

YEAR-END MEETING
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION COMMITTEE
Silver Spring, Maryland
October 31, 2003, 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

Kyoshin Ahn, Eradio Alonso, Nilton Amorim, Niels-Erik Andreasen,
George T Atiga, Raj Attiken,

George Babcock, Delbert W Baker, Trevor H Baker, Rosa T Banks,
Harold W Baptiste, Steven R Bascom, Dale J Bidwell, Gordon Bietz, Brenda Billings,
James Black, Larry Blackmer, Del Blake, Kelly B Bock, Heidi Boggs, Gary Bollinger,
Helen Boskind, Robert Brauer, James Brauer, Debra C Brill, George Brill, Walter E Brown,
G Alexander Bryant, Samuel Bulgin, Robert Burnette, Russell C Burrill,

Eduardo B Canales, Hamlet Canosa, Dennis N Carlson, Selwyn Carrington,
R Ernest Castillo, Michael F Cauley, Larry L Caviness, Richard P Center, Marshall Chase,
Charles L Cheatham, Dowell W Chow, Ronald Christman, Monte Church, John I Collins,
Charlotte Conway, Kenneth R Coonley, Donald W Corkum, Ken Corkum, Cynthia Coston,
Ruth Counts, Thaine Creitz, David C Cress, Manuel Cruz, Robert Curren, Orlie Curtis,

Romulo Daquila, Jerome Davis, Kenneth Denslow, Maitland DiPinto,
Charles W Drake, III, Roger L Dudley, Mable Dunbar, Elwin Dunn, Jon L Dybdahl,

R Rennae Elliott, G Thomas Evans,

Mumtaz A Fargo, Martin W Feldbush, Odette R Ferreira, LeRoy Finck,
Gary Fogelquist, Brad Forbes, James Ford, Judy Fowler, John Freedman,

Jay Gallimore, Steven L Gallimore, Reo E Ganson, Larry W Garrett, David Gemmell,
Lawrence T Geraty, David Geriguis, L Stephen Gifford, Marianne Gifford, James W Gilley,
Ricardo B Graham, Samuel L Green, Buford Griffith, Rodney Grove, Joseph E Gurubatham,

Janet Hall, Richard Hall, Richard R Hallock, J Neville Harcombe, Eric Hepburn,
Ray Hartwell, Dan Herzel, Gary Hodder, Clarence E Hodges, Jim Hoehn, Trudy Hoffman,
Luc Homicile, Paul Hopkins, Dean Horinouchi, Pat Horst, Ron Hosking,
Roscoe J Howard III, Darrell Huether, Timothy Hullquist, Alan Hurlbert, Van Hurst,

Denise Isaac, Ruth Izquierdo,

Keith Jacobson, Daniel R Jackson, Michael R Jamieson, Delbert Johnson,
George Johnson, J Alfred Johnson, Russell L Johnson, Noelene M Johnsson,
William G Johnsson, Theodore T Jones, Bruce Juhl, Artemas Julien,

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Alvin M Kibble, Donald G King, Norman W Klam, Lorinda Knowlton,
J Deryl Knutson, Eric Korff, Gerald N Kovalski, Sung Kwon, Robert Kyte,

Alice Laabs, Nancy Lamoreaux, Erma J Lee, Harold L Lee, Mike Lekic,
Robert E Lemon, James L Lewis, Don Livesay, Calvin Lloyd, John Loor Jr, David Lopez,
Andrea Luxton,

Julihana Madison, Gerald Martin, Mary H Maxson, Alphonso McCarthy,
Joseph W McCoy, Duane McKey, Oliver J McKinney, Stephen L McPherson,
John K McVay, Lonnie E Melashenko, Norman K Miles, William K Miller, Bobby Mitchell,
Robert Moon, Larry R Moore, Patrick Morrison, Thomas J Mostert Jr, Edward Motschiedler,
Nahor Muchiutti, James Murray,

Kermit L Netteburg, Derrick M Nichols, John S Nixon, Dennis Nooner, J J Nortey,
Jerald M Northam,

Willie Oliver, Dionisio Olivo, Naomi Olson, Stephen Orian, Priscilla Orozco,
Michael F Ortel, Kenneth W Osborn, Richard C Osborn, David D Osborne,

Jerry N Page, James Palmer, C Michael Park, Bryce Pascoe, Robert Patterson,
Jere D Patzer, David Peay, Larry Pitcher, Juan R Prestol,

Gary Randolph, John Rapp, G Edward Reid, Gordon L Retzer, Delores Richardson,
Paul Richardson, Marcellus Robinson, Dan Rochford, Astor Rogers, Jeffrey Rogers,
Jose V Rojas, Ronald K Russell,

