

FLORIDA FOCUS

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TOTAL NET WT. 144 oz (9lbs) 4.08Kg

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Nature's Way
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Conference Finances
One Year Later,
page 10



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY MIKE CAULEY, FLORIDA CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

My dear brothers and sisters, I am excited to share with you “the story” that came out of the storms of last summer. With all the devastation that four hurricanes brought to Florida, there was born a burning desire to help those in need. From several Pathfinder chuck wagons serving meals after

Hurricane Charley to a well-run community services program, it is a thrilling story that we wish to share with you on the following pages:

- ◆ **Dale Bass** is the president of the Golden Harvest Fruit Company. Dale experienced a miracle last fall when a national catastrophe devastated his life. On this page is Dale’s testimony to what the power of God can do in your life, especially as you answer the call for ministry.
- ◆ Energized by being the hands and feet of Jesus, the **Adventist Community Services (ACS)** program led by David Canther is not only about disaster relief in time of hurricanes. It has become a vehicle for year-round evangelism with recovery efforts, training, and outreach programs uniting Pathfinders, youth, and our schools with disaster preparedness. You’ll find this story on pages 4–5.
- ◆ **Adventist Community Team Services (ACTS)** has emerged from the storms as a lay-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing equipment—exceeding ¾ of a million dollars, to date—and to distributing supplies that have totaled more than 17 million dollars. The story of ACTS is on pages 6–7.
- ◆ In the northwest corner of Florida, near the Alabama border, is the little town of **Century**. Let me share with you on page 8 the story of the mayor who prayed for an angel and got an ACS/ACTS team of volunteers and a 14-vehicle convoy of equipment and supplies.
- ◆ The **Islamorada Church** in the Keys has stood vacant for several

years. At the end of April, ACS/ACTS volunteers turned this church into an outreach center. I personally visited there during the transformation of this building and was pleased to see the beginnings of a new method of evangelism in the Keys. The story on page 9 describes the vision of this exciting adventure that continues to unfold daily.

- ◆ **Hope for Humanity** is the new face and the new name for Ingathering. On page 12, read how contributions benefit local, national, and international projects.

Volunteerism is the key to finishing the work that Jesus started here on earth so many years ago. I challenge each of you to get involved prayerfully, financially, and/or physically in being the hands and feet of Jesus. *u*

COVER: Zemira Barnett, age 6, of Fort Pierce found joy in serving others as the hands and feet of Jesus after Hurricane Frances brought destruction to the community.

FRANCES CAME

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY BY DALE BASS, DIRECTOR OF ACTS

My family has been in the citrus fund-raising business for more than 30 years, and we own a packing house in Fort Pierce. As part of our program, we were up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, supporting the Pathfinder Camporee when Hurricane Charley came ashore. We looked at the TV and prayed. We said, “Someone needs to send help. We would help, but we have our own mission. We’re too busy. Someone needs to go help.”

THEN IT CAME TO MY HOUSE!

When Frances came to our house, we were so confident. I was the president of the Golden Harvest Fruit Company which supplied 800 Adventist schools with fruit for fund raising throughout North America. Because of that involvement with the school program, I was convinced that the Lord would protect our business and not allow the storm to harm us. We hunkered down over the Sabbath, and the storm hit Saturday night.

Sunday morning, after cutting tree limbs and clearing the driveway, we drove out to the main thoroughfare of town. It was a strange and eerie thing to see the

whole town with its face literally ripped off. As we drove to the packing house and saw that the west side of the packing house was still intact, we said, “Hallelujah! The Lord did exactly as we expected.” Then we turned to the north side and our hearts sunk with despair. We could see the hulk of the machinery inside. The building was just completely stripped of all its skin. The roof was torn off. All the metal was gone. Only big beams remained.

At this point, we were quite disappointed that God had not protected us. As we went into the building and looked at the disaster laying at our feet, the emotional turmoil that we were going through was beyond imagination—everything we owned was completely wiped out in a single day.

At the same time that I was viewing the damage at the packing house, one of the deacons from our church called my cell phone and said, “Hey, there’s someone here from the Conference office, and they’ve got a truck load of supplies that need to be unloaded. We don’t know what to do with it. We figured we’d call you.”

Initially, I didn’t want to go, of course. I was busy with the disaster that I was faced with. However, Dianna, my wife, told

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COVER PHOTO: DAVID CANTHER

To Our House

me, “You know, there’s nothing you can do here. You need to go over there where you can do something.”

So, I went to the church and helped for about an hour. Then, I called my son-in-law and said, “Go get some forklifts and bring some equipment so that we can handle this heavy stuff.” Lines of people in cars soon appeared as we continued to unload five semi trailer loads of supplies that day.

