Seventh business meeting
Fifty-third General Conference session
April 21, 1980, 3:15 P.M.

Session proceedings

Mike Stevenson: [Directed the opening song.]

W. Duncan EVA: E. C. Lemke, of the South Queensland Conference, Australia, will lead us in prayer.

E. C. LEMKE: [Offered prayer.]

W. J. HACKETT: There are a number of very important items to look at this afternoon. First, R. F. Williams has a report for us.

R. F. WILLIAMS: [Read the names of additional delegates in box on this page, and moved they be seated. The motion was seconded and voted.]

W. J. HACKETT: Several Church Manual items are not yet finished. Brother Brothe, can you tell us the page and number of those to be considered now?


Mr. Chairman, I move the adoption of this Church Manual supplement. [Motion was seconded.]

W. J. HACKETT: You will notice that this is for the North American supplement, so will not apply to the overseas divisions. Is there any discussion?

J. L. Everett: I believe this document that should state that the youth leader should be a member of the church board.

Charles Martin: I think it would be very satisfactory to incorporate that provision.

W. J. HACKETT: Can we add that by common consent? [Pause.] [The amended supplement was voted.]

J. W. Bothe: [Read the action: "The Church Board/Church Board Meetings—Church Manual Revision," on p. 15. It was moved and seconded to adopt the revision.]

Darrell J. Huenergardt: I would like to address my comments to the section entitle "Officers." That paragraph states that the pastor is chairman of the church board unless he decides otherwise. This past week we have heard that the concept that the pastor is a ruler of the church should be abandoned. I feel that this paragraph is contrary to that principle. I move that the motion be amended to provide for a study of the paragraph beginning on page 39, line 17.

W. J. HACKETT: Would you be happy if the Manual said the pastor or the elder could chair the board, leaving the decision to the church?

Darrell J. Huenergardt: That would be fine.

W. J. HACKETT: How many of you feel that the motion should be amended? May I see your hands? [Hands were raised.] How many do not agree with the amendment? [Hands raised again.] Well, you are out-voted, Brother. The motion to accept the revision is now before us.

R. R. Bietz: This whole document emphasizes that the board is responsible for evangelism. That is as it should be. I would like to suggest, however, that evangelism includes more than public evangelism, and I am glad to see this emphasized considerably. I would like to move that we add on page 39, line 38, after "planning evangelism," and on page 38, line 16, after "planning for evangelism," the words "in all of its phases."

[The motion was seconded and voted.]

E. J. Humphrey: I am in complete harmony with the document, especially as it relates to the pastor as chairman of the church board.

J. H. Zachary: I am concerned about areas where there is one pastor for 20 or 30 churches. Perhaps a flooded river prevents his visit to a church for six months. In such cases, I hope the head elder can still serve as the leader of the church and the board in the absence of the pastor.

George W. Schlinsog: Most of the segments of the church are represented on the church board. However, should not the school board chairman, or principal of the school, also be a member of the church board?

W. J. HACKETT: Who will answer this question?

M. T. Battle: The section dealing with members of the church board specifies that additional members of the board may be elected by the church if desired. The committee is of the opinion that this statement covers such situations, since in many churches there is no school board, while there may be a Home and School leader.

W. J. HACKETT: Will that be satisfactory, Brother?

George W. Schlinsog: With all due respect, sir, I feel that this does deserve to be specifically included in the membership of the church board.

W. J. HACKETT: Could we add the phrase "chairman of the church school board where there is a church school"? How would that be?

George W. Schlinsog: I would move that, sir. [The motion was seconded and voted.]

Louis Venden: In the section "Definition and Function of the church board," it is stated that the "chief concern is the work of planning and fostering evangelism." In the light of recent discussion of apostasies, I believe that the church board should join the pastor in planning for the crucial work of pastoral care. I move that the words "and pastoral care" be added. [The motion was seconded and voted.]

Eliah E. Najji: I refer to the section concerning membership of the church board. I have wondered for a long time why the one who is in charge of music, or the choir leader, is not included as a member of the church board.

W. J. HACKETT: Page 39, line 13, provides that "additional members of the board may be elected," if desired.

Can we vote on the motion as a whole? [It was voted.]