Monte C Sahlin, Donald R Sahly, Charles Sandefur, Leon F Sanders,
Don C Schneider, Marti Schneider, Duane M Schoonard, Glynn C Scott, Charles Scriven, Dan
Serns, E Wayne Shepperd, Dean Sigsworth, Manford Simcock, Carlyle C Simmons, Hepsiba S
Singh, David C Smith, Robert S Smith, Ron C Smith, Emmitt Slocumb,
Jorge Soria, W Aaron Spencer, Lincoln E Steed, James L Stevens, Verlon Strauss,
Ward D Sumpter, Robert L Sweezey

W L Taylor, Leon D Thomassian, Halvard B Thomsen, Gary Thurber,
Frank Tochtermann, Max C Torkelsen II, Max A Trevino, Arnold Trujillo,
Kenneth M Turpen, Rosemary Tyrrell,

Ulrich Unruh, Manual Vasquez,

Douglas Walker, Thea Walker, Jere Wallack, Linda P Walton, David Weigley,
Rita Weisz, Ron Whitehead, Kingsley Whitsett, Kenneth Wiebe, DeWitt S Williams,
Lynn Williams, Walton Williams, Edward E Wines, Randall R Wisbey, Marvin Wray,
Billy E Wright, Ed Wright, Walter L Wright,

Naomi Yamashiro, Margie Yanez, Lillian Yarosh, F Martin Ytreberg.

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OPENING

Willie Oliver, Director of the North American Division Family Ministries Department and his wife, Elaine Oliver, led the song service accompanied by Judy Thomsen, Administrative Secretary for Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries, organist, and DeWitt Williams, Director of Health Ministries, pianist.

Heidi Boggs, Associate Director for Educator Programs of the Philanthropic Service for Institutions, opened the meeting with prayer.

Juan R Prestol, Treasurer of the North American Division, welcomed the attendees to the 2003 Year-end Meeting.

QUORUM

Debra C Brill, Vice President of the North American Division, verified the presence of a quorum.

CALL TO ORDER

Debra C Brill, Vice President of the North American Division, called the first session of the 2003 Year-end Meeting to order.

AGENDA NOTEBOOK DISTRIBUTION

Agenda notebooks were distributed prior to the meeting.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Roscoe J Howard III, Secretary of the North American Division presented the Secretary's Report as follows:

The destruction of the Twin Towers, sniper shootings in Maryland, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the reality of Nuclear proliferation by North Korea, the corporate greed of businesses like Enron, Tyco, and Wall Street, same-sex marriage legislation being passed in Canada, unemployment, rising nationalism, hate crimes, and uncertain pension funds have had an impact of uncertainty and cynicism on society. Where are we headed and what happens when we get there?

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In the midst of all this confusion and ambiguity, the church must live and thrive. The word of God says to us, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you." Isaiah 60:1, 2 . I believe that the Lord is calling Seventh-day Adventist leaders, pastors, teachers and lay people to recognize that God's light is waiting to explode on this continent in a manner that will make Pentecost look like a wading pond beside the Niagara Falls.

"The Lord calls for a renewal of the straight testimony borne in years past. He calls for a renewal of spiritual life. The spiritual energies of His people have long been torpid, but there is to be a resurrection from apparent death. By prayer and confession of sin we must clear the King's highway. As we do this, the power of the Spirit will come to us. We need Pentecostal energy. This will come; for the Lord has promised to send His Spirit as the all-conquering power." GW 308

Our task is a daunting one. We will in no way finish this work in our strength or with our ability to strategically plan, cast visions and create programs. The Spirit of the Living God must first possess us as leaders of this Church, and our influence must be infectious. It is in this context that I submit to you the report of the growth and progress of the Church in North America.

The current membership stands at 983,662, and at the present rate of growth, we should reach the one-million mark by the second quarter of 2004. The following are some tables that illustrate a collective picture of what is taking place across the Division.

North American Division Accessions and Membership

By Baptism	14,155
By Profession of Faith	2,973
NAD Membership as of June 30, 2003	983,662

**2002 NAD Membership
Percentage Distribution by Unions**

Atlantic Union	9.5%
SDA Church in Canada	5.0%
Columbia Union	11.5%
Lake Union	8.9%
Mid-America Union	6.0%
North Pacific Union	9.0%
Pacific Union	21.5%
Southern Union	21.0%
Southwestern Union	8.0%

**2002 Individual Percentage
Growth by Unions**

Atlantic Union	1.35%
SDA Church in Canada	2.29%
Columbia Union	2.06%
Lake Union	2.44%
Mid-America Union	1.15%
North Pacific Union	1.34%
Pacific Union	1.01%
Southern Union	2.97%
Southwestern Union	3.16%

