

The 2005 St. Louis Session: Items of Interest

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: FACTS ABOUT BIRD FLU / CHURCH MEMBERSHIP LOSSES

In a separate report, you will find an analysis of the new addition to the official Statement of Beliefs (*The New Fundamental Belief [WM-1304]*).

In this present study, we want to consider a few other developments at this latest quinquennial (five-year) Session of the church.

Session Costs—Several years ago, I published a tract set on the General Conference Sessions (*Captive Sessions [WM-114-116]*), the small amount of time allocated to actual business meetings, the prearranged voting agenda, and the high cost of the Sessions. Here is the latest data on Session costs:

The General Conference publicly states that \$1 million is allocated per year for the Sessions. This amounts to \$5 million for each five-year Session. The audiovisual and staging expenses for this year's Session—alone—amounted to \$2 million. The GC staff travel and GC booths—alone—were another \$1 million.

In addition, the estimated total expenses by the various world divisions, including travel, hotels, food, booths, and video reports were between \$5 million and \$6 million.

The total estimated organizational expenses were about \$12 million. Not included in these estimates are the salary costs of church workers during the Session, and travel to and from it.

The cost of overseas Sessions are much greater!

In addition to the above totals, in an official 1980s report of a Session held in the U.S., we learned that, *at that time*, expenses to visitors amounted to about \$10 million. They would be much higher today.

Yet since most of the decisions are rubber-stamped on preplanned agenda items, it would be far less expensive to just do it all by mail.

Why is that not done? For just one very important reason: Although they, the delegates themselves, never seem to realize it, the delegates are all-powerful. They have the ability to vote any changes in church policy. However, because the delegates are primarily selected from church leaders and workers, they can be safely entrusted with not rocking the boat.

Item #302—Late in the afternoon of July 5, a simple change was presented to the delegates by the chairman, Michael Ryan; this was a simple one-sentence change in the bylaws of the official General Conference Working Policy. But as soon as it was announced, a small firestorm erupted.

This is Item #302: “The General Conference president shall be an ordained minister of experience.”

Immediately, Dr. Lisa Beardsley came to a floor microphone and objected, declaring that the proposed amendment would exclude women from eligibility to the General Conference presidency. Quite obviously, someone had warned her in advance; for she was at

that microphone and quickly made a motion to take the agenda item back to committee and change it to “The General Conference president shall be a credentialed employee of experience.”

(Beardsley is vice chancellor of Academic Affairs, at Loma Linda University, and a strong feminist advocate in southern California.)

Ultimately, Item #302 was approved as originally presented by Ryan.

The Nominating Committee—The Nominating Committee at each General Conference Session has immense power. This is due to the fact that the General Conference ByLaws and Rules of Order stipulates that no nominations can be made by delegates on the main floor,—only by the Nominating Committee! As for the Nominating Committee, its members are preselected by the General Conference before the Session starts—and then quickly passed by the delegates! The delegates, of course, have power to change this and any other church practices; but they never do. Instead, they just approve the agenda items placed before them.

The vote for President—The General Conference president is the first person to be decided in each Session by the Nominating Committee. Jere Patzer (North Pacific Union president), Lowell Cooper (GC vice president), Ted Wilson (GC vice president), and Jan Paulsen (GC president) were the only serious contenders. In the first round of voting, Cooper and Patzer each received a little over 20 votes while most went to Wilson and Paulsen. In the second round, Wilson received 91 votes and Paulsen 98. Seven people were absent or abstained. It is believed that all of Cooper's votes went to Wilson and most of Patzer's went to Paulsen.

I had heard for several years that Ted Wilson has wanted to make the church more conservative, while Paulsen considers it best to keep peace by letting both liberals and conservatives have free rein to do whatever they want. The liberals have been seizing the opportunity. I am also aware of the fact that Jere Patzer is the wise leader who tried to reform Walla Walla College and eliminate its worldliness; but he was primarily stopped by a threat from the North Pacific Accrediting Association, to no longer accredit the school.

It appears that we came very close to getting a president who would try to turn the church back toward conservative positions.

Election of Ella Simmons—It came as a surprise when Paulsen urgently recommended Ella Simmons, a gentle, kindly professional, as the first black general vice president. The problem for some was that she was a woman. The problem for the black caucus was that it had planned that a strong man be elected to that position, to replace Calvin Rock who had retired.—*vf*

FACTS ABOUT BIRD FLU

Public health officials have warned about the danger of a deadly worldwide outbreak—a pandemic—of bird flu (also called avian flu).

In September, the World Health Organization (WHO) finally became interested, issued a warning of an influenza epidemic, and said the question is not if—but when—it will occur; not whether millions would die, but how many millions.

