforts, Tackle Challenges in the Mission Field,”](#) *Adventist Review*, 13 Oct 2024.

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## A COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING FRONTLINE MISSION



Paul H. Douglas, GC treasurer, presents his report during Annual Council 2024.

**D**uring the [Treasurer's Report](#) on October 14, treasurer/CFO Paul H. Douglas shared a general outlook of the GC's financial position, while associate treasurer Timothy Aka and undertreasurer Ray Wahlen respectively reported on macroeconomic trends and on the world allocations and appropriations budget for 2025. Wahlen also reported on the use of tithe funds in 2023. A video presentation highlighted the role of treasury personnel in mission, at a time when the Adventist Church celebrates 150

years since deploying its first missionary overseas.

### MACROECONOMIC TRENDS

After Douglas' introduction, Aka, who had been absent due to major health challenges, thanked God and his colleagues. "I wasn't sure I would [have] this opportunity again," Aka said as he addressed EXCOM members. "I am so thankful that I am standing here and so appreciative of all of your prayers."

Aka discussed some global economic trends and how they

affect the ministry of the Adventist Church. He noted that while the global economy has been growing, inflation has been rising around the world. He noted current trends in the countries that affect the GC budget the most, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Mexico, Philippines, and the United States.

These seven countries contribute approximately 75 percent of the tithes remitted to the GC and 65 percent of the offerings, Douglas said. "We praise God for the faithfulness of all our members, but we pay special attention to the macroeconomic realities of these countries, because the realities that affect these countries will indeed affect the financial picture of the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

### FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

Douglas was pleased to report that the financial position of the General Conference is strong. "It is important for us to be strong, because we don't only serve but also support the world field to ensure that this mission, indeed, can go forward."

He reported that cash and investments, which account for 83 percent of total assets, have increased 6.2 percent when comparing August 2023 to August 2024. While tithe has slightly decreased against the budgeted amounts through August 2024,



Ray Wahlen, GC  
undertreasurer

“  
I praise the Lord for  
this strong evidence  
of the continued  
growth in the  
financial capacity  
of our church  
organizations and of  
our church members  
around the world.”

offerings have increased 24.5 percent against the budgeted amount.

Likewise, working capital (current assets minus current liabilities) has reached 16.6 months, greater than the 6 months voted policy. Liquid assets (those that can easily be converted to cash) reached 13 months, greater than the 3 months voted by policy. “God has provided for His church, and we give all the glory to Him for the resources we have to do the work for which we have been chosen,” Douglas said.

### BUDGET AND MISSION

As Douglas introduced the budget 2025 presentation led by Wahlen, he highlighted once more the renewed emphasis on targeted spending. “I want to assure you today that our budget process and priorities will be going through a period of deliberate study with the expected outcome that the General Conference itself will exemplify for the church what it means to put our money where the mission is,” Douglas said.

Wahlen agreed. “In the preparation of the budget, we remained mindful of the mission that the Lord has placed upon every level of His church. Therefore, we have attempted to consider the impact of our financial activities throughout the entire system,” he said.

### A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

As in the past, Wahlen added, financial officers of the world church have deliberately taken a conservative approach at the time of budgeting, something essential in a macroeconomic environment that remains highly volatile, he said. The church has also taken a global view, as for instance, currently, only 21 percent of world offerings are given in US dollars (which makes the budget more susceptible to currency fluctuations).

Wahlen reported that working on the budget required factoring in four major items: the impact of the continuing shift in tithe-sharing percentages (contributions by the North American Division have been reduced while the contributions of other divisions increased), currency fluctuations across various division currencies, post-pandemic giving patterns, and appropriations.

Despite challenges, the budget has been balanced, Wahlen said. “I praise the Lord for this strong evidence of the continued growth in the financial capacity of our church organizations and of our church members around the world,” he said.

### EXPENSES AND APPROPRIATIONS

After “the slump caused by the pandemic,” expenses

have increased, Wahlen reported. At the same time, appropriations have increased for GC institutions to offset the effect of inflation. International Service Employees (ISEs) and GC Auditing Service (GCAS) will also receive increased amounts to fund their services.

Wahlen also reported changes in GC-administered funds, with a higher appropriation (\$3.35 million) to the Digital Strategy for Mission (including hybrid evangelism), church software platforms, major church gatherings and business meetings, and insurance premiums. The only major decrease is a \$2.3 million budget reduction in the expense of the *Adventist World* magazine.

“We praise the Lord for the assets He has entrusted to the world church which have provided a certain amount of flexibility during uncertain times,” Wahlen said.

