

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Report of the Christian Education Council of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

2015-2016

## Members of the Council:

**Peggy Chroniger, *chair*, Alfred Station, NY**

(term expiring 2019)

**Rev. Paul Andries, Washington, DC**

(term expiring 2018)

**Charlotte Chroniger, Shiloh, NJ**

(term expiring 2017)

**Omari Rhoden, Toronto, Ontario, Canada**

(term expiring 2020)

**Rev. William Shobe, Dodge Center, MN**

(term expiring 2016)

## Staff:

**Rev. Nicholas J. Kersten, Director of Education and History**

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## **Introduction**

The Christian Education Council is charged with the development and oversight of educational ministries for Seventh Day Baptists in local churches and at our yearly General Conference sessions. The Council is made up of five individuals elected by the General Conference (on staggered five year terms), who meet regularly throughout the year to address our portion of the General Conference's work to equip individuals and churches to actively advance God's Kingdom.

During the 2015-16 Conference year, the Council met in person twice at Camp Harley Sutton, Alfred Station, NY and two additional times by teleconference to review the work given to us by General Conference and to move the educational programs of Seventh Day Baptists forward. This report, our second annual report to the SDB General Conference, is meant to summarize our work over the last year.

## **Vision Statement**

As part of the work of the new Council over the past eighteen months, we have carefully considered our purpose, mission, and vision. After prayerful consideration, we have concluded that our task is to *equip ambassadors to represent Christ's Kingdom*.

## **Helping Hand**

One of the ministries which the Council inherited from the Board of Christian Education was the Helping Hand in Bible Study. The Helping Hand, which is written and produced by Seventh Day Baptists and based on the Lessons on the Uniform Series, has been printed and distributed among Seventh Day Baptists since 1885, and became the responsibility of the Board of Christian Education in 1940, when that organization was incorporated in New York. The BCE successfully stewarded the publication from that time until their recent merger with the General Conference.

The General Editor for the Helping Hand is the Rev. Steve Osborn, Boulder, CO. He continues to solicit original writing for each quarterly volume, editing the contributions for publication and arranging for their publication. Distribution of the publication is organized through the SDB Center, both for the print copies by postal service and for the variety of digital offerings of the publication (Kindle, PDF, etc.).

The publication has encountered many obstacles in the past year as mailing and publishing challenges have led to delayed delivery of the publication to some subscribers. We have worked to continue to respond to these ongoing challenges to insure seamless delivery for subscribers going forward. In response to the many challenges, concerns have been shared with the Council, both formally and informally, about the future of the publication. The Council is aware of the concerns and is moving to secure a long-term future for the publication. Individuals or churches interested in subscribing to the publication should contact the Director of Education and History, Rev. Nick Kersten.

In addition to the English language version of the publication, for the last several years we have given permission for Seventh Day Baptists in Ecuador to translate the publication into Spanish for

use in their contexts. As part of the agreement, and by their graciousness, they have made copies of the Spanish language version of the publication available to churches around the world, including congregations in our Conference. This work with Ecuador has been overseen and encouraged through relationships between the Houston SDB church and the SDBs in Ecuador. Both groups have worked selflessly and without accolade to achieve this important work. As part of our continuing support of this initiative, we have agreed to aid in the distribution and billing for the publication here in the States as part of insuring the continuing of this important work. Individuals or churches interested in receiving copies of the Spanish language Helping Hand should contact Rev. Helmer Umaña, chair of the Hispanic Ministries Subcommittee or the Director.

## **Pre-Conference Retreats 2015**

Prior to General Conference in 2015, the Christian Education Council helped to insure that the Pre-Conference retreats were held for our youth and young adults. The information for the two retreats is as follows:

### Youth Pre-Con 2015, Camp Jersey Oaks, Shiloh, NJ

Directors: Rev. Wayne and Kris North, New Auburn, WI

Staff: Rev. Don and Charlotte Chroniger, Shiloh, NJ

Attendance: 24

### Young Adult Pre-Con 2015, Lancaster Bible College, Lancaster, PA

Director: Chad Ochs, Milton, WI

Staff: Rev. Nick Kersten, Milton, WI; Sara Sager, Milton, WI

Attendance: 23

We are grateful to the directors of these retreats and their staffs for their dedicated work with our young people, and trust that their work has yielded and will continue to yield positive fruit for the Kingdom among the “next generation” of Seventh Day Baptists.