W. J. HACKETT: We are very happy from time to time to have brethren in Christ from other communions fellowship with us. I would like to ask B. B. Beach to present our guest at this time.

B. B. Beach: Brother Chairman and delegates, we have the privilege of introducing Dr. Paul Opsahl, of Houston, Texas, the official observer for the Lutheran World Federation. We are happy to welcome Dr. Opsahl.

Paul Opsahl: Mr. Chairman, Dr. Beach, delegates, and friends in Christ, I am pleased to bring you warm greetings from the 17 million brethren and sisters in Christ that form the Lutheran family of churches who circle the globe and form a worldwide church family that in many respects is much like yours.

We also confess our faith in the risen Lord Jesus as the hope of the world, and, like you, God has blessed us with the ministry of caring that circles the globe. God bless all of you in His name.

W. J. HACKETT: We thank Dr. Opsahl for his greetings and for being here with us today.

J. W. Bothe: [Read the action: "The Church Board/Lay Activities Council/Church Board Meetings—Church Manual Revision."

Mr. Chairman, I move the adoption of this supplement to the North American Division Church Manual Revision. [Motion was seconded and voted.]

W. J. HACKETT: Brother Wilson, you have an item for us at this time.

Neal C. Wilson: For some time we have been considering a refinement of our Statement on Fundamental Beliefs. I think you have that document in your hands. No doubt you have done both some studying and some praying.

We have heard a variety of interesting rumors. Some, it is said, understand that the church leaders want to destroy completely the foundations of the church. Of course, that course would be un-Biblical, contrary to the tradition of the past and to historical Adventism. My fellow delegates, there is nothing that is further from the truth.

We have also heard that at any time we touch the Statement on Fundamental Beliefs we would be introducing the Omega, the final confusion of theological and doctrinal positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I suggest to you that this is also a very unfortunate statement.

I can understand how individuals far removed from where some of these things are being studied, and who may not themselves be the most interested in participating in a restudy or refinement of wording, might feel that there is something very sinister, mysterious, and secret going on that will suddenly confront us, and that it may contribute to the ultimate detriment and demise of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Additional Delegates

The following delegates were added as authorized by policy:

Regular delegates:
Northern Europe-West Africa Division
West African Union
Edward Dorsey
Euro-Africa Division
Romanian Union
Alexandru Timis

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Charles B. Hirsch (left), associate director of the General Conference Department of Education, presented a plaque recognizing 46 years of denominational service, all in the field of education, to Walton J. Brown, retiring director of the Department of Education.

Church. My fellow delegates, I assure you that no one who has been struggling with some of these matters has any such intention.

There are others who think they know why this is being done. They believe it is being prepared as a club to batter church could confront them with any such intention. The result of this matter has developed. The Statement appeared in the April 23, 1980 issue of the ADVENTIST REVIEW. It was adopted by the delegates at the General Conference Session held at Springfield, Missouri, in July 1980. The Statement was based on a draft prepared by the General Conference Committee on Fundamental Beliefs. The Committee was appointed by the General Conference Session of 1979 to study and report on the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Committee consisted of the following members: W. D. EVA, chairman; M. B. COCHRAN; D. A. JONES; W. J. BROWN; and J. W. ROGERS. The draft was submitted to the General Conference Session of 1980 for approval. The Statement was adopted by a vote of 369 to 124, with 12 abstentions.

The Statement is divided into two parts: Part I, The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, and Part II, The Statement of the General Conference on Fundamental Beliefs. Part I sets forth a clear statement of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Part II provides for a process of review and revision of the Statement, with the aim of maintaining its relevance and consistency with the evolving nature of the Church's beliefs and practices.

The Statement is intended to be a living document that can be modified and updated as new information becomes available and as the Church's understanding of its beliefs and practices evolves. The Statement is not intended to be a rigid, inflexible formula that cannot be changed.

