

2010

STATE OF THE CONFERENCE

Presented by Elder D. C. Edmond, SCC President

*If we do what He asks, He **will** do what He said that He would do. In fact, His Word declares that "He will do exceedingly abundantly, beyond what we can ask or think".*



SOUTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST

715 Youngs Lane
Nashville, TN 37207
615.226.6500
www.scc-adventist.org



STATE OF THE CONFERENCE

PRESENTED BY ELDER D. C. EDMOND, PRESIDENT

1. *Evangelizing Our Conference*
2. *Equipping Our Workers*
3. *Educating Our Children*
4. *Engaging Our Young Adults*
5. *Enunciating Our Expectations*
6. *Evaluating Our Results*
7. *Entreating Our God*

Last year (2010), we committed to reporting to you, on a yearly basis the state of our conference and the progress that the Lord had allowed us to make towards the goals that were set each year. Those goals were set around the core values of our conference, which we called *The 7 E's*, which are listed above. We said our theme was *Intentionality*, that *Success was rarely accidental, it was almost always intentional*; that God's work deserved planning and purpose. Today, we are reporting to you the progress that the Lord has allowed us to make in these areas over the past twelve (12) months.

(1) **Our Legal Challenge:** This time last year, we were on the verge of going to trial to defend the conference in a 42 million dollar lawsuit. Our former President, Elder Benjamin P. Browne, led the people of God in petitioning the throne of God for deliverance, and God came through in a marked manner.

The plaintiffs came to us and requested mediation to settle the lawsuit. We *saw* God work on our behalf and we stand today, for the first time in eight (8) years, fully free and clear from any legal challenges. It was a long road, but in the words of our late former President, Elder C.E. Dudley, "*Jesus Led Us All the Way*".

(2) **Intentionality About Time:** One of the first things that was said in *The Presidential Vision*, the 35 page document that outlined the direction in which we thought that the Lord would have us to go, was that we would be *intentional*, even about things that seemed small. We said that we would be *intentional* about time-that meetings would start on time and that they would end on time.

We could not fully implement that commitment during last year's Church Officers Conventions, due to the need to properly say farewell to Elder and Dr. Browne and introduce the new Conference Executive Secretary, Elder Auldwin Humphrey, and his wife.

But implementation began at Camp Meeting. Divine Worship ended at 12:50 p.m. Generally speaking, the services for Camp Meeting during the week began and ended on time.

Please allow me to reiterate once more that we are in *no way* desirous of “putting a clock on the Holy Spirit”. We simply contend that the Holy Spirit gets “blamed” for things that have nothing to do with the Holy Spirit: Meetings that do not begin on time, multiple people giving “greetings” (a particularly common black Adventist practice), repetition of announcements that are already written, etc.

We are so desirous of the Spirit of the living God falling afresh upon our meetings that we are willing to stay all day, all night, all *week*, and thankfully and joyfully bask in His presence. But we shall discontinue the practice of attaching to the Holy Spirit things that are really more our doing than His. We believe that God is a God of order and that generally speaking, worship can be both punctual *and* spiritual.

And with that in mind, we propose taking steps to rein in the longest meeting that we have-Constituency Meeting/Conference Session. Both in *2006*, when there were a number of personnel changes voted, and in *2001*, when there were virtually none, our meetings lasted more than eleven hours each, in addition to our morning devotional service.

To put it another way, if a person attended both the *2001* and the *2006* Constituency Meetings, and they stayed the entire time, that person spent the equivalent of *one full day* at Constituency Meeting.

We believe that a strong case can be made that it is time to bring the practice of 12 hour Conference Constituency Meetings (if we count the pre-meeting devotion service) to an end.

Here is the case:

- (a) **Long Constituency Meetings Tend to Disadvantage and Disenfranchise Laymen (Who Have to Go to Work the Next Day) and Those Who Live the Greatest Distances from the Place Where Constituency Meeting Is Being Held.** Important decisions, e.g. votes on changes in the constitution, votes on the makeup of the Executive Committee, etc., are made by a small minority of the delegates, who are disproportionately conference employees and from the places closest to where Constituency Meeting is located.
- (b) **Very Important Decisions Are Made at the End of A Twelve (12) Hour Day:** It could be argued that the end of a twelve (12) hour day does not lend itself to the best decision-making.