## USE OF TITHE

Wahlen also reported on the use of tithe monies, as he reminded administrators and executive committees about their policy prescribed to “understand scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy counsel regarding the use of tithe,” “assess and evaluate its application within their territories,” and “make an annual report to [their] executive committee” to trigger meaningful discussions.

“Tithe is a sacred biblical resource provided to the church,” Wahlen said. “We have good policies outlining what tithe can be used for, but without regular review it is possible that tithe may be unintentionally allocated to areas that are not the greatest priority for the advancement of mission,” he said.

The overall goal, Wahlen said, is to rein in operating expenses relating to administration in order to increase expenditures for pastors, evangelists, and frontline workers. “Remember that we must focus the use of tithe on its primary objective—the support of pastors and their soul-winning activities,” Wahlen said.

## MISSION REFOCUS, A REALITY

After Wahlen’s presentation, Douglas returned to

“

The General Conference is committed to rethinking its strategies and refocusing its resources to ensure a greater impact. Next quinquennium, the plan is to spend approximately \$75.5 million in supporting frontline mission work in the 10/40 window.

the podium with a call to action for EXCOM members. “God has provided us the resources; let us do the work. Let us do the work locally and let us do the work globally,” he said.

Douglas also noted that Mission Refocus, a GC initiative that reviews and reassigns more funds to frontline mission, “provides us the framework to work both locally and globally in the work of seeking and saving the lost.”

Douglas also emphasized that the GC is committed to rethinking its strategies and refocusing its resources to ensure a greater impact. He announced that in the next quinquennium, the GC is planning to spend approximately \$75.5 million in supporting frontline mission work in

the 10/40 Window (a region of the world where most people live but where Christians are a minority), the post-Christian populations, and the urban societies around the world.

## AN EXAMPLE OF SERVICE

As he concluded his presentation, Douglas shared a video report of a mission trip the GC Treasury team made to the Caribbean island of St. Croix in April. According to organizers, the initiative created synergy among various church entities, but most importantly, it got everyone involved in mission. It also resulted in many baptisms across the island.

The trip to St. Croix was only one of many mission-driven and evangelistic initiatives led by treasurers of the Adventist Church around the world, Douglas said.

“My brethren, the Lord is coming, and we need to bend every energy to the accomplishment of the work before us,” Douglas read at the end of the video report, quoting from *Gospel Workers*,

“The mission is for everyone and there is something for us to do for the Master,” Douglas said. “Let’s do our part in building up the kingdom of God . . . so we can finish the work and go home!”

\* This article is abridged from “Treasurer’s Report Highlights Commitment to Supporting Frontline Mission” *Adventist Review*, 15 Oct 2024.

# MORNING DEVOTIONALS

New insights into the 10 commandments

The theme of the 2024 Annual Council, “Called to Be Faithful: Commandments of God and Faith of Jesus,” was brought to the forefront each morning by the devotional speakers as they shared personal reflections and insights into each of the 10 Commandments. All speakers were lay members of the GC Executive Committee, and with two short devotionals presented each morning over five days, all 10 commandments were addressed. Following the two presentations each morning, Pastor Mark Finley gave a three-minute summary and life application of the principles presented. The devotionals and life applications can be accessed at the following links:

## Friday, October 11



[“You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me”](#) by Dan Houghton



[“You Shall Not Make for Yourself a Carved Image”](#) by Gonzalo L. Pita



[Life Application of the First and Second Commandments](#) by Mark A. Finley

## Tuesday, October 15



[“You Shall Not Commit Adultery: Hate in Action”](#) by Irene M. Tarigan



[“Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep it Holy”](#) by Adedeji Adeleke



[Life Application of the Seventh and Fourth Commandments](#) by Mark A. Finley

## Sunday, October 13



[“You Shall Not Take the Name of the Lord in Vain”](#) by Andi Hunsaker



[“You Shall Not Steal”](#) by Harold E. Butler



[Life Application of the Third and Eighth Commandments](#) by Mark A. Finley

## Wednesday, October 16



[“You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor”](#) by Marie Augustine Joseph Jasmin



[“You Shall Not Covet: The Cancer of Covetousness”](#) by Philip R. Mills, Sr.

