

A SECOND SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST DENOMINATION IS STARTING !

RON GLADDEN'S NEW CHURCH

The most prominent and successful “church planter” in the denomination has decided to start his own denomination—a second Seventh-day Adventist Church! Here are facts you need to know about this incredible development.

The “celebration church” movement began in the Adventist denomination in the late 1980s, in a desperate attempt to bring more people into the church more quickly—to replace the conservative believers which were being crowded out by new theology pastors.

Prior to that time, our evangelism had always been keyed to conversion to Christ and acceptance of our doctrinal beliefs and standards. But the celebration movement was a radical departure—which was centered around using modernist entertainment in Sabbath church services to attract and baptize newcomers.

Pastors from all over the continent were sent to David Snyder’s Milwaukie, Oregon, celebration church for training. Snyder, who in earlier years had studied acting and theatrical work, was ideally suited for the task. However, within a very few years both he and other celebration pastors began leaving the denomination, and sometimes taking members and even whole church companies with them.

So our leaders sought for something new. They found it in a new idea publicized by two Protestant mega-churches: Willow Creek, in northern Illinois, and Saddleback Church in southern California.

The new model for bringing people in off the streets and quickly making “Adventists” out of them was called “church planting.” This new concept of a church format was essentially the same as the celebration church (with its bands and drums, hand-raising, theatrical skits, wild music, and all the rest),—but with one exception: Under the former celebration plan, when a regular Adventist church was switched over to the celebration pattern by its pastor, faithful believers became upset and tended to leave. The new people coming in believed and practiced no standards; they gave little in tithes and offerings. The older ones who were leaving were taking their donations with them. Church leaders discovered that they were losing rather than gaining.

The church planting plan was different in just one key aspect: Instead of changing an established

Adventist church into a celebration church, an entirely new church was raised up in a separate building in a different location. In this way, a new celebration church could be started—without disturbing historic believers in their established churches.

Church planting became the big push in the mid- and late-1990s, as efforts were made to start brand-new celebration churches.

In 1996, the SEEDS conferences began, which trained Adventist pastors and promoted the new-style planting of celebration churches, hopefully at an even faster rate.

In this project, one man quickly rose to a position of great influence: Ronald Gladden. He combined imaginative speaking with eager, enthusiastic activity. More than any other church worker in recent years, Gladden has led out in urging the planting of new celebration churches which are based on “grace, only grace”; this concept is quite similar to the “once saved, always saved” of the Southern Baptists.

(The Southern Baptist version is this: Once you accept Christ, you cannot be lost regardless of what you do. Our new theology version is: Once you accept Christ, you are saved; and your future behavior does not matter.)

Although our name for it had been changed from “celebration church” to “church planting,” the underlying concept had not changed: Use entertainment to bring people into the church; beliefs and standards are not particularly important. Knowing doctrines, understanding Bible principles, and being aware of the existence of Spirit of Prophecy books is unimportant. Just get them in and, hopefully, get them to pay donations.

In the course of his work, Gladden made contacts with liberals all over America. He found that many of them were dissatisfied with having any restrictions on their beliefs or living standards. Although the denomination has become very lax in recent decades, it still maintains some standards. Liberals find them offensive—and want more freedom. The desire for freedom from rules and regulations underlies new theology teachings; indeed, it is the reason people are attracted to the concept and accept it.

Ron Gladden plans to now fill this niche with

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his new denomination, which he calls “Mission Catalyst Network.” His objective is to unite newly planted churches under his own banner, receive a percentage of their tithes and offerings for the purpose of starting still more churches, and become the leader of a great religious movement.

But there is one major weakness which Ron does not recognize: Liberals are not interested in evangelism. They want to relax, be entertained at church service, and be told once again in the sermon that they are already saved. They want to go to a restaurant after church and have wine with their meal, pay for the dinner, and go home and watch football on television.

It is likely that, eventually, disgruntled with the lack of success of his proposed new network of churches, Gladden will shrink down to one man in charge of one independent church: the one he is now pastoring in Vancouver, Washington (not British Columbia). *See box at the bottom of this page.*

So, at the present time, Ron Gladden is just another liberal Adventist causing problems.

His only doctrinal message is that of Desmond Ford and fellow travelers: “salvation by grace alone.” Why Gladden bothers to keep the Sabbath is a mystery. Like so many others who accept the teaching of salvation-in-sin, eventually he will leave Adventism entirely and unite with the Sundaykeepers.

A LETTER FROM A FRIEND

We will begin with an email received from a friend:

“The rumor has been circulating for the past week, including one that reached me at ASI. And then another was posted. But before I said anything, I wanted to confirm the rumor. So I called the secretary to the president of the North Pacific Union, and she confirmed that this is true.