I fully recognize, and I am very willing to admit, that we do need to use extreme care, including a wholesome variety of minds with training and background, to provide input on this kind of statement. However, I do not think anyone should become frightened when the wording of such a document is studied. Perhaps I should go one step further and say that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a creed as such. Nothing is set in concrete in terms of human words. The time never comes when any human document cannot be improved upon. We feel that every 20, 30, or 50 years it is a very good thing for us to be sure that we are using the right terminology and approach. Schools of theological thought are constantly changing. Certain terms mean today what they did not mean 50 years ago. There are certain presuppositions that people develop, and certain terminology is used to describe these presuppositions. It is extremely important that we should understand what we believe and that we should express it simply, clearly, and in the most concise way possible. We should not only state our beliefs but be certain that those who read them do not misunderstand and that they are unable to read three or four meanings into the same sentences or words.

It is just as important today to say what one does mean and as to say positively what one does mean in order to make sure that people do not just use words with different presuppositions to arrive at an entirely different conclusion.

We see only good coming from a careful rearrangement, rewording, and perhaps some restructuring.

The most cohesive thing in this church is our message. Some people say that what holds us together as a great world family is our organization and our policies. Thank God for organization! But what keeps this church together as one in all the world, in spite of all the fragmenting philosophies and the cultural-sociological-racial differences and linguistic problems, is not organization or policy—it is our message.

So it is important that we look at this statement carefully and that when we have finished looking, we know that we have not done violence, that we have not allowed anything to become eroded or weakened, but rather that we have strengthened and helped, and perhaps become more lucid and clear.

We are not suggesting changing any belief or doctrine that this church has held. We have no interest in tearing up any of the foundations of historical Adventism. This document is not designed to do that, nor to open the door so that it can be done. It should be clear that we are not adding anything nor are we deleting anything in terms of historical Adventist theology. We are trying to express our beliefs in a way that will be understood today.

There are great many individuals, for instance, who write to the General Conference Ministerial Association requesting a simple statement of our fundamental beliefs. We would like to feel that when such a statement is sent to those who are theologically educated or who are proficient in stating Biblical truth simply, they will understand not what they see but rather what we see in the context of who we believe. It is one thing for me to apply a certain set of values and theological-doctrinal principles to a statement and find that it all fits together. Someone else reading the same statement might not perceive the same truth.

Some say to me, "Well, you know, it [the Statement] is not ready yet. It needs a lot more study!" I say, "But it will never be perfect, no matter how many people work on it and for how long. I do not think we should ever be afraid to look at our beliefs carefully and ask ourselves, Can it be said better?"

We really should not take the time of this whole group to deal with minute editorial matters. We will provide for a competent editorial committee of scholars and theologians to consider such details. If someone has a really clear point to make that seems to be extremely sensitive or important in terms of content and substance and theology, then I think this whole group would like to hear it.

Now, you say, are you hoping to get this document voted at this meeting? I would say, Yes. But I also am a realist. If we find ourselves in too much trouble we should do the best we can. Let's create a great problem in this church. We have a statement of beliefs now. Nobody needs to think that we are all up in the air, that we don't know what we believe, that we have nothing to tie to, that the anchors are all pulled up and we are adrift. No one is adrift. We have a clear statement of fundamental beliefs, and we will hold to it until together we decide to refine, reword, and restate it in today's language.

I want to make it very clear that the introduction of this Statement does not suggest that we are not really sure what we believe and that there is a great deal of indecisiveness. This is not the case. There are a few people in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who want to delete the things that do not fit their own presuppositions. It is extremely important that we should understand what we believe and that we should express it simply, clearly, and in the most concise way possible. We should not only state our beliefs but be certain that those who read them do not misunderstand and that they are unable to read three or four meanings into the same sentences or words.

We have a conference of churches that are trying to express our beliefs in a way that will be understood today. There are great many individuals, for instance, who write to the General Conference Ministerial Association requesting a simple statement of our fundamental beliefs. We would like to feel that when such a statement is sent to those who are theologically educated or who are proficient in stating Biblical truth simply, they will understand not what they see but rather what we see in the context of who we believe. It is one thing for me to apply a certain set of values and theological-doctrinal principles to a statement and find that it all fits together. Someone else reading the same statement might not perceive the same truth.

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We really should not take the time of this whole group to deal with minute editorial matters. We will provide for a competent editorial committee of scholars and theologians to consider such details. If someone has a really clear point to make that seems to be extremely sensitive or important in terms of content and substance and theology, then I think
NEAL C. WILSON: I think we are ready to begin with Section 1, “The Holy Scriptures.” J. W. BOTHE: [Read Item 1, “The Holy Scriptures.”]