## **Conference Activities for Children and Youth:**

The activities for our children and youth at General Conference continued in 2015. Ministry to our children at Conference was once again overseen through the Children’s Conference program, which continues to be directed by Charlotte Chroniger. There were 65 participants in Children’s Conference in 2016, led by Charlotte and more than a dozen volunteers. Charlotte’s tireless work in this area has impacted a generation of younger Seventh Day Baptists and we are grateful for her continued dedication to this important work. Likewise, this program would be impossible without the hard work and dedication of our volunteer teachers.

Activities for the youth at Conference in 2015 were overseen by Rev. Bill Shobe, Dodge Center, MN, with assistance from Debbie and Ward Bond, Shiloh, NJ. Students had opportunities for Bible Study, recreation, and activities of various kinds, including the yearly Youth Banquet. More than 40 students participated in these events during our 2015 General Conference sessions.

## **Ministering to our Youth and Young Adults at General Conference:**

In response to a request for action from the General Council, the Christian Education Council suggested a new approach to our youth and young adult ministries at General Conference going forward. Despite the success of our Pre-Con retreats, increasing costs and dwindling participation, along with concerns about a lack of programming for youth and young adults at General Conference led to a time of prayer and brainstorming for the Council early in 2015. The result of this effort was a new proposal.

The new proposal was to discontinue the Pre-Con retreats in favor of augmented and amended programs for our youth and young adults at General Conference. The proposal was presented at General Conference and considered by the three interest committees that were appropriate, and the proposal was slightly tweaked and clarified, and the new programs for 2016 will be rolled out at this year's Conference.

For the young adults, their retreat has given way to a greater focus on their activities at Conference, with the responsibility for the planning of these activities resting with the young adults appointed by the Young Adult Interest Committee in 2015, with assistance from the Director. We look forward to these activities at Conference in 2016.

For the youth, a new Youth Conference has been planned which focuses on leadership training and development, as requested by the Youth themselves. This new Youth Conference will be directed in 2016 at General Conference by the Rev. Steve Osborn, Boulder, CO, and will include a variety of staff and Conference staff members assisting in the training process. Significant input in the planning of the Conference was provided by the youth, which we trust will increase excitement about the new program, as well as insuring that it will be a valuable time for them. The theme of this year's Conference, as selected by the youth is, "Leaders Without Limits." After this year's "trial run" of this new ministry, we will seek feedback from the stakeholders about this new ministry as we look for ways to continue to serve to our youth and the Conference in the years to come.

## **Child Protection:**

The Director of Education and History, as the designated Child Protection Officer (CPO) of the Conference, has responsibility for the administration of the Conference's Child Protection Policy. This policy was initially instituted in 2012 after a review of the changing cultural conditions and a growing awareness of our responsibility led to an effort to be explicit in our understanding of our responsibilities towards protecting our children. As part of these responsibilities, the CPO does the following:

- Background checks (done every three years) for all General Conference Employees
- Background checks (done yearly) for all those who have primary leadership responsibilities which include the oversight of minors as part of a General Conference sponsored event or ministry (especially SCSC and General Conference)
- Maintenance of the General Conference's Child Protection Policy

- Advocacy for child protection policies in Local SDB Churches
- Provides resources to SDB churches and ministries with questions about how to best protect their children in their ministry contexts.

All of these tasks have been dispatched in 2015-16 by the Director, according to our current policy.

In the area of advocacy, the General Conference requested that a list of resources be sent to local churches in the area of Child Protection, along with the text of the Child Protection resolution, which was passed at Conference 2015. This was accomplished. Part of the text of that resolution implored and empowered the General Council and General Conference to take all prudent steps to protect our children at Conference, and as a result of the strength of that language, a significant review of our policies as a Conference took place. As a result of this review, an amended and updated Child Protection Policy, properly vetted through legal counsel will be in force by General Conference.

