

1. Commission on World Church Organization:

For the last week 46 members of the Commission on World Church Organization, appointed by the 1991 Annual Council, met at Cohutta Springs, Georgia. During two previous one-day sessions, the commission (a) agreed on nine operating guidelines, (b) created an extensive agenda, and (c) scheduled three, one-week blocks of time for future meetings (two in 1993 and one early in 1994). The Commission's objective is to submit its final report to the 1994 Annual Council for consideration and referral of selected, appropriate items to the 1995 General Conference Session.

Some of the matters addressed during the course of this past week include:

! describing consistently, throughout all levels of church organization, the manner in which the officers relate to their governing bodies,

! reaffirming the current system of church organization with four-constituent and five-administrative levels of governance,

! deciding to poll divisions to evaluate the effectiveness of the current Church Ministries departmental structure and include in the survey form alternative options for consideration,

! clarifying processes designed to avoid unnecessary duplication of departmental functions at every organizational level,

! recommending a reduction of the number elected at a General Conference Session and increasing those to be appointed by the respective governing bodies (Annual Council or Division committees),

! considering methods the General Conference Session delegation might be configured to insure proportionate representation while capping the number of delegates to future sessions, and

! suggesting a modification to the composition of the General Conference Executive Committee so that: (a) it more accurately reflects the world membership distribution, while (b) enabling those who are members to attend more regularly.

2. Global Mission - South Pacific (SPD): The South Pacific Division has turned their attention to

another people-group, the Jewish community. Some of their plans include: (a) inviting Sanford Howard, (a Seventh-day Adventist layman, of Jewish heritage, who has dedicated himself to witnessing to the Jewish community) to conduct Jewish outreach training seminars, May 8-22, in Australia, (b) printing 2,000 Messiah Study Guides, (c) featuring a Jewish tent at the Victorian Camp Meeting, (d) mailing Shabbat Shalom (a quarterly publication designed for the Jewish community) to 180 Jewish families, (e) distributing the book, Israel - Captivity & Restoration, to the Jewish community of New South Wales, and (f) launching Video Jewish Outreach Ministries to bring video seminars and study guides into Jewish homes.

3. Global Mission - North America (NAD): With the backing of the North American Division, the Chesapeake Conference (which in 1992 baptized a record 495 souls) set a goal of establishing a church in Pigtown, an unentered, inner-city section of Baltimore, Maryland. Working in cooperation with Adventist-laymen's Services & Industries (ASI), young volunteers from many places in America joined church workers in carrying out community projects, holding Branch Sabbath Schools, giving Bible studies, and finally holding a public evangelistic series. Today, this once unentered area has a new group of believers worshipping each Sabbath.

4. Focus on Kuwait: In 1986, Allen Brown was a system analyst for the United Arab Shipping Company in Kuwait. While in Kuwait he gave his life to Christ. During the next three years, he conducted evangelistic series that resulted in 50 baptisms. One of those baptized was a Muslim lady from outside Kuwait. Allen Brown heard God's call, gave up his job, is now a senior theology student at West Indies College, and hopes to return to the Middle East to work for the Lord. God's call to the youth continues.

A. "From the GC President" Direct? If your church has a fax machine and you would like to receive "*From the GC President*" directly when it is sent out (about each week), please fax your church's number to Shirley Burton (GC Communication, 301-680-6312).

B. Waco update: If you've ever witnessed a wild, range fire, you know there are few things that travel faster, are less predictable, or are more damaging. In fact, about the only thing that rivals an out-of-control fire for speed and damage is the way inaccurate information spreads. Since February 28 we've experienced firsthand the effects of incorrect information, inaccurate reports, and public misperceptions.

Let me make it clear. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has no affiliation with the Branch Davidians or any other cults. Along with people of many other mainstream religions, we express our deep sympathy to the families who lost loved ones in this tragedy.

Unfortunately, the Church's name continues to be linked with the armed cult in Texas. We are committed to correcting this misperception and are working with a team of specialists to make this happen. While our natural inclination is to vigorously defend our Church's name, how we go about it is very important. The Communication Team has established three priorities:

! To provide the media accurate and consistent information about the Church.

! To correct public and media perceptions that there may be an affiliation between the Church and this armed cult.

! To establish a positive identity for the Church by focusing on who we are rather than on who we are not.

Here is the plan to achieve these objectives:

1. We have selected one spokesperson, who is kept apprised of the Waco situation, and assigned to provide the media with consistent, accurate information about the Church. This person is Gary Patterson (assistant to A. C. McClure, NAD president). Reporters should be referred to him at 301-680-6404. This will enable us to "speak with one voice" and thus avoid being misquoted or presented out of context.

2. Since there is no affiliation between the Seventh-

day Adventist Church and the Branch Davidians (or any other cult), pastors or members, however well-informed, who respond to inquiries about the Branch Davidians (or other cults) are linked to the story as experts on the topic. Simply answering this type of question contributes to the image of an association between our Church and the Branch Davidians!

While we may have knowledge of the beliefs of most religions, it is important that we do not attempt to position ourselves as experts on the Davidians or any other cult. To do so only strengthens the misperception that there is some type of affiliation with our church. Instead, we should refer such inquiries to others who are qualified experts, such as the Cult Awareness Network: 312-267-7777.

3. It is usually preferable to approach challenges positively rather than negatively or worse, defensively. This situation is no different. We need to provide reporters with positive information on who Adventists really are. It is not enough to simply deny incorrect reports, for that leaves a vacuum which will likely be filled with additional wrong information. We are striving to replace wrong data with accurate information. To accomplish this, we intend to focus on: (a) individual churches and their community outreach programs, (b) the significant contributions of Adventist Health System facilities, (c) the development and disaster relief initiatives of ADRA International, and (d) our parochial school system (the largest Protestant school system in the world), and more.

Perhaps now more than ever, it is important for us to work together cooperatively to implement a communication plan designed to correct misperceptions and provide a positive image of the Church. To date we've received calls from many pastors and members expressing support for this course, and I'd like to thank you for this "team spirit." It is deeply appreciated! Your input is valuable as we move forward. Those who have questions or suggestions regarding this matter may call 301-680-6404. Please share this information with your church members. And finally, please continue to pray for a peaceful resolution of the standoff in Waco, for the Communication Team, and for the families who have lost loved ones in this tragedy.

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