## Monday, October 14



[“Honor Your Father and Your Mother”](#) by Kathryn L. Proffitt



[“You Shall Not Kill”](#) by Neil Nedley



[Life Application of the Fifth and Sixth Commandments](#) by Mark A. Finley

[Life Application of the Ninth and Tenth Commandments](#) by Mark A. Finley





# ANNUAL COUNCIL 2024

## Highlights and Reports

### AHM PROVIDING MONUMENTS OF GOD'S MIGHTY ACTS



“We call it ‘heritage evangelism,’ said Markus Kutzschbach, president of **Adventist Heritage Ministry (AHM)** during his report. “Historic properties are neutral ground,” he said. “We are telling stories of historic persons who are long gone. Nobody feels offended by what they did. That’s an environment in which we can unfold, in a natural way in their story, our fundamental beliefs. People listen and ask questions.” Historic properties offer a three-dimensional experience for visitors, young and old, where they are immersed in the stories of the pioneers, he said. Citing Joshua 4 and the command to set up stones to create a monument of the mighty acts of God, Kutzschbach listed five AHM

properties that serve as “monuments” of how God worked mightily in forming the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its cornerstone beliefs:

- **The Second Coming:** William Miller Farm
- **The Heavenly Sanctuary:** Hiram Edson Farm
- **The Seventh-day Sabbath:** Joseph Bates’ boyhood home
- **The Spirit of Prophecy:** The Whites’ home in Battle Creek
- **The Formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Movement:** The Village of Battle Creek

Kutzschbach shared future plans of developing a “Millerite” campground and interactive visitors center at the William Miller farm and building a sanctuary model at the Hiram Edson farm. He ended with his personal testimony, explaining how he wandered away from the faith, but two books brought him back. Holding up a German language edition of *The Great Controversy*, he declared, “This book brought me back to reading the Bible.” Then, holding up *Stories of My Grandmother* by Ella M. Robinson, he said, “This book brought me back to the church. Our history matters. If you tell the kids stories of our beginnings, it will stick with them. Make sure the stories of our pioneers are available in your church. It will change your church. *If they are familiar with these stories, you will see the next generation finishing this work.*”

# HONORING MISSIONARIES WHO GAVE THEIR ALL

## CAPTAIN BOB ROBERTS ■ PILOT GARY ROBERTS ■ KALEB ROBERTS

The Roberts family was honored at [Annual Council](#) (timestamp 3:09:18). This family lost three members during mission service—Kaleb, a child who died of malaria while the family served as missionaries in 2009; Captain Bob Roberts (grandfather of Kaleb), an outstanding mission pilot who lost his life in a plane crash in 2014; and his son, Gary K. Roberts, who had picked up the mantle from his father and was serving as a mission pilot in Papua Indonesia. Just a few months ago, Gary was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and passed away this year. His sister, Stephanie, received a small token on behalf of her mother, Jan Roberts, of the deep appreciation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the sacrifice made by her family. Eric Roberts, brother to Stephanie and son of Bob Roberts, has accepted the call to continue his family’s legacy of serving as mission pilots in Papua Indonesia. Please pray for Eric as he serves in this role.



Elder Wilson, along with the Secretariat staff, offers a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving for the missionary service of the Roberts family.

## MARICA MIRILOV

On Wednesday, October 16, [tribute](#) was paid to [Marica Mirilov](#) (timestamp 2:03:36), who passed away after a sudden illness while serving as a Bible worker in Cyprus. Marica and her husband, Branislav Mirilov, served as missionaries in the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and Cyprus, where Branislav currently serves as president of the Cyprus Region of the Trans-European Division.

Marica was born into a nominal Catholic family in Croatia, but was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the age of 14. She married Branislav at age 19, and together they studied at Newbold College in the U.K. While Marica



loved history, what she loved most was the study of God’s word. She was known for her warmth, care, creativity and energy. While Branislav served as Education and Adventist Mission Director for the Euro-Asia Division, Marica taught English language classes at Zaosky Adventist University.

After Branislav became president

of the Cyprus Region, Marica worked as a Bible worker at the Limassol Seventh-day Adventist Church until the time of her death. Shortly before she died, a remarkable baptism of 20 people took place—nearly all were prepared for baptism by Marica. “She loved God, and she loved people,” said Branislav during an interview with David Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research.

Marica is survived by her husband, Branislav, their daughters, Miriam, 33, and Natasha, 30, and their families, and their son, Emmanuel, 15. At the close of the tribute, Pastor Ted Wilson had a special prayer for Branislav, who continues to serve as president of the Cyprus Region.