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**NAD Accessions
Baptisms and Profession of Faith by Unions**

	2002			2001		
	BAP	POF	Total	BAP	POF	Total
Atlantic Union	3,114	594	3,708	2,950	589	3,539
SDA Church in Canada	1,412	217	1,629	1,477	155	1,632
Columbia Union	3,687	823	4,510	3,644	812	4,456
Lake Union	2,462	490	2,952	2,256	599	2,855
Mid-America Union	1,457	290	1,747	1,528	363	1,891
North Pacific Union	2,576	347	2,923	2,367	272	2,639
Pacific Union	5,879	1,434	7,313	5,698	1,235	6,933
Southern Union	6,730	1,427	8,157	7,663	1,659	9,322
Southwestern Union	3,193	764	3,957	2,967	732	3,699
TOTALS	30,510	6,386	36,896	30,550	6,416	36,966

**North American Division Accessions and Membership
as of June 30, 2003**

UNION	2003		Total Members
	Baptism	Profession of Faith	
Atlantic Union	1,710	267	94,824
SDA Church in Canada	648	77	52,149
Columbia Union	1,594	360	113,565
Lake Union	1,036	196	76,646
Mid-America Union	714	192	58,339
North Pacific Union	1,054	132	87,584
Pacific Union	2,743	669	209,869
Southern Union	2,957	601	211,208
Southwestern Union	1,699	479	79,478
TOTALS	14,155	2,973	983,662

Five-Year Growth in Membership

Year	Membership	Growth	% of Growth
2002	974,271	19,195	1.97%
2001	955,076	21,140	2.21%
2000	933,935	19,769	2.12%
1999	914,106	22,930	2.51%
1998	891,176	15,365	1.72%

Towards One Million

The projection of membership growth towards the goal of a North American Division membership of one million members by the year 2004 is as follows:

Membership as of December 31, 2002	974,271
Average NAD growth rate of the last five years	2.12%

The average NAD growth rate applied to the next two years:

2003	$974,271 + 20,655 = 994,926$
2004	$994,926 + 21,092 = 1,016,018$

We celebrate the fruit of the laborer, the pastors and laypeople, which has brought us to this point in history. It has taken us more than 150 years to reach almost one million in membership, and we say, "To God be the Glory!" Bringing people to a saving knowledge of Jesus in the context of His soon coming is what this Church is all about.

The year 2004 has been designated the "Year of Evangelism". It will be our privilege to take advantage of the promises of God in ways that will truly wake the spiritually dead. A Pentecost awaits our reception, and business as usual is not good enough. Praise God for a two percent growth rate, but we can't be satisfied with a maintenance ministry. God longs to give us so much more. As spiritual leaders of this Division, the Lord is calling each of us collectively and individually to exert our influence for the pulling down of Satan's strong holds and procuring the promise of the Holy Spirit of healing, power and love.

It could be a DVD presentation, a preaching service, a piece of religious literature, a personal Bible study, or the influence of our example that Christ uses to touch someone's life for eternity; but no matter how He chooses to work, He wants us to reach hurting people for His Kingdom. We can't reach our second million in one year, but by the Spirit's power, we can do more than one million in a year.

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My prayer is that we will each say, "Yes, Lord, here am I, send me!"

VOTED, To receive the report of the secretary.

THE HOPE CHANNEL—VIDEO PRESENTATION

A video presentation, *The Hope Channel*, introduced a new voice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church which is bringing God's word directly into homes, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The programming is designed to reach diverse cultural and age groups. The channel broadcasts well-known programs such as the Voice of Prophecy, It is Written, Amazing Facts and Breath of Life. It also shares programs which treat the topics of world affairs and their impact on religious liberty, as well as family and health issues. A weekly *Adventist Newsline* keeps members informed of happenings in the Church. Classic programs bring William A Fagal, Charles D Brooks and other outstanding preachers into the home. Travel in Bible lands and devotionals are available. There are Bible studies which may be shared with neighbors and friends. Three ABN, Loma Linda Broadcasting, ACN, and LifeTalk Radio are also available. *The Hope Channel* is bringing God's word into the homes of many people.

WORSHIP IN MUSIC

Eradio Alonso, Associate Ministerial Secretary, of the North American Division sang "How I Love My Jesus" which he wrote especially for this meeting.

KEYNOTE MESSAGE

Alvin M Kibble, Vice President of the North American Division, presented the opening address entitled, "When the River Rises."

I'd like to direct your attention to the 43rd chapter of the book of Isaiah. It's been about two years since I had the opportunity to speak with you in this capacity. On that occasion, I remember asking whether or not there was any love in this house. There were trickles of responses that came back, and I was encouraged a little. Then I got sick and those trickles became a cascade of love and I was really just overwhelmed by it. There is love in this house. There is a lot of love in this house. We are timid about showing it until you really get into a pinch; but then the fountains flow, and you really learn to appreciate the fellowship that we share.