The Christian Education Council implores local Seventh Day Baptist churches to institute and enforce their own Child Protection policies in the event that they do not have one in place currently. In addition, we encourage all local SDB churches and fellowships to regularly review their policy and train all their members in it. We will be developing resources to aid in these important tasks in the coming years, but in the meantime we encourage all churches to contact their insurance providers or consult the multitude of online resources available as they consider their own policies. Churches with questions or concerns about Child Protection issues are encouraged to contact the Director.

### **CALLED Program/SDBU:**

The training of lay leaders has long been a core Christian Education concern among Seventh Day Baptists. For most of the past 30 years, the CALLED program (Church Administered Lay Leader EDucation), which was developed and administered by the Board of Christian Education, has been the primary vehicle we offered for accomplishing this goal. The training, which is supervised by leaders in local churches, is built to equip local church members for Gospel service in their local congregations and includes modules on SDB Distinctives, Bible interpretation, and a variety of highly practical ministry skills. That program has served our churches well, but due to resources going out of print, needed to be revised and updated. As a result, the Council asked the Director of Education and History to take on the revision of the program.

Because the Director is also the Dean of the School of Ministry, we became aware that the Council On Ministry (COM) was also considering their training initiatives, some of which mirror the goals of the CALLED program. Through conversations with COM, mediated by the Director/Dean, we discussed our broader shared goals in educating and equipping SDB leaders and pastors, and concluded that a joint initiative which focused on training adult leaders would be the best response to these changing times.

As a result, beginning in the Fall of 2016, we will be starting SDB University, or SDBU. This program is the result of the ongoing discussions and will focus on training leaders through a series of certificate level programs administered by the CEC and COM. The CEC will focus on the

broad training of our people, including lay leaders, while COM's focus will be on training pastoral leaders who have already completed the CEC's programs (or similar programs from other institutions). As a result, the overhauled CALLED program will now become a certificate program as part of SDBU, and will be available for use in churches beginning fall 2016. The newly revised program will continue to be administered in local churches by pastors and leaders as they train up more leaders in their local churches. As part of the revisions to the program, more options for specific ministry training in missions, church planting, and other areas of ministry will be included. We encourage all churches to investigate this new certificate program to see if it could be useful to you in your ongoing efforts to develop and support new and existing leaders in your local church.

### **Scripture Memory Program:**

The basis of Christian Education is the Word of God as expressed in the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures are essential to our learning about God, the Christian Education Council, following the example of the Board of Christian Education, continues to promote Bible memorization among our people through the Scripture Memory Program. The program recognizes both individuals and local churches who commit portions of Scripture to memory during a calendar year. The verses and passages for memorization are selected by the incoming Conference President and usually center on their theme for the year. The program is broken into three grade levels so that all SDBs from the youngest to the oldest can participate.

Individuals who complete the program receive a certificate, with additional recognition given to those who complete the program for 10 or more years. In addition, the church with the highest number of members who complete the program are honored with the Mary G. Clare Scripture Memory Bowl, a traveling trophy.

In 2014-15, 178 individuals from 27 churches completed the program and were recognized. The winner of the Mary G. Clare Scripture Memory Bowl was the Toronto, Ontario church, with 24 individuals who completed the program. Certificates were mailed to those who completed the program after General Conference 2015, along with material promoting the program for 2015-16. The complete list of participants and churches can be found in the November 2015 issue of the *Sabbath Recorder*.

This year's Conference President, Rev. Dr. Ken Chroniger, Alfred Station, NY, has encouraged local churches and their members to participate in this year's Scripture Memory program, with a goal of 500 individuals publicized. We look forward to recognizing all those who participate at General Conference this year. In addition to the Scripture Memory Bowl, which honors the church with the largest number of participants to complete the program, we are introducing a new honor at Conference in 2016, which will recognize the church with the highest level of participation, by percentage of membership, in the program.

Those with questions about the program are encouraged to visit the General Conference website: [www.seventhdaybaptist.org/scripturememory](http://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/scripturememory), for more information.