R. H. BROWN: I could wish that, as a church, we were able to simply say that we base our belief and practice on the Bible, the Bible alone, and the entire Bible. But unfortunately the enemy has confused the situation so that it becomes essential for us to declare to the world and to ourselves what we mean by such a statement. We have to specify where in the spectrum of theological viewpoints we stand and what we understand to be the nature and authority of the Bible.

NEAL C. WILSON: In that exact place?

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NEAL C. WILSON: Jim, do you see it fitting in some other place in the document?

JAMES LONDIS: My concern is that Seventh-day Adventists avoid being designated as verbal inspirationists. I also appreciate the concern of those who do not want to diminish the authority of the Bible.

ROBERT OLSON: I can appreciate what Jim Londis is speaking about, but I don’t think that this expression as it stands gives the wrong impression. Ellen White speaks about the Bible as the infallible revelation of God’s will to us. She does not call the Bible inerrant. I do not think we should use the word inerrant, but expressing that the Bible is the infallible revelation of God’s will, I think, is very correct. It certainly is in harmony with the Spirit of Prophecy.

J. J. BATTISTONE: I would like to speak to the two points Dr. Londis mentioned. First, with respect to the Holy Scriptures and the reference to the historical witness of the Scriptures to God’s presence. Doctrine number two brings this out; so if the first statement were amended, it would be consistent with the reference to God, who acts in and through nature and history.

The second point has to do with the word infallible. Are we sacrificing anything substantial when we omit the word infallible and retaining for it the word authoritative?

LEWIS O. ANDERSON: I feel that we should retain the word infallible where it is. I think that this is a proper statement of our view concerning the Bible. If we remove that, it will be seriously misunderstood by many people.

RUSSELL STANDISH: I want to support Dr. Brown’s statement that we recognize the Bible as authoritative when it comes to the area of history. I think we are all aware that we are not talking in a vacuum today. There are many among our believers who project the concept that the Scriptures are perfect for their purposes. Now we could talk about a statement like this and it is understood that what is meant is that Scripture is authoritative as a guide to salvation, but it contains many errors of history and science. I believe that the Holy Word of God is just as authoritative in matters of history and science as it is in matters of salvation. I would even go further than Dr. Brown and insert science into this statement as well as history. I believe, as have most of the other speakers, that the word infallible is very proper and that we would lose very much if we drop it.

JAMES LONDIS: In keeping with your statement at the beginning that we must be careful to say not only what we mean but what we do not mean. If we use the word infallible, I would suggest that we then state what we do not mean by infallible, that it is defined as absolutely perfect and unfailing in a verbal inspiration sense.

NEAL C. WILSON: That is something that might be worthwhile for this church to state.

J. J. AITKEN: The great genius of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that we believe in the infallibility of the Holy Word of God. There are many teachings today that would discredit certain parts of the Bible.

W. DUNCAN EVA: I would like to make a suggestion that will satisfy as many as possible. I would suggest that instead of the word “authoritative” on line 18, we use the word infallible. And that instead of the word “infallible” on line 20, we use the word authoritative. In other words, transpose those two words. I would suggest further that we refer the question of a definition for the term infallible, as Dr. Londis has suggested, to an editing committee, with the suggestion that a footnote be added defining what we mean by “infallible.” I think it would be desirable not to burden the Bible with authoritative.

MARIO VELOSO: I would like to support the presence of this word infallible. A definition, if desired, would be better placed in the text because footnotes are easily lost. I think the word infallible does not give any wrong impression. We will not lose anything by retaining it, and changing our objections by understanding that the word infallible be broadly interpreted and can be misinterpreted, I fear, by people who are unfamiliar with the world and to ourselves where we really stand with respect to the testimony of Holy Scripture. The same suggestion should be included where Ellen White’s attitude toward Scripture is referred to.

JAMES LONDIS: I think, Brother Chairman, that there is no doubt that the Statement was strengthened by the word historical or the words historical activities. As it stands, it can be misinterpreted, I fear, by people who are unfamiliar with the difference between the existential approach to the Bible and the historical approach.