Around the church on Virginia Avenue, there are 800 rental apartments. The people were looking over the rails to see what was going on in our church yard. Some came down, climbed around the fence, and came in the driveway. They said, “We don’t know what you’re doing, but we want to help. Is there anything that we can do?”

As we continued to unload the trucks and distribute supplies, a woman came through the line with a couple of children in a beat-up old pickup truck. At the end of every line, we always checked to see what they had and made sure that they’d gotten everything that they’d requested, and then we had a 30-second prayer. “Lord, bless this family. Protect them. We know everything around them is destroyed, but we know you still love

them.” As I said that prayer and slapped the side of her truck, I said, “You know, this is all we can do today, come back tomorrow.” She stuck her hand out the window and grabbed me by the arm and she said, “You know the Lord’s going to bless you for this.”

I did know that, but I had never experienced it. As I watched her leave, I surveyed the church yard and saw that we have the island community of Haitians and Jamaicans, we have the Spanish community, and we have the English community, and we’ve not even been able to get together just to play basketball. But in that church yard, distributing food for friends and neighbors, we became a team. We became a solid unit—no cultural lines, no divisions, no animosities.

It was then that I realized what the Holy Spirit had given me—He had given me peace through helping someone else. For the rest of that week, I basked in the sweet confidence that God would take care of my family/sheep and me as long as I took care of His sheep.

I’m a graduate of Forest Lake Academy and a second generation Adventist. I have the head knowledge to fill book after book after book, but I’ve never had the heart experi-



WALTER MAIER

Dale Bass, ACTS director, was interviewed by Florida Conference President Mike Cauley at Florida Camp Meeting.

ence. When I started to help other people and allow the Lord to deal with the things I couldn’t deal with, it gave me a heart experience that’s second to none. I was hooked by the Holy Spirit, and I’m not getting off until the Lord comes.

I’m convinced that this is the new style of evangelism for the end days. 🕊



DAVID CANTHER

Dale Bass, president of Golden Harvest Fruit Company, stands in front of his packing plant after it was demolished by Hurricane Frances. (Satellite photo: NASA Earth Observatory)

“I WAS NEVER ASKED!”



Norman Cowan, a Pentecostal minister, came to Florida to look for his father after Hurricane Charley struck Punta Gorda, and then found the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Norman Cowan was looking for his father in a destroyed mobile home park in the aftermath of Hurricane Charley. Cowan, who was a Pentecostal minister, had arrived by bus from Montana. He then stopped at a nearby, Adventist-operated food kitchen.

While eating, Cowan learned that his father had been taken to a shelter and began to look for transportation. He met Pastor David Canther who offered a ride to the shelter.

“As we rode together,” says Canther, “Cowan began to explain that he had been keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath for approximately two years. He had attended several Adventist churches and believed Ellen White was a prophetess of God. I asked him what was preventing him from joining the church? He replied, ‘No one ever asked me to join!’”

Cowan is now a Seventh-day Adventist and has returned to Montana to share his new faith.

EVANGELISM YEAR-ROUND

BY DAVID CANTHER

HURRICANES

Adventist Community Team Services/Adventist Community Services (ACTS/ACS) had passed the State Preparedness Drill for the 2005 hurricane season, and the team was put on standby by the State of Florida for Hurricane Cindy. When Hurricane Dennis hit, the team, under the direction of David Canther, Florida ACS director, was deployed three times en route to the panhandle before the final destination of Jay, Florida, was chosen.

Hot meals were prepared in Jay for the National Guard because their MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) had not arrived. The team also delivered tarps to the town of Century. Because power was being rapidly restored, the deployment of 15 vehicles and approximately 50 people mostly became a training exercise.

In 2004, Community Services ministered



ACTS volunteers completed a Crisis Intervention Stress Management course in June 2005.

to affected communities after four hurricanes by providing:

- 100,000 hot meals prepared and distributed
- 20,000 donated service hours
- 315 tarps installed
- 38 semi trucks of food and paper products distributed
- 23 semi trucks of ice and water
- 80 yards cleaned

Before the 2004 hurricane season, Adventists were known for warehousing tasks with the State of Florida Memorandum of Understanding. ACTS/ACS is now requested to provide warehousing, distribution, mass feeding, counseling, and training of young people.

This recognition did not come easily. It came because of the dedicated volunteers

◀ **The Community Services mobile kitchen provided hot meals for the National Guard after Hurricane Dennis struck the Florida panhandle in July 2005.**

who went the extra mile to do whatever was necessary to help the survivors of these terrible storms.

