

# Passport

Fourth Quarter 2008

A newsletter for the  
Regional Conference Retirees  
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

## Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled



In the last few weeks more than an average numbers of retirees have called the office to inquire about the health of the Retirement Investment Fund. Some have even stopped members of our staff on the street to voice their concern and to wonder if their monthly check would be affected by downturns in the stock market, the sub prime mortgage debacle and the failure of Fannie Mae Freddie Mac and Bear Stearns.

Here is something that should put your minds at ease. The health of our Fund is a long-term proposition. It is designed to ride out the expected ups and downs characteristic of investment markets. To date, we have approximately twenty-five times the amount of our current annual expenses. So, “let not your hearts be troubled.” Your monthly benefits are not in danger. We are in this position because those receiving benefits are . . . relatively few – 211. As the years go by and the number of retirees increases, the present favorable gap between annual benefit expenses and funds on hand will narrow. At that point we will either reach full funding or the fund will reach the “adequate to meet the present value of future liabilities” status. Achieving either of those is the ultimate long-term objective.

Now we must turn our attention to the current crisis in the economic markets and the conditions impacting them – Wall Street excesses, rising food and gasoline prices, upheavals in nature, national and international political decisions. First, the company we have hired to manage our retirement portfolio has demonstrated that they are more than prudent in the selection of instruments and companies in which to invest for their clients. Secondly, while the following may sound like a commercial and some of the language is taken from their investment report, the last eight years of our relationship leads me to believe that their words are borne out in their actions.

Mutual of America’s (MOA) long-standing, prudent investment policies seem to have served their clients well in this tumultuous market environment. The company has remained financially strong because its stated philosophy causes them to focus on securities and companies that they can evaluate for sound fundamentals, within acceptable risk tolerances. Surely your eyes are glazed over with all this “financial-speak.”

In plain everyday language this means that their investment professionals put a great deal of emphasis on long-range strengths in companies in which they invest our money and on actively avoiding risks which they do not believe are acceptable. This has enabled them to avoid seeking apparent higher returns that they believe are not grounded in sound fundamentals. Everybody says that but the proof is always in the pudding.

*This practice steered them away from investing in subprime or other similar vehicles, even when it was fashionable to do so, based on the promise of substantially higher yields. As a result they avoided the severe asset quality and liquidity issues that have hampered other financial institutions. It should be noted that they success-fully avoided the losses caused by the forced sale of Bear Stearns as they did not have any Bear Stearns equity holdings.*

What this means is that while their philosophy did not permit experiencing the light and highs of nosebleed interest income gains of the recent past, they are and we by extension, are not experiencing the darkness of collapse and huge loss. I hasten to say that MOA and The Regional Conference Retirement Fund are not immune to market downturns. But while the general market may have pneumonia we will, by God’s grace, only have a head cold-but not hospitalization.

Of course these observations and reports are built on Second Quarter 2008 performances and are not reflective of the disastrous month of September just ending as this newsletter is being published. However, if past performance is an indicator, our long-term health should be bumpy but good.

Finally, it should be understood and trumpeted throughout the land and country that the long-term health and viability of this retirement plan is grounded in the ongoing health of the Regional Conferences that support it. This takes us to the core mission and purpose of every congregation and Conference—spreading this gospel of the Kingdom—spiritual and numerical growth in memberships and faithfulness in Christian Stewardship.

Let us pray and work diligently to make the blessings of our faith a reality in every phase of our living.



## Let's Discuss the Money—Part Two

We continue this topic review from the July 2008 issue of the Passport. It is reflective of impressions and opinions gathered by the author over four decades of ministry and interactions with workers on this subject from all levels of The Church. The objective is to have a fair and honest interaction about one of the most philosophical and emotional conversations held mostly “off the record” in our ranks.



Way back in the 90s, the NAD gave attention to rising commentary and interest in the issue of compensation by forming a committee to study the possibilities of improving this important area of service. The discussion encompassed several ideas and questions:

1. What is a living wage?
2. Should a pastor's pay be enough so that the spouse does not have to work outside the home?
3. Should the pastor's spouse be compensated for the role they play in ministry?
4. How would the discussion impact uniformity of the wage scale that we seem to strive so hard to maintain?
5. If we changed the wage scale to accommodate some of the ideas generated (a living wage, etc.) should we allow the Conferences that could afford it to implement a different pay scale and leave the others to catch up as they could at a later time?
6. If we decided to change the uniform wage scale how would it affect the Conferences that could not afford to increase pay?
7. Would it be harder for them to attract workers because of lower salaries in their Conferences?
8. Did the compact wage scale (marginal differences in compensation from one job/position to another) preclude giving adequate pay raises to support staff that were not in pastoral ministry?

