

HEAD: General Conference Secretary's Report
SUBTITLE: *Delivered Wednesday September 26, 2001*

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It is my privilege to welcome each of you to this historic Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee. This is the first council of the millennium. We have every reason to express our sincere appreciation to our heavenly Father for the way He cares for and protects His Church and His people.

As we are all aware, we are meeting at a time when all freedom-loving nations around the world are shocked and saddened by the disastrous acts of terrorism against this nation. The events of September 11, 2001 will certainly be characterized as among the most tragic in American history.

I would like to quote from the speech of the President of the United States at 8:30 p.m. on September 11. "Tonight I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security have been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalms 23, 'Even though I walk through the valley of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.'"

As a worldwide Church, we extend our deepest sympathies to the American people, the North American Division, and everyone affected by the tragic event. Our heartfelt thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families during this time of sorrow. We mourn with those who have lost loved ones.

We pray that our world leadership will continue to work to foster unity among all people and peace for all nations. May this great nation, America, reaffirm its fundamental values of faith in God, tolerance, courage, wisdom, and justice. We are happy for the tremendous support from the world divisions, not only your prayers, but your financial donations to support the efforts of the North American Division to bring relief to those whose lives have been shattered.

Due to what has happened and the resulting challenges of the uncertainty of flights, we have shortened this year's Annual Council to two days. And since many of our union presidents and lay representatives are not able to be with us, we want to appeal to you to attend all of the business sessions. Let us avoid the repetition of Toronto where few people were present to do business. It is our hope that there will be no committee meetings during the business sessions. Remember, the auditorium is the venue for the council and not the atrium.

Once more, a hearty welcome to you all!

Secretariat Training

After the General Conference Session and the division yearend meetings, about 80 percent of the elected Secretariat staff on the General Conference, division, and union levels were new to their positions. We immediately embarked on training seminars at the request of the divisions. We have already conducted six of these and have about three more to do early next year. I am happy to introduce you to our newest team members—Harald Wollan and Douglas Clayville.

World Advisory

During the first quarter of this year all of the departments held world advisories here at the General Conference and at some nearby facilities. Currently the General Conference staff is assisting their colleagues in conducting division-wide advisories. It is during these advisories that the departments lay plans and develop activities for the next five years.

Department Reports

Global Mission—The 10/40 Window and the secular/postmodern west continue to be Global Mission's two very different, but major challenges. A 10/40 Window Committee has been established as a special taskforce to develop a strategic plan for reaching this high-priority area.

The successful church-planting program SEEDS is now working closely with Global Mission, and specializes in starting new churches in the secular west. The new Total Employment program is also beginning to grow in North America, with plans to begin in other divisions. This program encourages Adventist graduates from colleges and universities to seek employment in an area where there is either no church, or a church struggling to survive. The goal of these graduates is to help establish the Church in these areas.

The number of Global Mission pioneers working around the world has been growing rapidly, and the Global Mission office has set a goal of 150,000 pioneers around the world by the Year 2005. The Eastern Africa Division alone plans to send out 100,000 pioneers. The pioneer program continues to prove itself as the most effective church-planting movement within the world Church.

On July 4, this year, a new medical research center, to be run by Loma Linda University, was opened at the Kabul University Medical School, in Afghanistan. A German couple, Dieter and Christa Hang, were due to move to Kabul in early October to care for the center. Obviously in the light of recent events this has been put on hold, and we request your prayers for the future of this project.

Starting new churches in unentered areas remains Global Mission's reason for being. Global Mission has set a goal for establishing 25,000 new congregations by the year 2005.

Adventist Volunteer Center—Since the center was established, we have seen steady growth. In 1998, 1033 volunteers were sent out; in 1999, 1355 volunteers were serving, and in 2000, the number was 1526. These were mostly young people who went from various divisions to serve their Church. It is encouraging to see that a good percentage of them are now serving for more than a year.