# MISSION TO THE CITIES: REACHING NEW YORK CITY

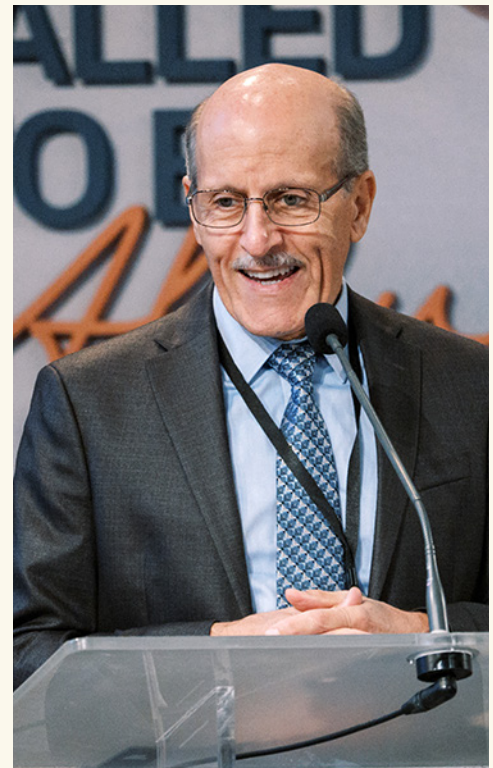
Mission to the Cities continues to be an important priority for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Working with the Greater New York Conference (GNYC), Pastor Doug Batchelor, a member of the GC Executive Committee and president of Amazing Facts (AF), a supporting ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, presented “Prophecy Odyssey.” a 15-part Bible series at the Manhattan Center in the heart of New York City from September 20-Oct. 5, 2024. Volunteers from GNYC and AFCOE (Amazing Facts Center of Evangelism) students handed out personal invitations on the streets of New York each day, and the Center’s large auditorium was filled each night to capacity.

The presentations, which delved into the prophecies of Daniel and

Revelation, utilized high-tech virtual reality to bring illustrations to life, and AI was used to simultaneously translate the programs into 16 languages, using Batchelor’s voice!

The meetings were broadcast live on television including Hope Channel International, AFTV, 3ABN, and Roku, and were livestreamed on AFTV, YouTube, and Facebook. In addition, recordings were made available for on-demand viewing, and the entire series and new study guides are available for use worldwide.

During his report, Batchelor stated “The Lord blessed in a mighty way” with 329 baptisms and 49 professions of faith, and two new church plants in the city. Additionally, there were 100 requests for further Bible studies and baptism.



## DR. PETER LANDLESS, DIRECTOR OF ADVENTIST HEALTH MINISTRIES, RETIRES



In his final report to the Annual Council as Director of Adventist Health Ministries, Dr. Peter Landless, asked: “Is it worth it to live the Adventist Health Message? Yes, it is,” he declared. “Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full! To

know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to serve Him!” He highlighted the advantage of taking to heart and living the “grace-filled health message, which can help us, by God’s Spirit, to enjoy a wholeness despite our inevitable brokenness in this world.”

Dr. Landless retired November 1 after serving more than 22 years in Health Ministries, first as associate director, and then as director beginning on April 14, 2013. Overall, he has served the Seventh-day Adventist church for 49.28 years, announced Lori Williams, GC Human Resources Director, during a special appreciation presentation following Landless’ report on Monday, October 14. “This is a difficult thing for us,” said Williams, noting the doctor’s compassionate

service. “If you have dealt with Dr. Landless at all, you know that he definitely knows Jesus because of the way that he serves Him.”

In his remarks, Ted N.C. Wilson, GC President, expressed his appreciation and made a surprise announcement. “Peter is not only an extremely well-qualified clinical physician in more than one area, but he is also an ordained minister, and he has an intense interest in people, so we are going to keep you on the team!” Wilson explained that while Dr. Landless would be “more or less retiring,” he would be serving as a part-time chaplain for the General Conference building. The announcement was met with delight by those present.

# WHITE ESTATE VAULT ANNEX AND JIM NIX COLLECTION UNVEILED AT ANNUAL COUNCIL

The opening of the Ellen G. White Estate Vault Annex and the unveiling of the Jim Nix Collection took place at the world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, on Monday, October 14, 2024, and marks a major milestone in the Church’s efforts to preserve its history for future generations. The new vault annex and collection contribute to the Adventist Church’s commitment to safeguarding its past while using these resources to inform its mission going forward.

“The Jim Nix Collection represents a monumental leap forward in our ability to preserve and study Adventist heritage,” said Merlin Burt, Director of the Ellen G. White Estate. He explained that these new additions offer invaluable context for Ellen G. White’s ministry and the broader early Adventist movement.