As I recall, the outcome was a paper and ceremonial change in the remuneration percentages of the wage scale from 150% to 100%. The change was accompanied with a marginally larger than normal annual cost-of-living raise. That act provided what seemed like an increase in pay at the time but left little difference in the amount of compensation and benefits between categories of workers (pastoral, departmental, administrative and non-pastoral positions) failing to adequately and realistically address the issue of compensation. In essence, things were about the same as before the study was done.

There was a time when the benefits package for denominational workers was the envy of many. In the non clergy arena, skilled persons would work for a lower salary because the benefits package was so good—tuition subsidy for church school, medical, etc. being huge draws. However, the narrow differences in pay categories and the governmental requirement for overtime pay for non exempt employees, led one year to a secretary making more for the year than did her boss of higher church rank. As I recall, it was not long afterward that benefits packages for non exempt employees began to shrink. A fair question to ask is was that action precipitated by the Psychology of Envy?

If my information is correct one of our prestigious educational institutions passed up the opportunity to have a United States Post Office on its campus because the Postmaster at that site on the campus would have been a U.S. Government employee and would have had a salary larger than that of the institution's president. Again, was the Psychology of Envy at work?

In the early 90's, some well-intentioned members of means, tried heroically to provide compensation for the spouses of high ranking church officials, so that they would not have to work in a traditional travel restrictive job. They wanted the spouses to be available to travel with their husbands and live without undue financial stress on the families.

Without question an argument can be made and the record will show that they could have found a better way to get this done. However the fact that they did not, caused a firestorm of protests that totally obscured, if not obliterated, what may have been an honest unusual if not heroic attempt to address that important issue. It was and is an issue that faces all whose positions require extensive travel and separation from their spouses.

I listened and even debated the issue in the hallways, lobbies and restrooms in “off the record” conversations about the matter at various meetings. Among the opinions expressed was one that suggested that to allow it would give those members too much influence with and over the leaders. The fact is because of their philanthropy and dedication to common SDA goals and mission, they still had and even still have to this very day, an inordinate amount of influence with church leadership. However, the prevailing opinion which rang out in clear if not strident tones was, “if we all cannot get it then they should not get it either.” Sadly the need remains almost universally admitted, occasionally addressed, virtually uncontested and unsolved. Is the Psychology of Envy driving the prevailing winds yet again?



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# Look for a special Holiday Issue of the Passport set to arrive by December 1, 2008



In too many instances our church has started out ahead of other denominations in health, private school education, and in the Black community low income housing, only to stagnate and watch others pass us by. Does not the rapidly rising cost of living demand that compensation is seriously addressed free from jealousy and envy? Can we any longer afford to pretend that this is not an issue while our youth continue to explain that given the current state of financial affairs, they cannot afford to work for The Church? Must we continue lagging behind as the world and other religious organizations, including selected ones within our own denomination, move further ahead?

Well, since it is not self-serving coming from the sidelines of retirement and, since your axe to grind is already sharpened, you may want to engage in dinner table leisure time conversations with the powers that be and pray that your input will help change things. This may put us in a position to enrich our ranks with additional workers who are the best qualified, adequately compensated and freed from the stress of unmet financial needs.



Finally, accomplishing this great feat is about far more than just money and "living large." It is not unreasonable to believe that such free and satisfied workers will render better and more productive service. It is not unreasonable to believe that under the Spirit, such a satisfied worker force, rightly trained, will inspire and re-energize the membership with a thirst for the person-to-person, winning of souls so necessary for finishing the work in these United States. Would not this help prepare a people to meet the Lord in the air when He comes?

Joseph W. McCoy

## Hard Questions That Demand an Answer



In the quiet corridors of denominational employment, conversations occasionally get around to compensation for pastor's spouses. Employment for spouses outside denominational organizations and frequency of movement with pastoral assignments in too many instances mitigate against spouses remaining on a job long enough to earn retirement benefits. In addition to that, pastoral assignments do not always come with denominational employment for the spouse and on those occasions when they do, re-assignment usually comes before vesting is achieved.