While there is a great need for volunteers to fill the numerous vacancies in the English language schools, there is also a great need for individuals to fill a variety of needs. There are retired pastors, accountants, and other church members with special qualifications who want to serve as volunteers, but we have nowhere to place them.

It is most encouraging to see that a number of divisions are convinced of the value of mobilizing the laity for service and are appointing personnel to promote volunteerism in the field. Our goal is to encourage churches to sponsor some of their youth to go out as volunteers.

Education—This department reports the positive trend that, as of December 31, 2000, the Adventist Church operates 6,064 schools, colleges, and universities around the world. There are 55,906 teachers and 1,065,092 students. There is an increasing recognition by governments and non-Adventists of the value of Adventist education. An increasing number of our universities and colleges are currently chartered by national governments or granted accreditation by regional authorities.

The trend that causes concern is the declining ratio of students in Adventist schools in proportion to church members. The number of Adventists attending non-Adventist colleges and universities is on the increase.

The department reports that the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education is ready to begin implementing its assignment in cooperation with its division counterparts. This board is designed to provide guidance and foster international coordination in the training of Adventist ministers, religious educators, and chaplains.

The Commission on Higher Education which was appointed last year is getting information from colleges, seminaries, and universities with the purpose of strengthening the quality and viability of our institutions in response to the projected needs of the Church in fulfilling its mission.

Stewardship—During the last six years the department has focused on rediscovering and presenting the biblical stewardship paradigm. This shift has accompanied the rebuilding of the Stewardship Department following its re-establishment at Utrecht in 1995. Yet much remains to be done.

In accordance with a 1999 Annual Council decision, the department led out in a World Stewardship Summit from April 6 to 11 of this year. This administrative summit included officers and Stewardship Directors from the General Conference and all divisions, as well as a

group of pastors and laity from around the world. During the four and a half days together, we explored the issues and trends facing contemporary stewardship. We spent time exploring the biblical and Spirit of Prophecy foundations for stewardship. Then, in the context of seeking God's will through prayer, we explored the future for Seventh-day Adventist stewardship. All the research confirms that stewardship must focus on building disciples rather than on raising money. The process of the summit included a clear commitment to integrity and transparency in church finances and led to a number of specific recommendations.

The three most important recommendations are:

1. Implementing a worldwide educational strategy for biblical stewardship.
2. Developing and implementing a simplified offering program.
3. Requesting the Stewardship Department to develop and implement a strategy for communicating information about church finances to church members.

While we have come a long way, there is still much to be done. Stewardship requires a partnership between administrators, department directors, and pastors. The challenge is great. The benefits are even greater. Leading members into the experience of the lordship of Jesus Christ will strengthen every area of church life.

Institute of World Mission

The Institute of World Mission is dedicated to serving the world field by preparing and training cross-cultural missionaries. Today our church is blessed with a missionary force that comes from all parts of the world. In the last year IWM trained 92 missionaries, coming from 23 different countries, going to serve in 33 different countries. IWM's goal is to help all of these missionaries serve God more effectively in cross-cultural situations as they live holistically, reason missiologically, think theologically, and serve incarnationally.

In addition to training regular General Conference appointed missionaries, IWM also conducted training for tentmaker missionaries working in Southeast Asia and assisted in the orientation and training of many student missionaries from North America. Additional programs this year included re-entry seminars for returning missionary families and teens (in SPD and NAD), various seminars and workshops on mission in different parts of the world, and the first-ever missionary campmeeting. IWM also cooperated with Secretariat and Global Mission on various mission-related committees.

Division Reports

The Eastern Africa Division reports that the Kampala city-wide evangelistic campaign organized by the division publishing department in December and January resulted in 10,000 baptisms.

The “Africa for Christ” campaign organized by the Tanzania Union and the North Pacific Union during the month of June led 30,000 souls to join the remnant church. The campaign was broadcast throughout Africa by AGCN. Evangelist Henry Mhando, a Tanzanian national held two meetings in Zambia and Zimbabwe, resulting in a total of 6,728 souls for the Lord.