ACTS/ACS was helping in the town of Century, Florida, when Frances hit Fort Pierce. Because the team was late in arriving at Fort Pierce, the State did not want them to become a distribution center. However, the team volunteered to help with any tasks that needed to be done. Canther and Robin Retzloff even made midnight runs delivering ice by flashlight to homes and assisted living facilities in the middle of nowhere.

When a representative from the Emergency Operations Center visited the Fort Pierce Church and saw approximately 1,000 people eating a hot meal, she put her stamp of approval on the church as a distribution site.

Adventists are now known truly as a first-response team—on the spot and ready to serve within 24 hours.





To learn how you can help, call the Connection Helpline at (800) 633-7992 or download a disaster volunteer registration form: www.connectionhelpline.org/pages/acts.htm

RECOVERY

ACTS/ACS helped with the restoration of churches that were hit by the hurricanes such as Melbourne, Melbourne Spanish, and Arcadia. One hundred volunteers, including the YES team (Youth Emergency Service) from Miami Central Spanish Church, helped in the recovery phase of the Melbourne Spanish Church. They essentially gutted the inside of the sanctuary, saving the church a \$10,000 insurance deductible. Likewise, the Arcadia Church was gutted, and their insurance deductible was met through the help of the volunteers.

TRAINING

More than 4,000 volunteers have been trained in practical disaster relief. In June, there were 53 graduates from the Crisis Intervention Stress Management (CISM) course held in conjunction with Florida



Community Services Director David Canther led an outreach ministry group prayer for Armed Forces at a park in the Mt. Dora area.

Hospital Orlando. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) encourages volunteers to take this course before helping at distribution sites.

Forest Lake Church was the site for a six-day disaster response training course for denominational certification, July 17–22. Sponsored by Southern Union Conference, this was the first time this course had been offered in Florida. ACS volunteers are now certified and are trained to be trainers.

OUTREACH

The team participates in community outreach events such as mass feedings, health fairs, concerts, and prayer vigils. Mass feedings have also been provided at major events in Florida and Southeastern Conferences.

AFFILIATIONS

“When churches, conferences, hospitals, and other organizations unite their strengths together, impossibilities become

realities,” says Canther. ACTS/ACS has initiated this principle of networking with the following church-related organizations:

- Florida Hospital graciously hosted the CISM training and subsidized the cost for that course.
- Florida and Southeastern Conferences have united to open a distribution and outreach center in the Fort Lauderdale area. The 6,000-square-foot facility is located in a strip mall with excellent visibility. Twelve churches were represented at the opening ceremonies in July. Another center is planned to serve the Tampa Bay area.
- North American Division has requested Florida Conference to consider becoming the Community Services disaster depot for the eastern portion of the United States.
- Adventurers, Pathfinders, youth, and our Adventist school system are adopting a new Seven-day Action Emergency Disaster Preparedness Plan presented in drama. It will involve all ages in year-round outreach to communities. The State has requested our young people to be involved in ongoing disaster training so

RESULTS OF BEING THE HANDS AND FEET OF JESUS

- A Pentecostal pastor joined the Church.
- A volunteer requested sponsorship at Forest Lake Academy.
- Mayor of Century, Florida, requested an evangelism meeting to be conducted in the city hall.
- A couple offered to plant a new church in Century.
- Two citizens of Century desired to join the new church.
- Newspaper articles (front page of *Tampa Tribune*) and TV news covered the volunteers' relief work.
- Tallahassee State headquarters Emergency Operations Center gave a standing ovation to Adventists.
- Tens of thousands were helped who said we were truly their brothers and sisters.
- 15,000 pieces of Seventh-day Adventist literature were personally given away.
- Revival and unity in four churches.
- 2,500 volunteers disciplined in being the hands and feet of Jesus.
- Four volunteers requested membership at the Ft. Pierce Church.
- Twelve inactive members are now active.

they can be called upon in times of disaster.

- The Connection Helpline, (800) 633-7992, is an Adventist, non-profit organization which assists ACS in processing all disaster response volunteer applications and other crisis ministries.
- Florida, Southeastern, South Central, and Gulf States Conferences are now working together in unity because of the blessings of ACTS equipment and supplies to help their members to become involved in their communities. 🌿

A BIG “THANK YOU” TO OUR TEAM LEADERS

- Frank Bailey**— personnel director
- Frank Barton**— warehouse director
- Dale Bass**— deployment director
- Rich Bradley**— liaison to FEMA and Conference disaster coordinator
- Clifford Keseler**— repair specialist
- Janet Keseler**— environmental engineer
- Kevin and Dawn Pakorney**— Conference Help Line and registration for volunteers
- Robin Retzliff**— assessments director
- Terry Turner**— mass feeding director

Acts

BY DAVID CANTHER, DALE BASS

ACTS (Adventist Community Team Services) is a nonprofit, lay-volunteer program which assists Adventist Community Services (ACS) with equipment and supplies. ACTS was born out of a restructuring of Florida Conference ACS and an urgent need for equipment and supplies to assist ACS with an expanded vision. Team members shared their expertise and equipment to help with the mass feedings and distribution

ACTS volunteers ► gathered in Apopka to attend a Disaster Response Training Course in July.

needed in the disasters caused by the four hurricanes of 2004.

