

THIS IS AN ABOMINATION!

Planning to Close the Churches

In the late fall of 1995, we learned from an Adventist pastor, somewhere in North America, that his union president had told him the General Conference was working with local conference presidents in revising conference policies, to make it easier to close down local denominationally owned churches whose members were not in full support of official teachings, standards, and practices.

Then, in February 1996, we received from a friend a copy of *Plusline Access: Making ideas and resources available to Seventh-day Adventists in contact ministry*, a bi-monthly newsletter published by the North American Division.

After introducing the subject by saying that daring new methods are needed, it discussed a few suggestions for the local churches; and, then, near the back, it clearly stated that local congregations which did not adhere to officially approved beliefs and practices ought to be closed down.

As soon as we saw it, we recognized what was coming—because of the warning we had earlier received about two months earlier from that pastor!

Here is a reprint of our initial report on this February *Plusline Access*, as given in our March 1996 *Checkpoints*:

TIME TO CLOSE DOWN THE SMALLER CHURCHES—Yes, the time has come. That is what the North American Division says.

In the latest issue of *PlusLine Access*, a special 8-page newsletter for church leaders and pastors in the U.S. and Canada, the problems are spelled

out and the solution is simple enough: Close the local church.

What are the problems? Any one of four is sufficient for the conference president to close the church and pocket the key.

1 - Weekly attendance is low. The congregation does not have lots of members. "Usually most of the members were aged." "Such churches should be loosed so the pastors can dedicate their energies to more populated areas."

2 - Even newly started local churches should be closed—if they do not get above "30 or 40 members" within a couple years.

3 - The church is not sending in enough tithe to the conference office. Close it down.

4 - "When a church becomes controlled by an independent ministry that is unsupportive of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its leadership, it's time to turn out the lights. Such churches are like a cancer among other churches."

The above four points just about include every small denominational congregation, anything that is below 30 or 40 members.

Why are leaders so anxious to close down the small churches? The reasons are obvious, yet profound in their significance:

1 - It is invariably the smaller churches which will be the most conservative. They are the ones which stand as fortresses in defense of our historic beliefs and standards.

2 - It is the delegates from smaller churches which lead out in opposing apostasy at conference constituency meetings.

3 - It is the delegates from smaller churches which are the most dangerous to getting worldly leaders elected and reelected in the conference.

4 - It is the smaller churches which want new theology pastors transferred out.

5 - By eliminating the small churches, the way is cleared for conference leadership to more rapidly take its churches into modernism.

6 - By disbanding a local church, the members will have to join a larger church; where, because they are in the minority, they have less influence over board and committee actions.

As noted above, this division-wide plan was disclosed in the January 1996 issue of an NAD publication sent to church leaders and pastors throughout North America. You were not supposed to know about the plan, not yet.

In November, a contact was made with a denominational pastor, located somewhere in the United States. Greatly concerned, he had just returned from a ministerial meeting, and the union president had announced that all the conferences in the North American Division were laying plans to close down the small churches.

I was waiting for more information on this, when the January issue of *Plus-Line Access* was sent to me by a friend. So it is official!

Your concern and ours, of course, is the plan to close the churches that the faithful are in. Once these little flocks are scattered, leadership will have more control over that which remains.

But there's an interesting question: What will be done with those padlocked buildings? In some instances they will remain closed until a conference evangelist comes through and brings in new theology trained members.

But the temptation will be great to sell the buildings—which local church members, in earlier years, paid for. For over a decade, conference funds have been drying up, as the most faithful—the cream—have been crowded out by new theology pastors.

Selling off these small churches will help subsidize Celebrations, youth congresses, festivals, and other activities which are intended to hold the shallow who think more of entertainment than they do of serious study in the Inspired books or missionary work. [End of *Checkpoints* article.]

After publishing that disclosure, we received a number of comments

from friends. A few said their pastors told them it could not be true, since they themselves had not yet heard about it.

But we knew that the danger was very real, because we had earlier received that advance warning from a faithful denominational pastor, whose union president had specifically let it be known that closing of small churches was in the planning stage.

On pages 4 to 8 of this report, we will reprint that issue of *Plusline Access* in full. Especially read pages 1, the top of 2, and the article on 7.

Plusline Access was chosen as the vehicle to transmit the information widely to church pastors, because:

“ACCESS is committed to providing an information network for seventh-day Adventist leaders, pastors and members involved in frontline ministry. In light of our rapidly changing times, we recognize the need to make practical ministry information more accessible. Thus, this medium will examine and propose new ideas and resources that are designed to help us carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.”—*Access, Special Issue, January 1996, page two.*

It is not easy to turn around a large ship, and the proposed plan to close down churches is radical enough that some delay in getting it started should be expected.