Then, in early October, President Bush said that he was thinking of getting military troops to enforce quarantines throughout the nation!

In mid-October, a reconstruction of the 1918 flu virus was accomplished, revealing that it was an avian strain that changed just enough to infect humans directly and easily.

This brief article will provide you with additional information about this increasing danger.

Each year 30 to 60 million Americans contract regular flu; and each year, one million people throughout the world die from it. 36,000 of them are in the United States (mostly the elderly). The flu virus spreads easily by means of tiny droplets exhaled by people.

All types of flu originate from contact with birds. But the common forms can easily be transmitted from one person to another. Each year, slight variations occur in the flu virus; so it is able to reinfect people who got different types in earlier years and therefore have only partial immunity.

But occasionally a strain that had seemed to only infect birds—begins infecting humans. Because this new strain is different, few people have immunity.

That is what happened in 1918, when a worldwide epidemic occurred (which, among others, killed my uncle who was a U.S. soldier in World War I).

The latest attack first occurred in Hong Kong in 1997; then in Vietnam and, by this summer, in Thailand and Indonesia.

This new strain of flu, called H5N1 (because of two proteins that stud its surface like spikes on half of a round ball), is a particularly virulent form. Unlike common flu, this one strikes deep within a person's lungs, making it harder to spread to someone else—but also extremely lethal.

Over 100 people have become sick from H5N1 since 2003; and at least 60 of them have died. Nearly all of them had come into close contact with birds. So far, human-to-human infection has been extremely rare.

The pandemic crisis would occur if this virus would make another change—so it could easily be transmitted from person to person.

Nearly all cases of H5N1 infection in humans has occurred in Vietnam (two-thirds of them), Thailand, and China.

To better understand this latest danger, it is well to consider what happened in 1918.

It was the final year of World War I; and something began killing the soldiers on both sides, beginning in May. Although called the "Spanish flu," it did not originate in Spain, a neutral country in that war which, because of a lack of wartime censorship, was the first European coun-

try to publicize its deaths.

Then the epidemic subsided for a time; but, in late August, it returned as a deadly killer—which went around the world!

The symptoms were fever, piercing headaches, and joint pains. Young adults, generally less likely to contract the flu were among the many who became ill. About 5 percent of the victims died, usually in two or three days. They suffocated to death, because their lungs were filled with bloody fluids.

Ordinary flu viruses destroy the cells lining the upper respiratory tract which protects against bacterial germs; and the patient usually dies of bacterial pneumonia. But H5N1 destroys tissue, producing a strong immune response which drowns the lungs in blood hemorrhage and quickly kills.

The epidemic first rushed through military camps in Europe and America, and then went into the cities. In Philadelphia alone, 12,000 died just in October. Around the world, over 50 million died. In contrast, only 16.5 million died in the war.

It was not until recently that we have discovered the exact source of that 1918 flu virus. In 1996, lung tissue from a soldier who died in September 1918 in a military camp in South Carolina, yielded pieces of the virus's genes.

But, then, the retired pathologist, Johan Hultin, recently traveled to a remote Alaska village and excavated a mass grave that had been part of the permafrost—ever since the flu killed many natives there in September 1918. The lungs of a woman contained intact lung tissue; and the entire genetic sequence of the virus was obtained.

It was then discovered that the 1918 flu was essentially the same as our present H5N1.

But where did it originate? Over a period of several years, Robert Webster and his associates carefully tracked the flu bug to its source.

Scientists now know that all the flu strains come from the wild birds of the world, especially the wild aquatic birds: ducks, shorebirds, and other waterfowl. They are then transmitted to chickens and other farm birds.

This explains why every new strain of flu always starts in South-Central Asia. Billions of birds are raised for meat in those nations. Handlers work closely with the birds; they contract new strains of flu from them, which are then passed on to others—and eventually reaches America and other nations. Because of the unclean conditions in those southeastern Asian poultry and duck yards, people around the world get the flu every winter.

Another factor in this transmission are the millions of pig farms, located next to the poultry and duck farms, in those Asian countries. It is believed that pigs provide the go-between, changing each new strain of flu virus, through genetic reassortment, to a form which humans can contract and pass to one another.

In addition to the 1918 pandemic, such conditions caused the two smaller 1957 and 1968 epidemics. Two million people died in those two flu seasons.

This latest form of deadly flu, H5N1, was first discovered in 1997. Although it has passed across the species

barrier, so far, not many humans have been infected. Yet physicians who have worked with it—and observed how deadly it is—are frightened as to what could happen if it begins to rapidly pass from one person to another.