David Canter, the original founder of ACTS, and other members began to pray for equipment, and it just started

coming. By June 2005, \$700,000 worth of equipment was on inventory and more than a million dollars worth of dry goods had been donated to help with community service programs

A FIRST-RESPONSE TEAM, UNITING OUR COMMUNITIES THROUGH HELP, HOPE, AND HEALING

throughout the state, as well as the distribution of 17 million dollars worth of supplies during the hurricanes.

ACTS has come to realize a tremendous need in the U.S. to assist the majority of

Conferences which do not have prioritized budgets to help with unpredictable disasters. Our responsibility is to help Florida first, then wherever requested to be a blessing. Whereas ADRA is



GLADYS NEIGEL



A semi trailer ► serves as a sound stage/mobile church, used for outreach ministries.

a tremendous blessing with equipment, supplies, and organization overseas, ACTS is a blessing to assist ACS here in the U.S.

Prophecy encourages us to prepare for the future because calamities and destruction will increase. The motto of ACTS is "Uniting our communities through help, hope, and healing." The command center trailer is named Help, the sound stage/mobile church is named Hope, and the first aid/counseling trailer is named Healing. Visionary, faith-dependent groups of volunteers gain inspiration when the semi tractors named Caleb, Joshua, and Aaron, are seen leading the caravan to bring help,



LEE BENNETT

hope, and healing to hurting people.

GOD HAS GIVEN US:

- A 48' semi trailer that has been converted to a mobile kitchen with air conditioning and a generator, capable of producing 10,000 meals per day.
- A semi trailer with air conditioning and a 60 kw generator which is being converted into a mobile sound stage.
- A semi trailer with air conditioning and an 80 kw

generator for first aid, sleeping, and crisis counseling.

- A semi trailer for a command center and media production.

The ACTS logo features tennis shoes to represent the feet of Jesus. Dale Bass, director, says "We've moved to wearing tennis shoes because that's the only thing we can wear and keep up with the pace of the Holy Spirit in the way He's opening doors." 🙏

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Join the ACTS Runners Team sponsors with a \$10–\$100,000 donation or monthly contributions.
- Donate vehicles, RVs, property, etc. for a tax deduction.
- Assist with a mission project.
- Become a part of ACTS leadership with a \$5,000 annual contribution and 100 logged hours of community service.

Dale Bass, ACTS Director
 P. O. Box 2550
 Ft. Pierce, FL 34954
 Cell: (772) 201-7099 • www.actshelp.org

EMERGENCY RESPONSE: (800) 633-7992

WALTER MAIER



WINNING AN ENTIRE CITY FOR GOD'S KINGDOM



PHOTOS: DAVID CANTHER

◀ **A distribution line for tarps, ice, water, and food were set up at Century's city hall.**

had helped unite the community.

The Navy Cadets and the National Guard helped with the distribution, and ownership happened as the town leaders, pastors in the community, and residents got involved and worked together. Southern Adventist University sent a group of students, and other groups arrived to help. More than 23 semi loads of supplies were distributed.

David Canther, Community Services director, began talking with the mayor and her husband every evening and presented them with a copy of *Desire of Ages*. "Would you tell us more about Adventists?" they asked. "What do you guys believe? Why do you believe that?"

In the end, several people said, "If there was an Adventist church here, that's where we would be going." The mayor requested that a meeting be held in the city hall, entitled, "Your friends, the Adventists." The outreach continued when a husband and wife team volunteered to plant a new church in Century.

After a week and a half of service, the ACTS/ACS team stay was cut short when Hurricane Jeanne came ashore in Fort Pierce. The city streets of Century were lined with tearful well-wishers as the police gave an escort to the long convoy of vehicles departing the town. Canther says, "It just grabbed your heart to see these people waving and sobbing as we left. This was powerful! This was truly being the hands and feet of Jesus." ✠

BY DAVID CANTHER

"Before you set up, we want to know how you ended up in this town?" said Evelyn Manning, mayor of Century, Florida. She, along with her husband and a councilman, met a 14-truck convoy carrying supplies and volunteers that lumbered into the little town.