Isaiah 43:1-7. "But now thus saith the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel. 'Fear not: for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; nor shall the

flames scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia, and Seba in your place. Since you are precious in my sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you: therefore I will give men for you and people for your life. Fear not: for I am with you: I will bring your descendents from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, give up; and to the south, do not keep them back. Bring My sons from afar My daughters from the ends of the earth; everyone who is called by My name whom I have created for My glory. I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”

Rivers, like organizations and institutions, can be described as having a life cycle of their own—a life cycle that includes their youth, maturity and old age. However, when applied to rivers, these terms do not refer to actual ages of the rivers but moreover to the physical features of them. A river, I am told, may be youthful in some areas and exhibit characteristics of maturity or old age in others. The Mississippi is youthful at its source, matures further downstream, and is in old age at its mouth. I didn't know that the primary source of water for a river is precipitation that has not been lost through evaporation or utilized by plant life. This water, called “run off,” may originate from melting snow on a mountaintop a long, long way from where the river resides, but gathers in numerous gullies that convulse downhill to form large streams or tributaries which eventuate into a river. Among the largest rivers in the world are the Amazon River, in Brazil and Peru, 4,000 miles in length, the Congo, in Zaire 2,900 miles, the Mississippi, 3,900 miles; and the Nile in Egypt, 4,100 miles.

As a boy I remember traveling with my dad while on assignment for the Church and having the privilege to visit Hoover Dam which is powered by the Colorado River. He would wake us up in the middle of the night while driving the car and say “Wake up everybody, we are passing the Hoover Dam. ‘Where daddy, where?’ You missed it. You should have awakened when I called you.” He was on his way to take care of the business of the Church. Hoover Dam is the second highest project in all of the United States, 725 feet high representing 1,434 megawatts of power – awesome. We also visited Niagara Falls, powered by the Niagara River representing 1,950 megawatts of power. Later in life I had a chance to go to Egypt and to actually see the Nile River.

A few years ago I had the wonderful privilege of visiting Victoria Falls. Now they say that it was discovered by David Livingston, but I supposed that there were some people who knew about it before then. I remember standing there gazing at the mighty Zambezi River as it flowed broad and placid to the brink of this rocky lip one meter wide before taking a headlong plunge into the frothy chasm of the great gorge that lay below, the largest sheet of falling water on the planet. It was a marvelous, magnificent, exuberating view of water power, a power that almost defies description.

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I remember when the guide was preparing me for the trip, he said, "Now you will need some type of a jacket or some rain wear." It wasn't raining. I couldn't figure what he was talking about. It was a beautiful day. He said, "Oh, don't worry, I will take care of it." When we got within a mile of the falls it started raining like I was in some kind of storm. He looked back and smiled passing me the parka. He said, "That's just the spray from the falls."

As a child I learned in an early near drowning experience at the 51st Street YMCA in Chicago, to respect the power of water. My friend Jerry Jones invited me to jump in, but Jerry could swim. Water is to be appreciated and enjoyed, but most certainly respected. As I grew up in Chicago I often had the privilege of driving along the lake front. Lake Michigan is one of the few bodies of water in the United States that is actually blue. I did not even see the North side of Lake Michigan until I was a grown man. We weren't supposed to go over in that section, but it was a pretty nice area, I learned.

Chicago is a real melting pot and a lot of Black people in Chicago are just transplants from Mississippi. Now don't tell them that, but a whole lot of Black people made that trek from Mississippi to Chicago after the Mississippi River flooded in 1927. A giant billow rose out of the river that covered trees, a force of current that gouged out of the earth a channel 100 feet deep and a half a mile wide. We thought Hurricane Isabelle was awesome. One writer said that the crevice roared like some great wild beast proclaiming its dominance. Well after that experience a whole lot of Black people said they are going to seek higher ground. They did not just get off some turnip truck and say they were going to find higher ground.

But Chicago is one of those cities where the winds of both rural and urban life converge and sometimes crash. It is a great town, it is a toddling town, some times citified and sometimes countrified. The people at my home church, the Shiloh Seventh-day Adventist Church on 70th and Michigan, could at sometimes be very, very sophisticated but when they let their hair down, you discovered that they had some Southern roots.