As of October 2005, H5N1 has infected humans in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia. From 2003 to 2005, in Southeast Asia there have been 2,989 outbreaks in birds; 226 in Indonesia and Malaysia; 55 in China; 53 in Central Asia; 24 in Japan and South Korea; and 4 in Hong Kong.

The number of known human cases have been 112 in Southeast Asia, 4 in Indonesia and Malaysia, and 20 in Hong Kong.

The number of deaths has been 57 in Southeast Asia; 3 in Indonesia and Malaysia; and 7 in Hong Kong. Two-thirds of all the deaths have occurred in Vietnam.

Very likely, many other deaths from H5N1 have occurred, which were never reported.

Obviously, the great danger is if H5N1 starts passing easily from person to person, or if the virus is carried around the world.

Consistently, those who have become sick with H5N1 and those who have died from it—are individuals who previously were in close contact with birds.

In May 1997, the first person came down with H5N1 flu in Hong Kong; and then more and more were sickened with the virus. Careful checking revealed that each person had either worked in one of the island's five poultry markets or had recently visited one.

Public health experts convinced the Hong Kong government to kill every bird in the farms and markets—1.5 million of them. Instantly, the H5N1 virus attack ceased.

But in 2001, another H5N1 virus attack began in Hong Kong. Obviously, the source of the virus had not been eliminated—which was China's Guangdong Province, which has hundreds of millions of chickens, ducks, and geese.

The nations of Southeast Asia have even more. Hong Kong is wealthy and can afford to kill birds; but Vietnam cannot. Those who live farther from coastal fisheries have little else in their diet but birds. Those nations which border it also depend on bird farms for meat.

China alone has 1.3 billion people. It has more than 10 times that number in chickens, ducks and other domestic fowl. Its farmers have 70% of the world's pigs.

It is believed that the virus travels in the intestines of wild waterfowl; and their droppings infect still more bird farms. This summer, the virus killed thousands of wild geese and gulls at a nature reserve in western China.

Another significant source of transmission is the duck. Unlike chickens, infected ducks often seem healthy, able to waddle and swim. They spread the virus in their droppings. In Vietnam and surrounding countries, duck herders drive their flocks from one rice field to the next, following the harvest, so the birds can fatten on leftover grains. This spreads the disease everywhere.

It is not unusual for chickens to get flu; in fact, avian-flu viruses far outnumber human ones. But ducks are the worst; since they carry the disease longer without dying as quickly.

Thailand makes enough money from tourists, that it is able to test ducks for H5N1, and allows only virus-free flocks to move around the countryside. In addition, it has enlisted the help of over a million village volunteers who

report dead birds. As a result, Thailand has drastically reduced its number of H5N1 infections, in both birds and humans, while the infection rate in nearby Vietnam continues unabated.

In February 2005, Vietnam celebrated the Year of the Rooster, with thousands of chicken meals—which was followed by new cases of bird flu.

By early 2005, scientists began fearing that migratory birds, infected with H5N1, might spread it farther, resulting in a global pandemic.

As you probably know, after arriving in Turkey, it entered Romania, Greece, Croatia, and then Russia. The latest is an imported bird in Britain that just died. So far, only birds are dying of H5N1 in Europe. No people yet. On October 25, Europe banned all imports of wild birds.

In August, the U.S. government announced that a flu vaccine appeared effective against H5N1. Whether or not that is true is a question. Flu drugs and vaccines are made from virus grown in fertilized chicken eggs. Workers break the eggs and pour out the insides, containing virus-rich tissue. It is then made into vaccine. A problem is that, unlike ordinary flu virus, H5N1 tends to kill the eggs in which it is being grown.

No vaccines have been produced and would not be reliable; since H5N1 can change (there are currently 9 subtypes of H5N1). In addition, no nation has the capacity to make enough vaccine.

Tamiflu is a drug taken orally while Relenza is given by inhalation. The U.S. government has ordered 2 million doses of Tamiflu. (A full course of 10 pills over 5 days costs \$80-\$90.) There are nearly 300 million people living in America. Tamiflu reduces severity of the flu if taken within 2 days of initial symptoms.

Should a pandemic begin, there would not be enough equipment and hospitals to care for the sick. For example, there are only 105,000 ventilators in the U.S.; and 95,000 are being used.

Extrapolating 1918 deaths to today's population, estimates of worldwide deaths in such a pandemic vary between 7.4 million and 360 million. Some say 300 million. The Spirit of Prophecy says plagues, caused by Satan, will occur and Sabbathkeepers will be blamed.