(c) **If There Were a Set Beginning and Ending Time for Constituency Meeting, the Delegates Might Well Be Better Able to Plan Their Travel to Be Able to Stay to the End of the Meeting.** Currently, the delegates cannot easily plan to stay until the end of constituency because there is no set time for said meeting to end.

Therefore, we propose:

To set an ending time of 6:00 p.m., local time, for constituency meeting, with the option for the delegates to extend the time by a 2/3 vote of the voting delegates.

At the beginning of our meeting, this proposal will be put to the constituency for their discussion and approval.

(3) **Intentional About Evangelism:** Last year, we shared with you our intention to do “targeted evangelism”, in terms of our appropriations.

The reason for “targeted” evangelistic appropriations is that the conference workforce has grown to the point that we can no longer adequately fund every Pastor and/or layperson who desires to run an evangelistic meeting, every year. Therefore, the decision was made to “target” the urban areas of the conference this year, with the thought that in **2011** we would *intentionally* target the rural areas.

The Lord blessed **Part I** of this plan in **2010** with the highest baptismal total in more than 10 years. Now, we ask His blessing as we turn our attention to the rural areas/small churches of our conference. Our evangelistic resources this year will be mainly targeted at our rural areas and the churches in them.

We said last year that we would ask the Pastors of our conference, who were seeking evangelistic appropriations from the conference, to give this office a full evangelistic plan in writing for the year; all of the Pastors who received conference evangelistic funds did so. To some degree, the funding was based on those plans, and the Pastors and those who worked with them to develop those plans did a fine job.

As part of the needed follow-up, we asked those same Pastors for an evaluation of those plans at the end of the year. The purpose was to ascertain what worked and what did not; to build and expand on the successes that the Lord gave us, and to learn from the things that did not work as well as we thought they would. This is a part of one of ***The 7 E's-Evaluating Our Results.***

(4) **Intentional About Our Ministry to Our Smaller Churches:** We occasionally hear that our smaller churches feel overlooked by the conference-particularly, the churches that are the greatest distance from the conference office.

In truth, all of the people of God are important-regardless of the size of the church they attend. Their importance can be measured, not by the size of their church, but by the size

of the sacrifice that God made to save all of us. Moreover, the majority of our churches would be considered “small” churches.

To be *intentional* about demonstrating our commitment to ministering to our smaller churches from the conference office, we were blessed by God to do the following in **2010**:

- a. **Send someone from the conference office to visit virtually every church in the State of Mississippi.** Mississippi probably has the greater percentage of smaller churches, and the churches which are the greatest distance from the conference office, so we began there. Transfers out of the conference by two (2) individuals who formerly worked in the conference office, plus the serious injury of another, made us miss a few churches, but in the main, most were visited.
- b. **I did a “Mississippi Tour” this summer, where I spent a week in Mississippi visiting the Pastors of the following churches: Pastors Roscoe Shields, Greg St. Ange, Steven Gates, Deon Johnson, Nathan Williams, Troy Brand - the last three (3) of those Pastors, I had the privilege of visiting them in their homes and praying with their families (and having the four (4) year old son of Pastor Johnson pray for me).**

On said “Tour”, I also met with the Jackson-area Pastors-Elders **Marshall Johnson** and **Joseph Privette**, as well as **Pastors Darron George, Edward Harden, Philip Johnny** and **Lay Pastor Phillip Collins** in Jackson for lunch.

Additionally, I was able to visit and was privileged to speak at the following churches on my week-long “Mississippi Tour” **Columbus Salem, Indianola Jesus Is the Way, Greenwood Shiloh** and **Hollendale First Church**. Lastly, I visited two (2) of our church schools: **Jackson E.E. Rogers** and **Memphis Alcy**. It was a *wonderful* experience and I learned a lot.

- c. **Instituted a South Central Conference “Small Church Day”, where the conference office staff goes to a small church puts on the entire program, from Sabbath School straight through AYS, including ushering and a Community Service project.**

This year, we visited the **Bethany Church** in Atmore, Alabama. The church was packed and we believe that the office staff enjoyed it even more than the local church. The next “Small Church Day” is *March 26*, at the **North Star SDA Church** in Covington, Kentucky.