“Ron Gladden, probably the most prominent ‘church planter’ in the North American Division promoting Willow Creek, celebration-style approach to church growth, was recently laid off from his position as director of church planting for both the North Pacific and Mid-America Unions. He has since made the decision not to seek a position inside the

denomination, and is instead starting an independent, congregational church in Vancouver, Washington.

“The secretary to the NPUC president told me that her boss, Elder Jere Patzer, and Don Schneider, president of the NAD, both begged Ron not to do this. But he is doing so regardless. The secretary to the NPUC president agreed with me that because of this, on the basis of the *Church Manual*, Ron will have to be disfellowshipped.

“The implications of this decision will likely be seismic throughout the North American Division. This man has been perhaps the most prominent promoter of the Willow Creek, contemporary worship movement in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When I remonstrated with him over this several years ago, warning him that it would likely lead in the direction he has now gone, he assured me that only a few extremists—the label he attached to other pastors who had recently left—would do anything so drastic.

“Now he has done the very thing I warned him about. We can be sure it won’t be long before he renounces all key Adventist doctrines, and goes fully the way of Richard Fredericks, Clay Peck, Dale Ratzlaff, Terry Pooler, and a growing number of others.

“Yet another pastor [in addition to those named above]—this one of four churches—has written a letter to his conference president telling him why he resigned and left the Adventist Church earlier this year. He said the Adventist Church is divided between Adventists who believe the ‘gospel’ and those who believe they have to be perfect. He maintains that as long as the perfection doctrine is tolerated in Adventism, the church will always be in trouble, and because this doctrine continues to be tolerated, he is leaving. [“Perfectionism” is their code word for the teaching that we are required to obey God, His law, and His Inspired Writings. They only want to obey man’s laws.]

“How we wish all [our modernist pastors] were this honest!

“What was so pathetic was watching him take the Bible out of context in this letter, trying to prove that becoming perfect is impossible. He quotes, for example, 1 John 1:8, totally ignoring the previous and succeeding verses! He then quotes 1 John 3:2, which speaks of how we will be like Jesus ‘when He shall appear’—the idea being that we won’t be until then! Yet if one reads the following verse (verse 4), and verse 7, it is clear we must become like Jesus *before* He appears! Yet these verses he totally left out!

“We can be sure we have only seen the beginning of these departures. They make us sad for the

WHAT IS IT LIKE IN THE VANCOUVER CHURCH?—Ron Gladden’s celebration church is in Vancouver, Washington. Several years ago, a friend videotaped a church service in that church. We will send you a copy for the cost of the video, plus shipping. It is called *Are You Ready for Church?* \$5.00 + \$2.50 / Overseas: \$5.00 + \$4.00

1 loss of souls they involve, yet they also cause us to
2 rejoice because of the clarifying of the issues this
3 may bring. While leaders may lack the courage to
4 cleanse the body of Christ, God is still on the job!"

LETTER TO CONFERENCE PRESIDENTS

The following letter was sent by Don Schneider to every conference president in the North American Division:

"August 10, 2004

"Conference Presidents

"North American Division

"Dear President,

"Ron Gladden met with me and two other church leaders for several hours this past Saturday night following the ASI meetings in Cincinnati. He outlined his plan to create a church planting ministry immediately. This follows on the heels of his termination from the Mid-America and North Pacific Unions in March of this year.

"Briefly, his plan includes the following points:

- "• He is creating a very congregational network of churches committed to church planting.

- "• Churches in his network will subscribe to a set of beliefs similar to the Adventist Church's beliefs.

- "• Churches in his network will give 10% of their tithes and offerings to Gladden's ministry office.

- "• No church in his ministry network will return any tithe or offerings to the conference—or any other part of the Adventist Church.

- "• No pastors in his network will carry any credentials from the Adventist Church.

- "• Ron indicated that he is aware that churches in his network cannot be part of the Adventist Church.

"I am deeply saddened that Ron has chosen to develop a ministry that cannot work with the Adventist Church. (I even made one more appeal last evening to Ron, asking him to back away from this plan and build plans that can work within the Adventist Church.) He is, however, adamant that his plan—which he acknowledged Saturday night will create a new denomination—is better than the church's governance structure and church planting plans.

"We've had significant success in planting churches in the past eight years since we first established the SEEDS conferences. We've planted about 1,000 churches, most of which are still healthy, growing parts of the denomination. On Saturday night, I asked Ron to continue to work within the church's successful program of church planting, but he said he had gone too far with his plans

to turn back now.

"Very sincerely,

"Don C. Schneider

"President

"North American Division"

GLADDEN EXPLAINS HIS NEW CHURCH STRUCTURE

Here are several excerpts from Ron Gladden's official announcement sheet. Bracketed notes are ours:

"The Mission Catalyst Network is an association of churches that embrace the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, are outreach focused, grace oriented, and fully committed to God.

[By "grace oriented," Ron means "saved by grace without obedience or behavior changes." In contrast, genuine grace forgives our past transgressions and provides enabling strength (grace, which is Christ's enabling merits), so we can obey in the future.]