They also had some very witty sayings. If they didn't care about something, you might hear one of the old timers say, "Well I don't give a hoot." Now that may have been an Adventist terminology, I don't really know. I have heard some other people tell me what they didn't care about something and it didn't come out as a "hoot." If a person was really low down and good for nothing they would say that they were so low that they could crawl under the belly of a snake. If a person was pretty, they might say that they were as pretty as new money and looking at that new \$20 bill that they have just made, that's a pretty good comparison. If a person looked happy they'd say they were "happier than a rabbit in a briar patch", or if something was fast they would say it was "faster than a Jack Rabbit on laxative." When counseling against wrongful association, they would say, "Now son, if you lie down with the dogs, you gonna get up with some fleas." My dad would often say, "Alvin you are slower than molasses in January." When referring to a whipping, when children misbehaved, they might say, "There is going to be some sad news in the camp tonight." When extremely busy they would say that they were busier than a one-legged man in a kicking contest. When warning about a decision or direction of one's life, they would say, "Honey, experience keeps a dear school." When someone was ashamed of their humble beginnings they would say, "Now listen, having been poor is no shame, but being

ashamed of it is." When told of something that was totally preposterous they would say, "Sneeze on me and tell me it's raining." And if someone were to ask a fellow member if they would see them at a meeting or a gathering they might answer by saying, "I'll be there if the creek don't rise." That was symbolism, without a cloud in the sky or the advantage of a WGN weather report, a person would say, "I'll be there if the creek don't rise."

When someone talks like that they are not talking about a real creek, the kind that runs through a city or through a country village. They are speaking in figurative terms. The creek with its capacity of rising is not really any difficulty that is unexpected or unavoidable "I'll be there if the creek don't rise." If the unforeseen does not occur, I'll be there.

And it's interesting how weather has long been identified with problems and with disaster. Rain, wind, and rivers cover a connotation of difficulty and despair. A language both in the scripture and out of the scripture suggests that water can represent that which can hurt us, as well as that which can make us unhappy. You are acquainted with such sayings as, "Let tears run down like a river." Lamentations 2:18. Or John's statement in Revelation 21, "And there will be no more sea." The sea represents separation for John. "When it rains it pours." "Into each life some rain must fall." "Don't know why there is no sun up in the sky, stormy weather." "The rain falls on the just..." Raindrops keep falling on my head." And the list goes on.

I don't mean to suggest that all references to water are negative and foreboding, but usually when we talk about water, about rivers or about tears we are dealing with the difficulty of existence. We are seeing what rushing waters can do. Rushing waters shut down the United States government just a couple of months ago. We have observed the devastating power and indiscriminate destruction, their death dealing ... washing out bridges, causing mudslides, destroying homes and taking lives. Bible students will readily recall the global flood which destroyed the antediluvian world recorded in Genesis and perhaps it was this that caused the water language to stir up such negative thoughts. If a person is in serious trouble one might say he is in flood waters. Or if someone tries to kill a good idea a person might say, "Why are you throwing cold water on it?"

Water, whether cold or hot, usually symbolizes what is not in our best interest. If the creek rises things are not going well at all. Isaiah, prophet of God during Babylonian captivity engaged one day in some water talk. The preacher of the captives refused to let himself be in prison by the imaginations of a foreign culture. You remember how it was in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to Jerusalem and carried away the people of God into that strange and pagan land. Isaiah like the other Israelites belonged to the ranks of the captive community, but though a prisoner, he remained free in mind and in spirit. He did not allow his soul to capitulate to the existing culture, to be shackled by the Babylonians. He kept in tune with the eternal and while the other slaves were capitulating to this alien culture and forgetting all about God, all about their religious roots, their upbringing and Jerusalem, Isaiah was praying. Isaiah was preaching and telling the people, "Whatever you do, Church, don't give up." "Don't capitulate, don't quit. Why are you going to quit? We don't have anything to fear. Our God will come, God will come. I know it's tough down here in Babylon, but the Nebuchadnezzars and the Belshazzars of this world are only temporary. They will not last forever, they will soon lie down

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and die, but our God, the God we serve is the eternal God. Now we forsook Him. We mistreated Him. We didn't act right back at home in Jerusalem and that's why we are in this mess. That's why we are in this strange land. God had to judge us. He had to deal with us. He had to deal with our apostasy. He permitted us to be taken captive. I know it's hard. I know it's rough. The waters are rough and the storms are raging. But riding above the storm clouds of justice is the brightness of God's mercy and His grace." "I know," says Isaiah. "I know because I've been in touch with God. I know the Lord and I have discovered that there is a certain wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea. And there is a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty. God told me to tell you when you pass through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overflow you."

My elders back in Chicago used to say, "If the river rises." They acknowledged that it could rise and that if it rose, they would inevitably suffer. Their suffering might be severe or it might be simply a matter of inconvenience. "If the river rises . . ." Isaiah's report to Israel and to us from God is altogether different He does not employ "if." Hear me tonight. You had better listen to me. But *when* the river rises, *when* thou passeth through the waters, *when* thou walkest through the fire. This is not an acknowledgement that it *might* rise or that it *can* rise. This is a sure certain declaration that the river is going to rise. Whether it is because of the folly of others or the results of God's judgment of us, the river, folk, is going to rise. Either by His permitted will or by His declarative judgment, the river is going to rise.