"We got a call from a higher power," replied the Adventist Community Team Services/Adventist Community Services (ACTS/ACS) team.

The mayor said, "We've been praying." She had pled, "Lord, we need angels to help us! We're desperate."

The mayor had contacted the president, the governor, and everyone else she could think of to get some help for her little town of 1,800 citizens while the major relief supplies were all headed for the larger city of Pensacola. Century, which is located in Escambia County, already had the highest rate of poverty in the state. Then, as a *Tam-*

pa Tribune headline stated, "Ivan Found [the] Forgotten Town."

Electricity was non-existent, and devastation greeted the team on all sides as they drove into town. The landscape was forever changed. Trees were even missing their tops in the tornadic winds that came in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan.

The ACTS/ACS team was given keys to city hall, the police department, and the jail. According to Dale Bass, ACTS director, "We backed the mobile kitchen right between the city hall on one side and the police department on the other side." The team even got out their forklift, with the town's approval, and moved a receptacle for paying utility bills to better-facilitate a place to set up the supply line. Team members



Mayor Evelyn Hammond welcomed David Canther and Adventist Community Team Services to Century.

slept on the floor of the city hall, and a closet was turned into a makeshift shower.

Tarps, ice, dry goods, and meals were soon ready to be served, but help was in short supply. This need was soon solved when Dale Bass went from car to car and said, "Look, here's my problem. We have a lot of stuff back there. We have everything you're going to need for today. The only problem I have is I need one person from this car to get out and help you and the car behind you." Volunteers began to increase. By noon, the distribution line was fully manned, and the volunteering

2005 UPDATE

In July, the town of Century, Florida, again felt the effects of a powerful storm when Hurricane Dennis passed through. Mayor Evelyn Manning immediately contacted Tallahassee and requested that the ACTS/ACS team be deployed to their town because of their prior good experience with the team.

Manning was so pleased when the team took them a load of tarps. She said, "We've got a place for you to set up your operation that's better than where you were before." The town wanted the team to use an entire school complex with a kitchen facility and showers. "Come on back," the mayor urged.

Ultimately, the quick return of the town's power made the request for a distribution center unnecessary, but the love and respect for the team was felt in the hugs and heartfelt thanks given on their departure.

KEYS PROJECT—UNITING IN CREATIVE EVANGELISM

BY ANDRE VAN HEERDEN

Twenty miles south of the mainland of Florida lies a tropical paradise of islands known as the Keys. For years, the churches scattered throughout the islands have struggled to exist.

Now, an outreach and disaster center is being established in the former Islamorada Church on Plantation Key to bring growth and renewal to the three established churches in this “mission field.”

In the Keys, there are two extremes. On the one hand, it’s kind of an escape or city of refuge for people throughout the United States who are down on their luck. On the other hand, it is the playground of the rich. Lack of funds and help have made evangelism very difficult.

Pastor Andre Van Heerden approached David Canther, Florida Conference Community Services director, at a ministerial meeting and told him there was a church standing vacant in Islamorada. “I shared with him our vision to create a magnetism in the Keys where we could draw people from upstate and from further north to come down to the Keys and do mission projects,” said Van Heerden. “I had a vision for a multi-

function evangelistic campus that would be a community center and a versatile campground where young people could come and stay not only for a vacation, but for ministry in the various churches in the Keys. Then, we would use this campus to train people for disaster relief and to stock disaster relief supplies.”

April 27–May 1 found approximately 100 church members

from Florida and beyond working together under the direction of Adventist Community Team Services/Adventist Community Services (ACTS/ACS) to accomplish many tasks at the new outreach center:

- Bunk room to hold 24 beds
- Two apartments
- Shower added
- Two additional water heaters
- Two additional refrigerators

RESOURCES NEEDED

- Venues for health and lifestyle improvement seminars
- Advertising for health and lifestyle improvement seminars
- Pack tote bags for homeless
- Take food to homeless
- Help with health and lifestyle seminars
- Help at A Key Encounter, an Adventist-run nature theatre

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- Beach clean-up
- Run the thrift store
- Clean yards for elderly

Contact Pastor Andre Van Heerden: (305) 872-9973



Twenty-four bunk beds were installed in the bunk room to be used by Pathfinders and other groups.



Kathy Saladino and Gwen Griffin from Marathon sort items for the Thrift Store.

- One additional stove
- A lot of trimming and clean up of property for RV parking
- Semi trailer of disaster supplies stored and ready for use
- Semi trailer of thrift store items delivered and sorted

OUTREACH HAS BEGUN

Three camping trailers were donated to the Keys outreach center by the manager of the Knights Key Campground in Marathon where the Keys Camp Meeting has been held in recent years. These trailers have been cleaned and set up on the outreach center property.