"Mission: To do whatever it takes to equip local churches to accomplish the Great Commission.

[But the "great commission" of Matthew 28:18-20 commands us to teach others what Christ taught us; and He repeatedly emphasized obedience as a requirement.]

"Vision: To be a catalytic network of thousands of churches that are becoming a significant force for Christ.

"Slogan: 'Same cart. New wheels.'

"BGAGs (Big God-sized Audacious Goals):

"1. Establish a healthy, growing network church in each of the 318 Metropolitan Statistical Areas [MSA] in the United States within ten years.

"2. Strive to reach at least one percent of the people in each MSA. (For St. Louis, MO, that would be 27,000 people.)

"3. See where God leads us next.

"Core Values. We value:

"1. The primacy of the local church . . . All decisions and actions are weighed against their impact on the local church. In funding, policy, and support, if something does not improve the local church's health and mission, we will not do it.

[This is typical celebrationism. It is the same method he has urged throughout his church planting years for the denomination: Do whatever it takes to get people coming to church and signing up as members. Do anything and omit anything which will get them in! This principle is repeated in the next several paragraphs:]

"2. Lost people [sic., people are lost] so we do whatever it takes to equip local churches to reach

them. Every church that finds a good fit in this network makes reaching those disconnected from Christ the first priority of everything they do in church. Every contact, function, resource that we provide is for this purpose.

[The provided functions and resources consist of anything that will get people to keep coming. This could be jazz music, theatrical skits, or shouting by the audience.]

"3. Organizational efficiency and effectiveness so that desired outcomes determine the use of all resources. [The end justifies the means.] . . . We do not adhere to a practice [in worship services or teachings] because it has been done before, but only if it accomplishes the mission.

"4. An abundance [sic.] mind set because God rewards faith and knows no limits . . .

"5. Joy, fun, and optimism because God is destined to win, and being on a winning team is contagious. One of the reasons that successful churches grow is because people are excited enough about their church to invite their friends . . . Consequently, we look for ways to have fun working for God . . .

[The fastest growing churches in America today use excitement, fun, and wild music to do it. If you want wall-to-wall people in your church, throw out the Bible requirements and fill it with entertainment.

[Gladden next presents us with the need to make any and every possible change which will bring the multitudes in:]

"6. Change because it is the only constant in a successful organization. An organization that doesn't change its methods changes its principles by default since the environment in which we exist changes continually. We often ask each other: 'What have you changed today that makes your job more efficient, effective and mission driven?' . . .

[Gladden next discusses other aspects of his new networking denomination:]

"Doctrinal statement: We are in total agreement with all of the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" . . .

[This cannot be true. His position on "grace alone" leaves out a lot of our beliefs and all of our standards. Not once, in his 13-page explanation of his "Mission Catalyst Network," does he mention the need to teach people Bible doctrines. Nothing is said about encouraging people to study the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy at home. No comment is made about repenting of their sins, changing their ways,

and obeying God's Word. Instead, the focus is on doing whatever it takes to get people into the church and keep them coming back. In reality, Gladden does not even use the *27 Statements of Beliefs*, voted on at Dallas in 1980. Instead he has, what he calls, "10 doctrines" on his "*Commitment to Mission* form."]

"Frequently asked questions:

"Q: Why are you creating the Mission Catalyst Network? A: For the sake of the gospel . . .

[Ron never speaks of giving people "the Advent message" or the "third angel's message," but only "the gospel." The code phrases of our liberals are "the gospel," "grace," and "by faith alone."]

"Churches that join the network agree to send 10% of their donations to the network support office [Gladden's denominational headquarters] . . .

"Q: Can women be pastors? A: The Mission Catalyst Network believes that God has gifted and called both men and women to be full-time, paid ministers. No distinction will be made between the genders . . .

"Q: Will you encourage the churches to use any particular worship style? A: No. We will expect that every church will experience worship in whatever style is most effective in communicating the gospel to the people . . .

"Q: How can an overseas church become part of the network? A: One of the local church leaders should contact our office and let us know of their desire . . .

"Q: Where will the network headquarters be based? A: Initially in Vancouver, Washington, across the river from Portland, Oregon . . .

"Q: What will the network office not regulate? A: We will only insist on four things from a member church: (1) The church is non-negotiably outreach focused; (2) the church affirms and agrees to teach the doctrines as stated on the *Commitment to Mission* form; (3) the church is involved in a mission project at least 100 miles from their community; (4) the church sends 10% of its tithe and local giving to the network support office . . .

"Q: What about a church that agrees to two or three of the four points above, but not all four. Can it become a network church? A: No. They are welcome to attend our events (at non-member prices), but network membership is reserved for those who agree to all four . . .

"How can I help? You can help financially. We welcome your financial support . . ."