In the month of May pastors in Nairobi City, Kenya together conducted meetings and baptized 1,500 souls.

The Euro-Asia Division, which includes most of the former Soviet Union, has decided to follow the New Testament model in all future evangelism. At the heart of this plan are small groups. Every member is involved in carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who need hope. It is hoped that local churches all over the division will quickly embrace the vision for small group evangelism.

To jump-start the vision, a program code-named 300-300-300 has been put in place. Three hundred global mission pioneers have been trained at the theological seminary. These 300 trained workers will be assigned in groups of 12 to territories throughout the division. These groups will work to establish 300 or more congregations within the next two years. It is hoped that 300 church buildings will be in place to house the congregations.

This project will not concentrate on the number of baptisms so much as it will concentrate on the quality of education, retention, and involvement of each individual person who joins the Adventist Church.

The Secretary for the South Pacific Division reports that 2000 was a year of great significance for the Church. Not only was it the year in which the quinquennial session was held, but it was a year of significant change in the organizational structure of the division. Four of the five unions ceased to operate. In their place three new unions were created. The new unions are the Australian Union Conference, the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference, and the Trans-Pacific Union Mission. Papua New Guinea Union Mission remains as it was.

It is anticipated that the realignment of union boundaries and the associated relocation of personnel and revised mode of delivery of department services will provide some benefits. For example, it will avoid unnecessary duplication of department services; provide national voice in each country, reduce personnel and financial resources that are directly linked to administrative structures, and redirect a minimum of 1.7 million dollars to conferences.

The report from the Africa-Indian Ocean Division says, “We have launched a quinquennial evangelistic program aimed at baptizing one million new souls, code-named, “Blow the Trumpet! Mission Possible!” The plan challenges all, pastors and laypeople, to be involved in the proclamation of the everlasting gospel.

A campaign held by the division Secretary in Madagascar ended on September 1 with 1,002 persons baptized. There are 1,500 more people studying to be baptized in a month's time. During the meetings the President of the Senate, a non-Adventist who attended every night, was so impressed that he influenced the national television to donate two hours of prime time in order to explain the doctrines of the Church to the nation. This has not been done for any other denomination in the country. Members are using video tapes to conduct their own campaigns throughout the country.

ACTS 2000

About three years ago Elder Mark Finley and his team designed ACTS 2000, a massive global evangelistic series which involved ten satellite campaigns around the world in two and a half years. This was an ambitious plan. But the Lord has blessed these plans and the last of the series was held in Papua New Guinea.

Instead of the one million participants envisioned, God gave 1.5 million; and instead of the 100,000 baptisms expected, 150,000 souls have joined the remnant Church.

Elder Finley and his team are ever grateful to over 150,000 laypeople who joined with pastors in providing extensive spiritual preparation and follow-up to nurture the nearly two million interested people who attended these meetings.

Go One Million

Last year our president declared 2000 to 2005 to be the quinquennium of laity. To achieve the maximum result, the Go One Million Coordinating Committee was established. *Go One Million* is an initiative of the Church worldwide to recruit, mobilize, train, place in action, and track the results of one million laymembers participating in active soul-winning activities. It is very gratifying to see how this concept has been received all over the world. You will be hearing more about *Go One Million*.

Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries

Before I leave the subject of the involvement of the laity in soul winning, I take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the work ASI is doing around the globe by providing the DVD evangelistic tool. Our president has made this observation, "The DVD approach for sharing the precious hope in Jesus is a very effective tool in reaching the unreached. Already hundreds of new members have responded to the invitation to prepare for the second coming of Jesus. The ASI organization has made another large contribution to the work of the Church with this DVD evangelistic series."

Elder Mark Finley believes the DVD evangelistic project has the potential to make the largest impact for Christ of anything he has ever witnessed.

We will not forget the great work the Maranatha group is doing in many divisions in providing beautiful church buildings for the new converts.

May the good Lord smile on you all!