Donations of supplies have been made to the homeless shelter in Marathon. “There hasn’t been any church group or anybody helping us out like this,” said the shelter’s manager. Joe Saladino, Marathon

Church head elder, was thrilled to see the manager at church one Sabbath morning.

The manager of the homeless shelter in Key West was also thankful for supplies. He wants to come to church and bring his Adventist mother who hasn’t been attending.

In July, only two days ahead of Hurricane Dennis’ landfall, ACTS/ACS took a semi truck load of supplies to the homeless shelter in Key West, a counseling center in Marathon, the Marathon Church, and the outreach center.

Monroe County Sheriff Richard Rott, county officials in Islamorada, FEMA, and the State of Florida now see Adventists as having a lighthouse center in the Keys.

The opening of the outreach center is planned for the fall. 🌊

PHOTOS: GLADYS NEIGEL

STATE OF THE CONFERENCE FINANCES—ONE YEAR LATER

BY TOM VERRILL,
CONFERENCE TREASURER

It is hard to believe that a year has passed since I last reported the financial condition of the Conference to the entire constituency. The administration, Finance Committee, and Executive Committee have been working diligently in the past year to address the issues outlined in the October 2004 issue of the *Florida Focus*.

As I go from place to place throughout the year, many people ask, "How are things going with the Conference finances?" The following is an update of where our finances currently stand, and the challenges we continue to face.

HOW DID 2004 END UP FINANCIALLY FOR THE CONFERENCE?

2004 was a difficult year for many, with the reduction of 55 positions in the office and pastoral staff, plus additional reductions within the ranks of our teachers. Our state was also hit with four hurricanes that brought millions of dollars of damage to homes, businesses, churches, and schools, and disrupted the lives of thousands of people.

We recognize there was much pain experienced from these circumstances that we in no way want to diminish or overlook. Even so, much prog-

ress was made during 2004 as it relates to the financial picture of the Conference and the challenging financial position in which we find ourselves.

The Conference ended the year with an operating loss of approximately \$500,000, which was much better than original projections for the year. Overall, even with significant challenges that we continue to address, as outlined below, the financial situation began to stabilize during 2004.

WHAT KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THE BETTER-THAN-EXPECTED OPERATIONS FOR 2004?

Though the Conference still experienced a loss for the year, several areas turned out better than projected during 2004. Following are the major factors that helped the year come out ahead of the \$3.5 million expected loss:

Tithe

The Conference experienced a 7.1% tithe increase for 2004, ending the year at just below \$43 million in total annual tithe. This is the greatest percentage tithe increase we have seen since 2000 and the third highest increase in the past ten years. This tithe increase helped operations by \$1.9 million as compared to the budget.

Health Care Costs

Health care costs

for the year were under budget by more than \$500,000, and the total costs had decreased for the second straight year.

Church and School Building Appropriations

Church and school building appropriations were at their lowest level in more than ten years, ending up \$235,000 under budget.

Trust and Will Maturities

The Conference benefited from \$570,000 in unrestricted trust and will maturities during 2004. This was \$255,000 more than was budgeted for the year.

It should be noted that it is our Conference practice to distribute 20% of all unrestricted maturities to the church from which the gift originated if the church was not otherwise remembered by the donor. These distributions amounted to almost \$100,000 in 2004. In addition, more than \$250,000 was received by other Florida Conference entities through specific trust and will maturity gifts during the year.

Budget Reduction Transition Costs

Costs relating to the budget reductions were \$500,000 less than projected. This was primarily due to many workers receiving jobs

in other fields more quickly than expected.

Conference Departments

I would be remiss not to mention the outstanding attention and effort exhibited by administrators, departmental directors, and the managers of Camp Kulaqua and Pine Lake Retreat in administering their budgets. The overall programming costs for Conference operations came in under budget. For this, I am very thankful.

WHAT IS THE OPERATING DEBT SITUATION FOR THE CONFERENCE?

Between December 2003 and the middle of 2004, as reported last year, the Conference borrowed \$9 million to fund operating shortfalls. As of 2004 year end, the balance owed was \$8.7 million.

HOW ARE COLLECTIONS ON CHURCH AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE DOING?

As was noted in the 2004 article, collections from churches, schools, and other related entities have posed a challenge for the Conference's cash flow for the past several years. The vast majority of the churches are remaining current on their accounts with the Conference.

Payments from elementary schools improved during the 2004–2005 school year. As of July 2005, we have received 92%

of the charges billed to the elementary schools. 80% of the schools ended the school year either with their account fully paid or their owed balance reduced from the amount due at the beginning of the year.