I would also like to comment on both points.

NEAL C. WILSON: Surely.

JAMES LONDIS: I wish to sound a word of caution about using the word infallible in any statement with respect to the Scripture. We have bypassed using it in reference to Scripture as a revelation of God’s gracious purpose and will. Rather, we have said is authoritative and trustworthy. To be consistent, we ought not to use that word with respect to faith and practice.

NEAL C. WILSON: Would somebody like to comment on this matter of the use of the word infallible?
NEAL C. WILSON: You have a point there. The problem is, how do we see God today if it has to be through the Son? We have to see the Son through the Scriptures. I think the intent of those who drafted the statement was that there is no way for us to see God or the Son today except through Scripture.

H. J. HARRIS: It seems to me we have a conflict or a contradiction in this statement, “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of Three co-eternal Persons.” Would not it be more clear if we were to say “There is one God consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” We begin with “one God.” Then, without any explanation, we use “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Later, we go to “a unity of Three.”

RICHARD HAMMILL: There are several comments I would like to make. Regarding this last suggestion, I think it is rather difficult to use the verb “consist” with God. I think we ought to be very careful in using terms that the Bible does not use of Him. When we framed this statement we tried to use Biblical phrases as much as we could. The next concept has to do with that of self-revelation. I think it would be a mistake to limit this, because God reveals Himself in many ways. He reveals Himself certainly through

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the Scriptures, as we have stated. He has revealed Himself in nature. Ellen White explicitly says there are two books—the book of the Written Word and the book of nature—and God sometimes reveals Himself in ways the Bible says we don’t expect and don’t actually understand. So, we try to be no more or less explicit than the Bible is here. If we define this word, we rule out others that I think we have to understand when this is read.

The next matter is the concept about God in and through all. This is an exact Biblical statement. It could be in quotes except stylistically we have not been putting Biblical phrases in quotes. But Ephesians 4:5 uses these phrases with the verb is—God “is.” Just because there have been some pantheistic views in our past history, I don’t think that we ought to try to rewrite the Bible, not wanting to use this verse of Scripture. The Bible does say that God is in all, and through all, and above all, in ways that we do not understand. Since this is a Biblical clause, I think we should try to maintain it.

My last comment has to do with the thought that God acts in and through history and nature. This does not mean that these are the only ways that God acts. God acts in many, many ways, but the Bible explicitly says that He does act in history and in history. When we say that, we are not denying others, but we are making an affirmation of that which the Bible clearly states.

MIGUEL CASTILLO: It has been interesting to me to find a statement of Ellen White that says God acts in each natural phenomenon. This is in perfect agreement with the Biblical statement “My Father worketh not in me, but in thee.” The statement, therefore, that He acts in all, above all, and through all, is in perfect agreement with both the Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy as far as I am concerned.

W. G. C. MURDOCH: I would suggest that we use the expression “The Godhead of Trinity” rather than “Trinity.” J. J. BATTISTONE: There was a reference to the pronoun He. We are talking about the Godhead, so the antecedent of the pronoun is God, not the three persons. In the reference to His self-revelation in Scripture, I prefer that reading.

PAUL C. CHIMA: I would suggest that when this goes back to the committee, Sister White’s writings be studied to see what term she used to describe God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Let us use a little of her terminology to define this. Whatever decisions are made and expressions found, let us be content with them.

W. R. LESHER: I am concerned about words and phrases that would seem to limit God or to change the view of God that is given to us in Scripture. One of these is the suggestion that was made that we not use the word He. I presume that the speaker was referring to the use of “They” in paragraph 2. And, of course, the statement of Scripture is that “The Lord our God is One Lord.” And to speak of “They” or some other pronoun than “He” would make us tri-theist, instead of believing in one God. The expression “consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” might read more nicely. It seems to me it does introduce a limiting factor. It is much more in harmony with the mystery of God to simply say there is one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My same observation would apply to the expression “a unity of purpose.” We assume that there is a unity of purpose in the Godhead. Still, God is a mystery. And we do not know in what ways that unity might exist other than in purpose. There are some ways in which we can seem to say that God is not a unity. But even then we are not sure what we are talking about. The idea of three Beings that are One is a mystery, and it seems to me that we should not try to remove all of that mystery from the statement.