But progress is being made. We have now received the latest development in this ongoing changeover; it comes from a local conference.

This document has the curious title of *Georgia-Cumberland Conference Church Strengthening Policy*. Yet it is quite clearly discussing reasons and procedures for, not strengthening, but closing down local denominationally owned churches in that conference!

In three pages, the plan is laid out as clearly as anyone desiring proof could wish.

Plusline Access reveals it is a division-wide agenda. The Georgia-Cumberland Conference policy

paper shows it is already beginning on the conference level.

What churches will be closed?

The plans, as outlined in *Plusline Access* and the conference agenda, spell it out clearly. Any one of the following may be used to define the church marked for closure and possible sale:

- The ones which have small memberships. (The large ones are more liberal, even though they care less about church teachings and frequently provide less per-capita financial support.)

- The ones which have any variant teachings, standards, or [worship] practices.

- The ones whose members do not pay all their tithe into the conference office.

—Plus a few more.

Apparently, this is a shrewd decision, for it will eliminate the dissenters from the ranks. Only the liberals will remain to vote at conference constituency meetings.

But the experience of Elijah reveals that the real troublemakers are not being eliminated (*PK 139-140*). It is those abandoning our historic beliefs and standards who are the problem.

Leaders assume that more converts will be attracted if the church is more liberal. But, ultimately, their plan will fail. In the early 1980s, Desmond Ford and his followers imagined that he would win large numbers in his lectures and radio broadcasts, now that he was freed from historic Adventism. But they discovered that the world was not interested. They already had Ford's teachings.

Our denomination is becoming the tail of Protestantism, when it used to be at the forefront of God's last-day people, and ranking high in the estimation of the Majesty of heaven. It is a poor trade-off.

We could try to excuse the matter, and say the poor conference offices are suffering from a lack of tithe

and offering income, and need to reduce the number of churches in order to make ends meet.

But here are two facts:

- It is not necessary to disband local churches in order to save money! Doing such a thing is terrible! What denomination do you know that liquidates local congregations, in order to reduce expenditures? They never do. Yet we do it—and dare to call the abomination a “church strengthening policy.” The very title is a lie. Destroying churches is not strengthening them.

- When I was at the Seminary, back in the 1950s, I met a minister from the Dakotas, who told me that, for years, he pastored five churches, each a hundred miles from the others. Yet the impoverished Dakota Conference did not shut down those churches! He said there were lots of districts in the midwest like that.

—The only valid reason for doing so is that men want to eliminate historic believers. That is the underlying theme in the wording of the “Church Strengthening Policy” (*see the next two pages*).

Notice that, not only do they want to shut down churches—they do not want new ones started either! New congregations are not wanted, unless they turn in at least \$50,000 each year in tithes.

Do we have Jesuits running our conferences? Why do the leaders of the work want to close down the work? Only wolves want to scatter the sheep (John 10:12). What gain is there in emptying out the denomination?

Why is there, suddenly, this strange urgency to make more money by having less members?

According to the General Conference trademark policy, the denomination is a commercial business firm.

According to this new conference policy, it is a money-making operation.

Oh, come quickly, Lord Jesus!

— Vance

On pages 3 and 4 of this two-part tract set we learn of the plan the Georgia-Cumberland Conference is beginning to implement, in order to “strengthen” its local churches. Closing down local churches, in spite of the appeals of the members, sounds cruel and heartless. We surely have entered upon troublous times. This denomination was raised up to proclaim to earth’s inhabitants the great truth of Revelation 14:12. —And now men are trying to make the members disappear! Yet they have been at work making the message disappear for a number of years.

Of the three pages in the newly revised Georgia-Cumberland policy statement, pages 1 and 2 explain the ease with which they will start ejecting local congregations within two years and page 3 details how difficult it will

henceforth be to start a new denominational church.

Close them down—and keep them closed—is the message!

On pages 4 through 8, we learn that the Georgia-Cumberland plan is being done in willing obedience to a continent-wide plan, decided on over a year earlier.

On page 1, we learn that the North American Division needs to grasp a “dangerous opportunity” set before it. On the top of page 2, we learn that the church is “in a crisis,” and has “an acute disease.”

Following several pages of side issues, page 7 brings us to the ultimate remedy: Each local congregation must either fall into line—or be ousted.