The White Estate Vault Annex was constructed with cutting-edge environmental controls to ensure the long-term preservation of delicate artifacts and documents. It complements the original vault, which contains materials from Ellen G. White, her family, and other early Adventist pioneers. The new annex, however, significantly broadens the scope, allowing for the preservation of a wider range of historical materials.

At the heart of this expansion is the Jim Nix Collection, a comprehensive archive of historical documents, photographs, and other artifacts gathered by James Nix, former director of the White Estate. Nix, described by colleagues as a passionate and meticulous collector, spent decades preserving materials related to Adventism and the Spirit of Prophecy. His collection is now available to church members, historians, and researchers worldwide.

“This collection is a precious gift,” Burt said. “It offers unprecedented access to a wide range of materials that will enrich our understanding of Adventist history and Ellen G. White’s prophetic ministry.”

See preliminary remarks by Ted N.C. Wilson, Merlin Burt, and a brief video interview with Jim Nix [here](#).

\* This article is abridged from “[White Estate Vault Annex and Jim Nix Collection Unveiled at Annual Council](#),” by Jeanne Damasio, ANN, 16 Oct 2024.



# SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS

## ANNUAL COUNCIL 2024

For a full report, visit <https://executivecommittee.adventist.org>

### THURSDAY, OCTOBER 10

“Digital Strategy for Mission,” was the focus for **this year’s annual LEAD Conference**. In his presentation, “The Urgency of the Hour: Why We Need Integration in Our Digital World,” Erton Köhler, GC executive secretary, stated “We are in a battlefield; technology is at the center of this war.” Communication and IT specialists, pastors, administrators, and lay members gave perspectives on using digital technology in soul-winning. The afternoon featured practical workshops, and four live-streamed baptisms of individuals who were influenced through digital evangelism.

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13

The Secretary’s Report, led by Erton Köhler, GC Executive Secretary, focused on mission, ranging from honoring the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first official Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to mission today, with the GC Secretariat group’s mission trip, “Hope for Cuba.”

In his statistical report, David Trim, director of the GC Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research reported worldwide church membership at 23,235,925 by the end of June 2024, with 1.465 million people added to the church in 2023—the highest number of net accessions of any year in Adventist church history. Losses declined in 2023, with a loss of 836,905 members.

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15

Global TMI harvest events were featured showing how personal involvement and public evangelism work together:

- Papua New Guinea for Christ (SPD) featuring 2,300 simultaneous public evangelistic meetings across the country.
- Global TMI Across ECD, featuring multiple events across the division.
- Adventist World Radio (AWR) and Global TMI in Rwanda

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11

The “I Will Go” Strategic Plan for 2025-2030 was voted. The four foundational priorities of the plan include: 1) **Communion** with God; 2) **Identity** in Christ; 3) **Unity** through the Holy Spirit; 4) **Mission** for All. The “Strategic Plan booklet is available here.”

### SABBATH, OCTOBER 12

“Talking Points” YouTube Sabbath School hosts, Mark Howard and Kameron DeVasher, presented a dynamic lesson study on “Signs of Divinity,” with three talking points: 1) The Word became flesh; 2) In Jesus is life; 3) Walk while you have the light.

In his sermon, “Called to Be Faithful,” GC President Ted N.C. Wilson stated, “In this contemporary world of ever-changing values and slippery moral slopes, we are to stand firmly on solid ground with our feet planted on the sure Word of God.” The sermon included a personal testimony by Giorgia Maghelli.

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 14

GC Treasurer/CFO Paul Douglas presented the Treasurer’s Report, consisting of: 1) reviewing the financial position of the performance of the GC as of August 31, 2024; 2) reporting on the world allocations and appropriations budget for 2025 and the use of title report for 2023 by Undertreasurer Ray Wahlen; 3) a video presentation highlighting the involvement of Treasury personnel in a mission trip to St. Croix, V.I.

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16

Several church territories were re-organized, including:

South Philippine Union Conference (SSD) into the Southwestern Philippine Union Conference and the Southeastern Philippine Union Mission.

North Philippine Union Conference (SSD) into the North Luzon Philippine Union Mission and South Luzon Philippine Union Mission.

Northern Ghana Union Conference (WAD) into the Greater Kumasi Union Conference and the North-Central Ghana Union Mission

Cameroon Union Mission (WAD) into the North-East Cameroon Union Mission and the West-Central Cameroon Union Mission

South Central American Union Mission into the Costa Rica Union Mission and the Nicaragua Union Mission.

Sudan Field transfer from the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission (MENAUM) to the East-Central Africa Division (ECD).