We are still working to bring the academy budgets in balance so they can stay up to date with their payments to the Conference. Our goal is to have both academies operating on fully balanced budgets for the 2005–2006 school year.

HOW IS 2005 LOOKING SO FAR?

The 2005 budget projected a deficit of \$1.3 million based on tithe income equal to the amount received in 2004. (It is important to note that this budget deficit does not include the additional \$2 million that would be required to catch our employees up with cost of living adjustments in accordance with the North American Division remuneration plan.)

A 4.8% tithe increase would be needed in 2005 to break even for the year. Through the July remittance, the Conference has experienced a 10% tithe increase compared to the same time last year. The departments are remaining on budget through the first half of the year. So far during 2005, we have paid more than \$1.5

million of the amount previously borrowed for operations. We hope to be able to pay approximately half of the \$8.7 million in operating debt by the last half of 2006 through the sale of properties not integral to the ministry of the Conference.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR FINANCIAL CHALLENGES YOU SEE AS YOU LOOK TO THE FUTURE?

① **Balanced budget.** We still have the challenge of fully balancing the operating budget while meeting the growing ministry needs of the Conference. This will require healthy tithing gains over the next few years while continuing to contain operating costs.

② **Cost of living salary adjustments.** As noted above, the Conference is currently behind on implementing the cost of living adjustments for employees in accordance with the denominational salary plan. With the accelerating increase in housing costs in Florida, it is imperative that we address this issue in the near

future in order to continue to attract and retain good employees.

③ **Debt reduction.** It is important for the long term financial strength of the Conference to pay off, as quickly as possible, the remainder of the operating debt incurred in the last couple of years.

④ **Operations of related entities.** Because the financial strength of the Conference is directly affected by the operations of its churches, elementary schools, academies, and other related entities, it is vital that these entities operate in a financially positive manner for the overall stability of the organization.

⑤ **Containing health care costs.** Health care costs are a major part of the Conference operating budget. Continually researching ways to contain these costs is an important component in providing for the financial well-being of the Conference.

⑥ **Rebuilding reserves.** Every financially strong organization needs adequate reserves to weather the fluctuations and cycles

that occur in the economy. Rebuilding the Conference reserves is a key long-term goal that we must keep in the forefront.

⑦ **Assisting churches purchase land and buildings.** It is becoming increasingly difficult for churches to find and afford land and buildings in which they may worship, particularly with the escalating cost of real estate in Florida over the past few years. We must research creative ways that we can strategically address this growing problem.

CONCLUSION

Though there are big challenges before us, we can be thankful that we serve a "big" God. We have much to be thankful for as we look back over the past 12 months and see how the Lord has blessed in so many areas. We must also thank you, our constituents, for your continued support and faithfulness.

There is much work yet to be done, but I am confident that the Lord will direct and provide as we walk together with Him. 🌿

Coming Events

A complete calendar is available online:
<http://www.floridaconference.com/calendar.html>

ONGOING EVENTS

Florida Pathfinder Events. <http://www.floridapathfinders.com/>
Singles' Ministries Spiritual Study Group. Every Friday evening.

Forest Lake Church, classroom #4. 7:30 p.m. Details: Melody West, (407) 292-1421 or mwest@ahss.org

Singles' Ministries Monthly Fellowship Dinners. *Second Sabbath*, Forest Lake Church, Apopka. *Third Sabbath*, Kress Memorial Church, Winter Park. *Fourth Sabbath*, picnic, location/details: Melody West, (407) 292-1421 or mwest@ahss.org. *Fifth Sabbath (if any)*, Deltona Church.

Evangelism Series.

Oct. 1-Nov. 12. Ft. Myers. Bill & Sunshine Waters.
 Oct. 13-Nov. 19. Orlando Central. Lester & Zula Pratt.
 Oct. 15-29. Ft. Myers Spanish. Rolando & Rebeca de los Ríos.
 Nov. 5-19. Palmetto-Tampa Spanish. Rolando & Rebeca de los Ríos.
 Nov. 26-Dec. 3. Northwest Miami Spanish. Rolando & Rebeca de los Ríos.

Estate Services Clinics and Seminars.

Oct. 1. Midport in Jensen Beach. Nov. 12. Spring Hill.
 Oct. 15. Kendall. Dec. 3. Ft. Lauderdale.
 Oct. 22. Kissimmee. Dec. 10. Jacksonville Southpoint.
 Oct. 29. Altamonte Springs. Feb. 18-19, 2006, Daytona Beach.
 Nov. 5. South Orlando Spanish.

Florida Adventist Book Center. Winter Park: (800) 765-6955.