N. C. WILSON: I would like now to appoint a committee to do some editing for us with these suggestions in mind. I would like to suggest that Dr. Richard Hammill serve as chairman and that the following serve as members:

Thomas H. Blincoe, dean of Andrews Theological Seminary
W. Duncan Eva, of the General Sabbath School
Larry Geraty, of Andrews University
W. R. Lesher, from the Biblical Research Institute
James Londis, pastor and Biblical scholar
Robert Olson, from the White Estate
J. W. Bothe, with Paulsen, from Newbold College
Mario Veloso, from South America
G. R. Thompson, chairman of the Church Manual Committee
M. T. Battle, secretary of the Church Manual Committee

This makes a committee of 11. It might be well to add R. H. Brown also, since we are dealing with some areas of science.

W. J. HACKETT: We have a report from the Nominating Committee, which we will release at this time.

H. H. SCHMIDT: We will ask J. G. Smoot, our secretary, to bring the report.

J. G. SMOOT: We have a rather lengthy slate to present this evening. [The report was presented and accepted. It appeared on p. 32 of Bulletin 4.]

L. M. HAWKES: [Benediction.]

NEAL C. WILSON, Chairman
W. J. HACKETT, Chairman.
D. H. BAASCH, Proceedings Secretary
J. W. BOTHE, Actions Secretary

Session actions

Youth Council—Church Manual Supplement

Addition

Voted, To insert a new section, Youth Council, in the North American Supplement of the Church Manual, to read as follows:

The Adventist Youth Society organization as listed in the Church Manual is the official world plan of organization for youth ministry in the local church. However, in the North American Division an alternate organizational plan known as the Youth Council has been adopted and is followed in some churches. This plan differs from the Adventist Youth Society plan of organization primarily in its concept that all activities involving senior youth in the local church are planned and executed by one organization under the leadership of one person, known as the church youth leader. This organization includes the youth Sabbath school, youth temperance activities, Adventist Youth Society meetings, youth witnessing, and youth recreational activities.

The youth leader, an adult who has demonstrated mature abilities to relate to youth, is elected by the church and is chairman of the Youth Council. In larger churches he will be assisted by one or more church-organized youth leaders, all of whom would serve as secretary/treasurer of the Youth Council. One associate youth leader would serve as youth Sabbath school leader. In smaller churches, the youth church leader may not only be the youth leader for the church but may serve as leader of the youth Sabbath school or class.

The Youth Council is to be made up of these church-elected officers and young people selected by these officers and the youth themselves to serve on the council. The size of the Youth Council is adaptable according to the size of the church.

The responsibility for the youth Sabbath school in this organizational plan is with the Youth Council. The youth Sabbath school will, however, use the resource materials and foster the objectives and program of the General Conference Sabbath School Department. It will also receive guidance from the local Sabbath School Council.

The detailed organizational plan of the Youth Council which was adopted by the 1974 Annual Council is printed in a special leaflet available from the local conference youth director. Further information and helps are available in Youth Ministry Accent, a quarterly journal published by the General Conference Youth Council which is sent free to each conference for distribution to the churches in North America.

Adventist Junior Youth Society

In the North American Division the Pathfinder Club has replaced the Adventist Junior Youth Society (formerly JMV Society) in the local church. However, an Adventist Junior Youth Society is a part of the devotional and witnessing activities of each church. Each classroom is considered a society with the teacher as the leader and the students serving as society officers.

Pupils in grades one to four are designated as Adventurers, while students in grades five to eight are listed as regular members of the Adventist Junior Youth Society. In larger schools where each grade is in a separate room, students in grades five and six would be members of the Adventist Junior Youth Society while those in grades seven and eight would be listed as members of an Adventist Earliteen Youth Society. This harmonizes with the divisions of the Sabbath school.

Youth society meetings are usually held the first period on Wednesday or Friday mornings and include not only programs which the students develop but also the study of the Adventist Junior Youth Classes (formerly JMV Classes) and Adventist Youth Honors (formerly MV Honors). An Investiture service is

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