## **Sabbath School Teacher of the Year, 2015:**

The lifeblood of Christian Education in local SDB churches is the Sabbath School program, and as part of our commitment to encouraging vital and thriving Sabbath Schools, the Christian Education Council recognizes one local Sabbath School teacher each year as our Sabbath School Teacher of the Year. The recipient of the honor is decided by a subcommittee of the CEC who considers nominations from local churches. A church whose nominee is selected for the award is ineligible to nominate another teacher for a set number of years after their most recent candidate is honored.

In 2015, the Sabbath School Teacher of the Year was Rachel Trudell from the Alfred Station, NY SDB Church. Rachel was honored during the awards time on Sabbath Afternoon at General Conference and was presented with the Crystal Apple award in commemoration of her nomination. More information about Rachel and her skill as a teacher can be found in the March 2015 issue of the *Sabbath Recorder*. We look forward to honoring another skilled Sabbath School at General Conference 2016.

Those with questions about this program or wish to nominate a teacher from their local church are encouraged to visit the General Conference website: [www.seventhdaybaptist.org/crystal-apple](http://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/crystal-apple), for more information.

## **Website Migration:**

The online home for SDB Christian Education materials has been [www.educatingchristians.org](http://www.educatingchristians.org) for the past several years. As part of the resolution of the merger, that website URL now points to the Christian Education Council's page on the General Conference website: <http://seventhdaybaptist.org/ministries/christian-education/>. The resources that were previously available on the BCE webpage can be found there.

In addition, the helpful *Helping Hand* special edition on SDB Beliefs, which provides a quarter of lessons on the 1987 Statement of Belief is available in PDF format for free download at the CEC page after the print version went out of print early in 2016. In lieu of an updated version of the material which will include recent changes to the Statement of Belief, we hope churches will make use of this resource.

## **Other Ministries and Responsibilities:**

The Christian Social Action Committee tasked the Director of Education and History with exploring "...educational materials concerning a holistic understanding of biblical sexuality for use within our local congregations." Nick did research in this area which will likely end in a list of resources suggested for use in churches once a broader survey of the material available is done. Seventh Day Baptists with suggestions for materials which might be included in such a resource list should send them to the Director.

## **Conclusion:**

The work of Christian Education among Seventh Day Baptists is the work of every member of our churches, not only the work of the five members of our Council. Nevertheless, each member of the Council has taken ownership of a significant portion of our work, to join with the Director of Education and History as we promote the work of Christian Education among our people. We invite all Seventh Day Baptists to join us in this important work as we look to equip ambassadors as part our joint mission as a Conference to actively advance God's Kingdom.

## **Travel/Activity of the Director Since Conference 2015:**

August 2015

9-14- Summer Institute, SDB Center, Janesville, WI

October 2015

29-31- Christian Ed. Council Meetings, Alfred Station, NY

31- Alfred Station, NY SDB Church

November 2015

1- Christian Ed. Council Meetings, Alfred Station, NY

17- Visit with Clyde Thompson and Robert Nakamoto, Nashville, TN

17-18- Church Planting Leadership Fellowship, Nashville, TN

December 2015

17- GC2 Summit Planning Meeting, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, IL

January 2016

20- GC2 Summit, Community Christian Church, Naperville, IL

March 2016

3-6- CLT/GC Meetings, Miami, FL

5- Fort Lauderdale, FL SDB Church

28-31- Mission Trip to Zambia (TIME program to Zambian Conf. Leaders/Pastors)

April 2016

1-7- Mission Trip to Zambia (TIME program to Zambian Conf. Leaders/Pastors)

15-17- Fort Lauderdale, FL SDB Church (Deacon Installation)

22-24- Christian Ed. Council Meetings, Alfred Station, NY

23- First Alfred, NY SDB Church

29-31- Council on History Meetings, SDB Center, Janesville, WI

May 2016

20- State Historical Society of WI Meeting (Milton SDB added to Hist. Reg.)

June 2016

3-5- Southwest Association Meetings, Little Rock, AR

13-23- SCSC Training, Camp Harley Sutton, Alfred Station, NY

18- Little Genesee, NY SDB Church

July 2016

30- Hebron, PA SDB Church

30- Memorial Fund Meetings, Houghton, NY

31- General Council Meeting, Houghton, NY