

Message from the President | The Real Meaning of Unity



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The word *unity* has become an icon within Adventism. Unity by its definition is wholeness and harmony, interconnectedness and synergism—an interaction of elements that, when combined, produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Essential components of unity include respect for the unique identity of each member of the united group; fairness, justice, and trustworthiness in all relationships; and the quest for truth—not only the cluster of

central beliefs we hold in common, but also the ever-expanding search for new understandings.

Each individual develops her or his own “script,” beginning with childhood. These scripts compound and grow as we go through life, making up our individual identities. Each one of us has different memories—some of war, savagery, and domination; others have memories of a loving, caring family in a country at peace; some were born into prosperity and others into privation. Imposed on these memories are the religious ideas which others have taught us. The differences created by our varied backgrounds, cultures, economic situations, and opportunities must be sympathetically combined when attempting to create a paradigm that has validity for many. It is how we achieve unity. And, from the start, each individual must be treated with respect for her/his God-given identity.

Embracing this concept of respect fosters a culture of connectedness and dialogue, harmony, flexibility—dynamic

rather than static relationships resulting in “unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation” in which there is no room for alienation, condescension, or humiliation. In this setting, racism, sexism, ageism, IQ-ism, and all other distinctions like these disappear. Stereotypical classifications that denigrate such groups as non-Caucasians or women, causing them to perform at lower levels because of lower expectations, likewise must disappear. There can be no ruling elite in the Christian community. While celebrating the need and the blessing of good leadership, true unity demands curbing the urge to control. A participatory, supportive community is marked by the absence of oppression, inequality, and exploitation.

Real unity fosters an environment where there is respectful dialogue and active listening. People who embrace diversity and find richness in a variety of insights live in an atmosphere of trust and elicit the trustworthiness of others—an atmosphere in which all individuals practice equal submission. People joined in unity pursue justice and cultivate the willingness to forgive. In this context, the quest for truth is not only the common acceptance of beliefs and convictions, but the spirit of inquiry, maintaining an openness—a flexibility to theology—which allows for both continuity and change in our beliefs over time.

It is imperative that Adventist leaders and members speak forcefully against the marginalization of any class of people, including the marginalization of women, physical and sexual abuse of women, and structural deprivation of women, which can limit women’s ability to use their God-given gifts in service within the church structure. Women have been marginalized for much of recorded history and declared to be inferior to men in strength, mental capacity, and in self-control. These assertions have led to a limitation of educational and professional opportunities for women.

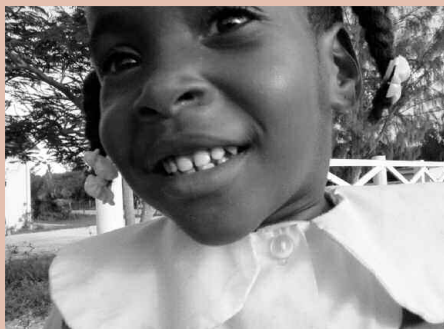
The Association of Adventist Women invites Adventist women to take an active role in an inclusive and unified community where there is empowerment and unhindered opportunity for self-development and service for all.

News Notes: Women in the News

Adventist Woman Elder Conducts Evangelistic Series in the Bahamas

Marva Farquharson, an enthusiastic lay-preacher from the Breath of Life and the Message of Hope Seventh-day Adventist churches in Nassau, Bahamas, recently conducted an evangelistic series in Eleuthera, Bahamas, that resulted in baptisms. Farquharson, who has been preaching for more than 29 years, was the first female (nineteen years ago) to be ordained as a local elder in the Bahamas Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Farquharson traveled to Eleuthera in August 2004, with twelve other people from the Breath of Life Adventist Church, to conduct an evangelistic series in Eleuthera. Farquharson preached for two weeks at the James Cistern Church. Members of the evangelistic team visited Rock Sound in the south to Spanish Wells | *continued on page 6*



courtesy Karen Stevenson