Church Membership

Another milestone occurred within the Church in June of this year. We became a denomination of 12 million members. The total membership of 12,035,811 as of June 30 means that currently there is one Seventh-day Adventist for every 510 people now living. The figure for last year was one for every 535. The growth percentage of 6.03 indicates a drop of 2.15 from last year's unusually high of 8.15 percent.

Baptisms and professions of faith for the year to June 2001 were 966,032, compared with June 2000's figure of 1,160,062, indicating a decrease of 194,030. Our net membership growth of 684,892 also shows a decrease of 173,571 from the previous year.

A membership retention analysis for the past five years gives cause for concern. In 1999 for every 100 members who joined the church, 17 were reportedly dropped or missing. In 2000 the figure increased to 20 and for the last four quarters the figure rose to 21.5. Some divisions are reporting 25%, 30%, and even 40%.

The rather high loss within certain divisions suggests the need for careful administrative analysis and response. I believe that our soul winning plans should include good preparation, follow-up and a place of worship.

It took 140 years (1844 to 1984) to reach 4.2 million members; but from 1996 to the beginning of this year (5 years) over 4.4 million souls were added to the membership.

Accessions—that is, people joining by baptism and profession of faith—for 1999 were 1,090,848, and for 2000 were 1,043,843. Accessions per day were 2,857.89. Last year a new church was organized every four hours on the average.

As of June 30, 2001, the Inter-American Division leads the divisions with a membership of 2,166,457, that is, 18% of the world total membership. The Eastern Africa Division follows closely with a membership of 2,115,805, or 17.58% of world membership.

Summary of Interdivision Employee Departures

In your program agenda book you will find the statistics to which I now refer regarding interdivision employees and mission appointees, as well as volunteers.

(1) In the Current Calls as of August 31, 2001, you will notice the various sections under Conference and Mission Organizations, Educational Organizations, Medical Organizations, and Publishing. Under each division various categories are listed. You will find the number of current calls adding up to a total of 107 employee requests and 506 volunteer requests.

(2) Let us take a look at the Departures for Interdivision Service Around the World for the year 2000. The figures include intradivision employees except in the case of the North American Division. Adventist World Radio figures are included in the respective divisions. AIIAS figures are added to the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, and General Conference figures are included in the North American Division. There are 169 new and 339 returning employees, making a total of 508 missionaries.

(3) Let us look at the Summary of Interdivision Personnel Departures which includes intra- and interdivision employees as well as those working for the Adventist Volunteer Service. There were 169 new appointees and 399 returnees. In addition, there were 1,526 Adventist Volunteers, giving a grand total of 2,034 departures.

(4) Division Source of Interdivision Personnel, December 31, 2000. This table tells from which division they have come or to which they have gone to work.

(5) Current Interdivision Employees from NAD. The next two tables give the total interdivision employees from the North American Division and their specific assignments.

(6) Current Interdivision Employees from Divisions Other than North America, December 31, 2000. The next two tables give the total number of interdivision employees from other divisions and their assignment. There were 605 as of December 31, 2000.

(7) Division Source of AVS—The next two sheets give the source of workers sent by Adventist Volunteer Service. We have the spread from 1981 to 2000.

Conclusion

The events of the past two weeks have brought home to us a message that we live in a frightening world—and it grows more so day by day. We are experiencing so much pain—death of loved ones through natural disasters, terrorists, and diseases such as cancer and HIV/AIDS. There is uncertainty enough, anguish enough close to home.

Life comes with no guarantees except this: Christ loves us, we are saved through His death and resurrection, and He has promised to come back and rescue us from the sad, uncertain, frightening world we live in.

One hundred years ago the servant of the Lord penned these words: “The nations are in unrest. Times of perplexity are upon us. Men’s hearts are failing them for fear of the things that

are coming upon the earth. But those who believe in God will hear His voice amid the storm, saying, 'It is I, be not afraid.'"—ST, October 9, 1901

So as we go into the agenda of this historic Annual Council, let us do the business of God's Church with the assurance that He is in control.