God does not mislead us. He does not sugarcoat us. He is not trying to fool us. God has never said serve me and I will make you exempt from all the emergencies of life. No, no, no. God is not some kind of rabbit foot. Don't buy into the TV evangelists who are constantly promoting this kind of thing, the "grow rich" philosophy. That is not the theology of the Galilean, it is not. In the world you shall tribulation. He makes it very clear that life is the arena of the soul's testing and whoever you are and wherever you are, you are going to cry sometime. Just because there are no tears in your eyes, does not mean there are none in your heart.

I have been to meetings many, many times. I have come on some happy days and I have come on some sad days. We all know how to put that plastic smile on and say, "Happy Sabbath." Everybody is going to cry sometime. When it happens, the Lord might be doing it because He's trying to save you. The Bible tells me that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. When the river rises, not if, *when*. "*When* thou passeth through the waters." Not if, *when*. This is not simply a promise of pain, it is also a promise of peril. As I read this I sense a feeling of fright. There is a note of danger here. There is something about these words that touches on that which I do not want to experience. Something I do not want to go through. They sound as if they speak of that kind of situation that is overwhelming, of problems beyond our capacity to solve. The accountants can't fix it, the lawyers can't solve it, the doctors can't cure it of hurts that no human can heal. There are drownings that none can deliver us from. This is not a promise of standing on Jordan's stormy bank. It is a pronouncement that those who love the Lord must expect to spend sometime in Jordan's swirling waters.

When the river rises—but how often does it rise? Well, I am glad you asked. Death can be a rising river, especially when the treasure of your life has been snatched from you. No parent expects to bury his or her child. When our parents get old we know that eventually they may pass but no parent expects to bury his or her child.

Recently I spent one afternoon at a camp meeting trying to encourage a fellow colleague whose daughter was dying. The doctors had done everything they could for her. She had even had the privilege of undergoing surgery at the blessed and wonderful hands of Dr. Carson, one of the greatest physicians in the world. But the tumor returned. My friend is a man of faith, a man of prayer, a fellow minister. How do we deal with unexpected death? It can be so difficult. I remember calling to speak with one of the true warriors of this Church who recently lost his dear companion of some sixty years. He said the most difficult thing is waking up and looking over there to the pillow next to him, and she is not there.

Death's "river" can be so rough and so difficult that sometimes you don't feel like going on. You stand over the lifeless body of one who shared your pain and your pleasure and you begin to remember. You remember the first time that your eyes met. You remember that first blush of love. You remember the sweet sorrow of learning life's experience together and you find yourself passing through the waters.

Disappointment can be another river. How deep the hurt and how strong the temptation to give up sometimes, especially when the best of your plans have failed to work out. How many times people stake their very being on something that they knew would make life better for them and just when it seemed to be within grasp, like the man at the pool of Bethesda, somebody else steps in and captures the prize that you wanted so badly.

Disappointments come in so many ways. The children you brought before the Lord, had them blessed, raised them in the Church, gave them the benefit of a Christian home, family worship, Sabbath School, Pathfinders, AY, Summer Camp, Christian Education, and now they won't go near a church. Lord, Lord, you said you would raise up a standard of your experience.

Suddenly a mother or father is afflicted with dementia or Alzheimer's, and you've got to go back and figure this whole thing out again. What do you do? Do you put your career on hold? Do you put them in a home and let somebody else take care of them? What do you do?

You are out teaching at the seminary, doing what you enjoy doing best, having fun serving the Lord. In the middle of the week you start having a high temperature, body ache, and your throat starts closing up on you. Did you catch the flu? Is something wrong? You have not been in the hospital except to be born and have your tonsils taken out. Yes, as a 9th grader you broke your leg at Christmas trying to ski down the side of a hill on ice skates. That made you miss the basketball game that you were supposed to play in at the church that following Saturday night.

"Doctor what do I do?" "You need to go to the hospital." You go to the hospital, you think you might have a massive throat infection. They give you some antibiotics, do some blood

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work, EKG throat and neck x-ray. "There is something in your lymph node here. We had better take a look at that. We will send you to a specialist. We are going to give you a fine needle aspiration. We don't know what it is, but here is this needle. Take a deep breath..."

You are feeling better, probably just a cold. You think you will go on to the next Church appointment up there in Battle Creek, You need to be there. They are gathering for a Summit Meeting. Everybody else will be there. You have been recently assigned to this post. You know they expect you to be there. The doctor says, "No, go home," Wife says, "Go home." What should you do? You need to go to Battle Creek. No you had better go home.