Miami: (305) 805-9900. High Springs: (386) 454-7956.
 Shop online: <http://www.floridaconference.com/abc/>
 or order by e-mail: FloridaABC@floridaconference.com.

Florida Adventist Bookmobile Schedule.

Maps to churches: <http://www.floridaconference.com/churches/>

Oct. 8: Port Charlotte. Oct. 9: North Port, Venice-Nokomis, Sarasota, Bradenton, Brandon, Tampa First. Oct. 15: West Palm Beach. Oct. 16: Jupiter, Fort Pierce, Cocoa, Titusville. Oct. 30: Fort Lauderdale, Lauderhill, Pompano Beach.
 Nov. 5: Jacksonville Southpoint. Nov. 6: Jacksonville First, Orange Cove, St. Augustine, Palatka, Palm Coast. Nov. 12: Naples. Nov. 13: Fort Myers, Fort Myers Shores, Arcadia, Lakeland, Lakeview in Haines City, Winter Haven. Nov. 19: St. Petersburg. Nov. 20: Clearwater, New Port Richey, Spring Hill, Brooksville, East Pasco in Zephyrhills, Plant City.
 Dec. 3: Maranatha in Miami. Dec. 4: Plantation, Lauderhill. Dec. 10: Tallahassee. Dec. 11: Perry, Lake City, Ocala, Silver Springs Shores, Belleview, Inverness.

OCTOBER

Family Ministries Days. Details: (407) 644-5000 x136.

Oct. 1. Florida Hospital Church.
 Oct. 15. Miami Temple Church.

High School Bible Conference. Oct. 6-9. Camp Kulaqua, High Springs.
 Registration deadline: Sept. 21. Sponsor orientation: Sept. 24. Details: (407) 644-5000 x129.

Spanish-language Family Ministries Seminars. Oct. 22. Apopka Spanish Church. Topics: God's Plan for a Happy Couple, Communication, Marriage Consolidation, and What You Need To Know Before You Marry. Details: (407) 644-5000 x138.

NOVEMBER

College/Young Adult Retreat. Nov. 4-6. Camp Kulaqua, High Springs. Details: (407) 644-5000 x129.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY 26, 2005

APPROVED the organization of the Treasure Coast Spanish Company and the Margate Company into church status.

MARCH 24, 2005

APPROVED the organization of the following mission groups into company status: Northwood

Spanish, sponsored by Lake Worth Spanish; Renacer Spanish, sponsored by Jacksonville Southpoint; and Victory, sponsored by Palm Springs.

MAY 24, 2005

APPROVED the organization of the Romanian Adventist Temple Company into church status.

“Thank you for supporting this year’s annual appeal and making it possible to reach people for Jesus.”

—Mike Cauley, President, Florida Conference

BY EVAN VALENCIA

Florida Conference members have met human needs for nearly 100 years through their financial, prayer, and hands-on support to the Hope for Humanity community outreach program.

This most important hope-bearing ministry—the new name for Harvest Ingathering—reflects the approach Jesus took while He was on earth as, first, He met people’s physical needs; then, the spiritual.

Each year, thousands of lives are touched by God’s love as Hope for Humanity makes a difference in communities impacted by natural disasters. In Florida, member donations continue to assist those effected by recent hurricanes.

This year, once again, your contributions to Hope for Humanity will be distributed with the guarantee that 100% of the funds will be used for humanitarian, development, and disaster response projects in the United States and around the world. Hope for Humanity will work with local, regional, and national partners to provide the following resources and program support:

50% OF ALL FUNDS

will be allocated for local and state-wide projects such as disaster response, community service centers, tutoring and mentoring projects, health clinics and health screening programs, job training and placement programs.

10% OF ALL FUNDS

will be allocated for national disaster response and inner-city programs such as warehousing and distribution of food and supplies, tutoring initiatives, community service training and support.

40% OF ALL FUNDS

will be allocated for international development and relief projects. One such project is the literacy program in Central America which Florida Conference helps to sponsor through its Hope for Humanity offering.

Soon, Hope for Humanity material will be distributed in your church. Then, you will be invited, once again, to contribute and make a difference in meeting the physical and spiritual needs of those in your community. ✚



DAVID CANTHER

Florida members met needs of their neighbors after the hurricanes of 2004.



EVAN VALENCIA

Through their donations, Florida members brought the joy of reading to Central America as Hope for Humanity helped establish literacy classes which, in Nicaragua, led to 300 baptisms.

As this issue went to press, Adventist Community Services teams had returned from south Florida, and their freshly supplied convoy was en route to the Gulf Coast to bring hope to thousands devastated by Hurricane Katrina.



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