As mentioned earlier, in case of a worldwide pandemic, President Bush has said he might send troops into our cities, to enforce the quarantine of infected people.

In 1918, the most deaths occurred in the cities. Those living in remote areas were far less likely to become infected. Ellen White said to get out of the cities. When will our people do it?

If an occurring H5N1 outbreak is not controlled within 20 days, it would go everywhere. WHO wants, at first sign of person-to-person transmission, to have governments immediately quarantine people, freezing all traffic in and out of infected areas. Schools and businesses would be closed.

What to do, if an epidemic begins: Wash your hands frequently with soap and water. Get extra rest, avoid getting chilled. (Nonvegans should not eat undercooked eggs or poultry.) Avoid close contact with those with symptoms. Consider using a protective mask. If any symptoms appear, take your temperature, immediately get extra rest, eating light, and drinking lots of water, etc. Do not wait until you have the full symptoms to begin the recovery process. —vf

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP LOSSES

For the first time, the official statistics presented to the St. Louis Session included data on the number of people who leave the church, are dropped from the rolls, or who just stop attending.

Over the last five years, the denomination grew from 10.9 million to 13.9 members. However, while more than 5 million new believers were added, over 1.4 million left. That is a very high loss. According to the official report, “for every 100 accessions, more than 35 others decided to leave.” This was a significant increase over the 24 per 100 which left in the preceding five-year period (1995-1999). The drop rate has increased by almost one-half.

A sheet distributed at one of the booths said that “70 percent of young people in developing nations drop out of the church.”

One missionary declared that, in his field, “a third are dropped from the membership rolls; another third are on the rolls but no longer attend; and only a third are active members.”

That one-third which remains on the rolls but no longer attends is significant. It is clear that membership totals are not a true indicator of the actual number of members in the world church.

The statistical report, presented at the Session, lists the **Southern-Asia Pacific Division** (SSD) as having the highest drop rate in the world. It is 104.75%. This means that 104.75% of the number of membership increase in the SSD between spring 2000 and spring 2004 have left the church. That is more than 100%!

That does not mean that everyone who was newly baptized into the church in that time period left the church; but that many did—along with many other members. In that time period, *the SSD lost more members than it brought into the church.*

There were less than 60,000 baptisms in each of those years in the SSD. At the same time, 136,741 members dropped, in 2003, and 148,017 in 2004.

SSD membership losses were heaviest in two countries. The single highest loss rate for any nation in the world field was in the Philippines. Second highest was Indonesia.

The **Euro-Asia Division** (which is actually the territory covered by the former Soviet Union) is next highest in membership loss. It was 65.02% for the 2000-2005 period. In this division, losses have equaled two-thirds of accessions over the last five years. In the two most recent years, losses have equaled 85% of bap-

tisms. Additions to the church have declined steadily each year—from 17,798, in 2000, to 8,756 in 2004.

The next highest is the **East-Central Africa Division** (ESD) with a loss rate of 61.79%. This territory includes five nations surrounding Lake Victoria: Rwanda, Tanzania, Congo, Uganda, and Kenya.

Over the past five years, an average of 62% of the number of baptisms have left the church. But, as in many other localities, this trend is accelerating. During the last three years, the loss rate has been 88%.

However, it should be kept in mind that in 2002, 2003, and 2004, the ESD made, what they called, major statistical “adjustments,” which averaged almost 100,000 each year. Many names were dropped from the rolls. For more than a decade, this area has been torn by wars and large numbers of refugees fleeing to other areas.

The above three divisions had the largest losses. In **Europe** (Trans-European Division [TED] and Euro-Africa Division [SPD]—which has almost no members outside of Europe) and **North America** (NAD), losses have averaged just under 40% of the number of new members (39.17% in TED and 38.84% in NAD). In the NAD, it has significantly increased from 32%, in 2001, to 48% in 2004.

Here are **the rest of the divisions**: South Pacific Division, 32.96%; South American Division, 31.02%; Inter-American Division, 29.51%; Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, 19.34%; West-Central Africa Division, 12.65%; Northern Asia-Pacific Division, 10.38%; Southern Asia Division, 5.37%. In Korea, China, and Japan, only 10% of the number of new members is lost; and in India only 5%. This is probably due to the isolation and persecution they experience in their local communities.

In 1990, the American Religious Identification Survey claimed that 668,000 Americans said they were Seventh-day Adventists. That, of course, would include independents not affiliated with the denomination. This figure was 5% smaller than the official membership tally for the U.S. at that time, which was 701,657. The 668,000 total would probably include many independents not affiliated with the denomination. And the 701,657 total probably includes many on the church books who have gone out into the world and no longer consider themselves Adventists.

—vj