You go home, you are sick again. They put you in the hospital. It is a whole week. They don't know what's going on with you. Maybe you have lymphoma. What is lymphoma? That sounds, scary. That's when cancer gets into your lymphatic system and goes all throughout your body. Oh, God please, not lymphoma!

"We are going to do an incision and drain..." "What's that?" "We are going to cut your neck." "What?" You are feeling better. Maybe I am well now. Five days later, "I don't know how to say this but you have nasal pharyngeal carcinoma." "How do you spell that?" "Well it is a rare form of upper throat cancer. Do you smoke?" "No, I have never smoked in my life." "You are not a heavy smoker?" "No, I have never even tried to smoke." "Then you have a heavy diet of salt fish?" "No, I don't eat fish, I have never liked fish. I am a vegetarian." "You work around formaldehyde?" "I don't think so. How do you fix this? Can I have surgery?" "No, you can't have surgery. Besides, it will leave you badly scared. It will take away your voice and you are going to still have to have radiation anyway, seven weeks of radiation every day, and chemotherapy."

Disease can be a terrible river, financial reverses can be a river, loss of one's job, unexpected expenses. The river rises. We pass through the waters, and some way each of us has an appointment with the river. The question is, what are you going to do when the river rises? When you get way down yonder all by yourself and you can't hear anybody pray?

A sister called me one day and said, "Elder Kibble this is so-and-so. You don't know me but I want you to know that I am going to be praying for you today. So, if you are too tired to pray, just know that I have you prayed up." I don't even know the lady. When you are way down yonder all by yourself and you can't hear nobody pray, what are you going to do? What will be your response when the river rises? Well Isaiah said God has already answered that question for those that love Him. God says don't panic when the river rises, don't get anxious, don't get all out of sorts. When the river rises, just remember, I'll be with you.

I want you to know that's good enough for me, but what about you? The text tells me that no matter what happens, God has His eye on those that love Him. Better still, He declares, "I have called you by name, you are mine." Isaiah 43:1. God knows us individually and is in touch with the feeling of our infirmities. The servant of the Lord says, "He knows the very house we live in, and he knows each occupant of the home." *Desire of Ages*, p. 479. So if your son is not there and should be, if your daughter is not . . . God knows. God knows where they

are. He knows their condition. He knows what you are going through. In fact, "Every soul," Ellen White says, "is as fully known to Jesus as if they were the only one for whom He died." *Desire of Ages*, p. 479.3 My God, that's good news.

God just doesn't love the world, God loves you. He loves us personally, He knows us personally. I don't know about you but sometimes I wonder, does God even hear my prayer? But again Ellen White says, "The distress of every person touches His heart." *Desire of Ages*, p. 480. You know, I have been at a function, maybe at some friend's home, and there may have been a number of mothers there and they may have their children playing in another room You have been in that situation. One baby cries. Not all of them, just one, that baby's mother gets up, excuses herself. How does she know the difference between those babies? Fathers don't do that. I remember as a teenager, coming in after curfew. My father didn't wake up. But even though I would try my best to miss all the cracks in the floor, my mother . . . , "Alvin, Alvin? 'Thelma, what's wrong?' Alvin's just come in."

Jesus declared that in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world." Oh, the thing to do is not to let anxiety set in but to walk on by faith, believing that God knows every detail. He knows every situation and He will still the storm for those who love Him. Listen to me. He is a mighty windbreaker and He takes care of His own. Once more, the Servant of the Lord says, "Our Heavenly Father measures and weighs every trial before He permits it to come upon the believer. He considers the circumstances." Manuscript 6, 1889. You think, "Lord, this is the wrong time." He considers the circumstances and the strength of the one who is to stand under the proving and testing of God. He never permits the temptation to be greater than the capacity of resistance. Thank God! Christ has never failed. He has never failed a believer in his hour of combat. Did you hear that? I tell you it's one thing to profess faith in a group like this but in your midnight hour . . . I feel pretty good, when I am with my family and with my brothers and my sisters, when I am with my "homeys," as the young people say. I don't care if you are on Patmos Island like John, in Iraq like my pastor, Dr. Andrew Harewood, or in some hospital room. it's altogether different than when you profess faith in a room like this.

Paul talks about Abraham's faith in Romans 4:21 and how he was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. But over in Genesis 17 He talks about how Abraham doubted. The Bible talks about how he fell on his face laughing. He said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old? That old lady is going to have a child?" And then the old patriarch offered to help God out by substituting Ishmael. Abraham was positively persuaded, he was convinced that God could bring life out of death and something out of nothing. Here he is leader of God's church and he is doubting. He is laughing, he is insulting God thinking he has to work it out for God. We need to understand that Abraham was just like us. Faith did not come any easier for him than it does for the rest of humanity. It wasn't automatic, he knew the problems and realities.