- d. **Church Consulting Team-** This past year, there was put in place a Consulting Team, consisting of the Conference Executive Secretary, Elder Humphrey, the Ministerial Director, Elder Benjamin Jones, Jr., the Conference Sabbath

School/Personal Ministries Director, Elder R.L. Patterson and the Conference Youth Director, Elder Vandeon Griffin.

The purpose of the Consulting Team is to go to a local church and to examine the church's programming and to offer suggestions as to ways that the church can improve upon the ministries that it offers its members and its community. Last year, the Consulting Team went to several small churches to work with them and we shall offer that service again, upon the request of the Pastor.

(5) Intentional About Our Historic Evangelistic Opportunity: The North American Division has asked each of the unions in our division to target a city for evangelistic emphasis for the next five (5) years. We are excited and extraordinarily blessed that Memphis has been chosen.

A major part of being chosen is the financial resources that the Southern Union has committed to place in the Memphis area over the next five (5) years. This week, we shall meet with the Memphis area Pastors, via phone conference. That will be followed up by a second meeting, on **February 10**, with a group of Pastors and laypersons from all of the Memphis area churches, to make recommendations as to the best way South Central can take advantage of this historic opportunity.

(6) Intentional About Diversity: Last year, we made a commitment to diversify our pastoral staff; first, by hiring the first female Pastors in the history of our conference, and ultimately, adding members of other ethnic backgrounds.

On **June 13**, the Conference Executive Committee invited Pastors Lola Moore and Josian Frampton to join our staff. Pastor Frampton's arrival has been delayed by immigration challenges, but Pastor Moore has been serving the Oakwood University Church as one of its Assistant Pastors.

We continue to be committed to bringing the best persons to our staff, regardless of race, gender, age or ethnicity. We cannot be in a position where we pass over qualified individuals to hire other individuals simply because these other individuals more closely resemble the individuals that we have traditionally hired.

We have also sought to be *intentional* about seeking diversity in the recommendations that are made relative to those who represent us on our Executive Committee and the various committees of our denomination. When two (2) positions opened up on our Executive Committee recently, one (1) was given to one of our experienced Pastors, Elder Al Frazier, of the Paducah/Hopkinsville, Kentucky district and the other was given to a young adult female, Ms. Tiffany Brown, of Huntsville, Alabama. Recently, we were given two (2) slots for laypersons on the North American Division Executive Committee. The recommendations were one (1) young adult female, Ms. Nicole Stokes, a church schoolteacher from Memphis, Tennessee and one (1) male, Cleveland (Murphy) Wilson, a retiree from Huntsville, Alabama.

(7) Intentional About Technology: We have made a commitment to being *intentional* about using technology to assist us in ministry. A major upgrade of our Website has begun, for which we are very grateful to our Communications Director, Elder Michael Harpe. Already there is a new format and plans are underway to make even more improvements over the next 4-6 weeks.

One use of technology that will be seen over the next 2 months or so is the videotaping of all sessions of the following seminars at this year's Church Officer's Convention: **Children's Ministries, Elders, Adult Sabbath School, Treasurers, Women's Ministries and Youth (AYS)**. These will then be placed on the Website for reference and for the benefit of those who either could not be present for all of the presentations or who could not be present at all.

On *December 12*, we had our first on-line Executive Committee meeting. The officers of the conference and the Educational Superintendent, Mrs. Erma Lee met at the Conference Office; all of the other members of the Executive Committee were brought together via computer and/or phone.

There were some technical glitches that had to be overcome, but the conference saved the thousands of dollars normally spent in travel, lodging, per diem and the two meals that are served at each committee meeting. Additionally, time was saved as well, as the "virtual" committee meeting was 90 minutes shorter than the average meeting.

In *October*, we had our first Presidential Webinar, where the Conference President was connected across the conference as a kind of electronic Town Hall Meeting. Another such meeting is planned for late February or early March on the challenges of reaching our young people. And the Technology Summit, sponsored through our Communications Department, continues to be a blessing.

(8) Intentional About Our Church Schools: Ending the decline in our enrollment and upgrading our facilities have been top priorities. On *August 22*, the constituents of Oakwood Adventist Academy made an historic vote to build a new facility for our students. In support of that project, the South Central Conference has made the largest financial commitment in the history of our conference-nearly three (3) quarters of a million dollars, to ensure that our children have a facility that is representative of who we are and Whose we are.