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I know that God can cure cancer. But I also know that people die from cancer. I said to my physician, (she is one of the finest physicians in the country) "I am happy that you have taken my case, and I want the best treatment that this institution can provide, but I don't expect you to cure me." Doctors can treat cancer but they can't cure cancer. Carrot juice doesn't cure cancer, tea doesn't cure cancer. I received 40 different remedies from people all across this church, do this, and do that. I got so frustrated. I broke down one day in the kitchen and just cried. "Lord, I can't do all of these things." If I am going to get through this, Lord, you are going to have to show me how. Take this and take that, and don't do this and don't do that. Jesus talked about faith in gradations, He talked about great faith, and little faith, and He talked about no faith. You don't have to have great faith everyday. And don't pretend that you do. Can I be honest with you? When Paul tells us that Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised, He was talking about his mature faith, not his immediate reaction. As one author puts it, "Unbelief was momentary but his faith was constant." George Knight, *Walking With Paul*, p. 117.

Were there days when I had difficulty and I was discouraged? Yes. Some people would call me on some days and they would say "How's it going?" and I would say, "Not good, not good." People don't like to hear those kinds of responses from leaders of the Church. They want you to always be up and always on top of it, a conquering buoyant faith. But that's not real and you and I know it's not real. But just because you and I have some momentary lapses doesn't mean that you have given up on God.

Faith isn't ecstatic, it's dynamic, it's growing, and it's moving. As believers, Ellen White says "We must claim the promise and meet the foe in the name of the Lord and we will know nothing like failure." Manuscript 6, 1889. And the text says, "When thou passest *through* the waters I will be with you, *through* the rivers..." I like that too because, it means if I go in, I am coming out. "I will be with you *through* the waters," *through* the rivers. You may be going through a valley but you are coming out because you gotta go through it. God knows how much you can bear, and He says, "I will be with you." As I prepare to take my seat, you've got to cut me a little slack. As the young people say, you've got to let me exercise a little freedom. You know the preacher has some prerogatives.

I don't know about you, but I enjoy my preaching. Nobody else may, but I get a great deal out of my preaching. If you think that I am just standing up here talking, I am not. After all preaching is the instrument by which conversion occurs, and preaching is the means by which salvation's information is placed upon the soul. Preaching is the surgical procedure by which one whose blinded eyes are able to declare he can see.

Preaching is the key that unlocks the mystery of being and opens up divinity's store house and I make no apology for it, I am God-called and I am God-sent. And as quiet as it's kept, I would do it even if the church didn't pay me. You see, you don't really understand. A year ago I did not have a voice. My wife came home one day with a board and some markers. I said "What is that for?" She said, "So that you can talk." I said "I don't want that." She said "You need it." "I don't want it. Take it away, I don't want it."

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I tried to have a conference call with some of the publishing directors and I had to have somebody else tell them what I was trying to say because I was writing on the board. I promised God that if He would give me back my voice that I would preach His word, and I would praise His name. So tonight, I gotta celebrate just a little bit. If you want a talk, I will give it to you some other time, but tonight I've just got to have a little celebration here. There's no way on God's good earth that I am going to take that seat without asking you one question, because if you can't answer this question, then you have missed the whole point of my sermon.

The text says, "When thou passeth through the water, I will be with thee." And the question is, who is this "I?" Who is he, the preacher? He is the First and the Last, He is the Root of David and the Bright and Morning Star. The Fairest of Ten Thousand and the One who is Altogether Lovely, He is the Desire of Ages, and the Bread of Life, the Living Water and the True Vine, He is the Good Shepherd, The Way the Truth and the Life. He is the Resurrection and the Life, Alpha and Omega, King of Kings and Lord of Lords! That's who He is!

He is your Maker and Redeemer, and whatever you need He is - Sin bearer, doubt settler, storm sealer, company keeper, grace giver, need supplier, redemption sealer, peace provider. Who is this "I"? In the words of the song writer, "God is the joy and the strength of my life, He removes all pain, misery and strife, He promised to keep; me, never to leave me. He'll never, ever go back on His word. I've got to fast and pray, stay in the narrow way. I've got to keep my life clean in every way. I want to go with Him when He comes back. I've come too far and I'll never turn back. God is my all and all." When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, even when the river rises!

PRAYER

C Michael Park, Associate Treasurer of the North American Division, closed the meeting with prayer.

Don C Schneider, Chair
Roscoe J Howard, Secretary
Rosa T Banks, Editorial Secretary