Additionally, we have made a commitment not to assign Pastors to churches where there is a church school unless that Pastor has made an advance commitment to supporting the church school. Further, it has been said to our Pastors that unless they are homeschooling their children, they are expected to enroll them in our church school.

The stated goal was to end the streak of five (5) consecutive years of enrollment decline. To assist our parents, the conference raised and set aside monies to institute the same

Three (3) Way Scholarship Program on the elementary and academy level that exists at Oakwood University, where the conference, the church and the church school partner to provide tuition assistance. This past year, over 100 students received such assistance.

We believe that this program was a major factor in seven (7) of our ten (10) schools having an enrollment increase and an overall increase in our enrollment for the first time in six (6) years. With your help and God's, we intend for this to be a permanent program.

Finally, my sisters and my brothers, we must be *intentional* facing the challenges which confront us. Last year, we talked to you about reducing the indebtedness to the conference by our Adventist Book Center (ABC), our churches and our church schools. We reported to you last year that said indebtedness totaled approximately 2 million dollars, an unacceptable and unsustainable figure that ultimately would compromise our operation.

We are glad to report to you that the ABC's debt has been reduced and we have begun to address and reduce the indebtedness to the conference that is tied to unpaid church insurance premiums, as well as unpaid church school subsidies.

We are thankful that the Lord has allowed us to begin to turn those situations around, but there is still more that needs to be done.

On the revenue side, we face two (2) challenges, in my opinion:

(I) The tithe that comes from our churches is coming later than it once did. This poses a potential cash flow challenge for the conference and it represents a long term threat to payroll, i.e., eventually, enough tithe may come in so late that it may present a challenge to making payroll.

We ask our church leaders, our Pastors, our local church treasurers and local church boards to make a commitment to:

- a. Seeing to it that the tithe comes in a timely manner.
- b. Make certain that tithe dollars are only used for tithe purposes.

(II) The tithe is not growing as fast as it once did. For most of this quinquennium, our yearly tithe gain has been at 2% or less. This is a challenge, not just here in South Central, but across North America. It is the single largest contributing factor to the denominational workers in North America not receiving a salary increase for four years.

If we do not make the adjustments on the expense side of our ledger to accommodate the changes on the revenue side, (i.e., our revenue has grown relatively marginally over the past five (5) years), it will be difficult for us to avoid having some problems in the future.

Our largest single expense, by far, are salaries and benefits. Beginning this year, we are going to have to take a serious look at freezing-**NOT REDUCING**-but, **FREEZING**, the number of employees we have.

One of the things that I shall begin discussing, first, with the other officers of the conference and then, with the Executive Committee, is the probability of not replacing workers who leave, until our revenue begins trending upwards a little higher.

In all candor, I do not like having to think that way; *we need more* workers. But our first responsibility, other than to spread the gospel, is to protect the livelihood of the workers that we already have and the best way to do that may well be by not adding any more workers until our tithing revenue consistently improves.

It is better to be *intentional* and proactive *before* a crisis *comes* and to make some marginally unpleasant decisions now, than to wait *until* a crisis comes and have to make some very unpleasant decisions later.

I want to be clear: We are not in a crisis now. This is exactly why we are going to make some decisions now.

There are some other things that we need to do to address our finances. Tithing is not really a matter of corporate dollars and cents; it is a matter of individual relationships with the Lord. We shall continue to address it from that perspective.

In closing, I thank each of you, our workers and our church members for all that you do to make the South Central Conference the special place that it is. I thank the Lord for what He did in **2010** through you and it is what the Lord has done for us in the past that make me absolutely certain that there is *nothing* that needs to be done that He will not do for us in the future, if we trust Him.

If we do what He asks, He *will* do what He said that He would do. In fact, His Word declares that “He will do exceedingly abundantly, beyond what we can ask or think”. Today, we re-commit ourselves to the *intentional* pursuit of His guidance, the *intentional* pursuit of His will for our lives, the *intentional* pursuit of excellence for His church, and most of all, the *intentional* pursuit of salvation in His kingdom when He comes.

Pray that this be so in each of our lives. And please do not allow a single day to pass without praying for Mrs. Edmond and for me.

May God bless each of you and may God bless the South Central Conference.