I know of one situation where the spouse of one of our pastors has 15 years of service credit but because of frequency of movement and breaks-in-service when denominational employment was not available, she is not vested. If she can find Regional Conference employment for three more years she could qualify for benefits under the Regional Conference Retirement Plan Eighteen Year Rule (number of years of service equaling 18 despite breaks-in-service).

**So here is the question:** *Given the high expectations of the spouse by the conferences and the congregations in supportive roles for ministering Workers, is it time to seriously consider paying the spouses an amount equal to a full or part-time salary and qualify them for retirement benefits? And if the Conferences decide to do this, should it come with a formal job description and "accountability" or should the generally accepted expectations of a spouse be enough for compensation without a formal job description and "accountability?"*



**Does anyone have an answer?  
Do you have an answer?  
Your responses are welcomed at:  
[passport@regionalministry.org](mailto:passport@regionalministry.org)**

## The Wellness Corner



It does not generate many, if any questions when I travel around the country talking to retirees and those contemplating retirement, but wellness is a subject that needs far more thought and attention than we give to it. Recently, I saw in a national magazine that the Boeing Corp. of American aircraft building fame was trying to scrap its traditional pension plan. Failing to scrap it to avoid a strike, Boeing proposed "killing" some of the retiree medical benefits. The labor union strongly resisted it suggesting that such a move was a "no-go."

The General Motors Corp. of American automobile building fame is struggling to remain viable because it is saddled in part with enormous healthcare benefits costs for its retirees. Adventists are known to the world as people who eat healthier and live longer because of their emphasis on health. In recent times however, most of us have to admit that we are not vigorously practicing what we have preached.

Retirees on the Regional Conference Retirement Plan have a unique opportunity to practice what we preach. Yes, even in retirement. The healthier the retiree is, the lower our healthcare costs. The lower our costs in healthcare, the more we will have to enhance your monthly benefits. Healthcare expenses go to physicians, hospitals and other healthcare professionals. Increased monthly benefits go into your pocket to improve or maintain your quality of life.

The Regional Conference Retirement Plan does not need to go the way of Boeing and General Motors. Please help us by helping yourself. Your children and grandchildren will love you for it and so will we.

### **Exercise Tips and Precautions:**

*(Information is gathered from the Adventist Risk Website [www.adventistrisk.org/wellness](http://www.adventistrisk.org/wellness))*

**For outdoor activities, take appropriate precautions under special weather conditions.**

#### **On hot, humid days:**

- ◆ Exercise during cooler parts of the day such as early morning or early evening after the sun has gone down.
- ◆ Exercise less than normal for a week until you become adapted to the heat.
- ◆ Drink lots of fluids, particularly water. You do not need extra salt because you get enough salt in your diet. Also, a well conditioned body learns to conserve salt so that most of the sweat is water.
- ◆ Watch out for signs of heat stroke, such as feeling dizzy, weak, lightheaded, and/or excessively tired; sweating stops; or body temperature becomes dangerously high.
- ◆ Wear a minimum of light, loose-fit clothing. Avoid rubberized or plastic suits, sweatshirts



and sweat pants. Such clothing will not actually help you lose weight any faster by making you sweat more. The weight you lose in fluids by sweating will be quickly replaced as soon as you begin drinking fluids again. This type of clothing can also cause dangerous high temperatures, possibly resulting in heat stroke.

#### **On cold days:**

- ◆ Wear one layer less of clothing than you would wear if you were outside but not exercising. It is also better to wear several layers of clothing rather than one heavy layer.
- ◆ Use old mittens, gloves, or cotton socks to protect your hands.
- ◆ Wear a hat, since up to 40 percent of your body's heat is lost through your neck and head.
- ◆ On rainy, icy or snowy days, be aware of reduced visibility for yourself and for drivers, and reduced traction on pathways.



#### **Be aware of possible signs of heart problems such as:**

- ◆ Pain or pressure in the left mid-chest area, left neck, shoulder, or arm during or just after exercising. Vigorous exercise may cause a side stitch while exercising, a pain below your bottom ribs, which is not the result of a heart problem.
- ◆ Sudden dizziness, cold sweat, pallor or fainting.
- ◆ Ignoring these signals and continuing to exercise may lead to serious heart problems.

**Should any of these signs occur, stop exercising and call your doctor!**

(Talk to your doctor or other health professionals if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [healthinfo@osu.edu](mailto:healthinfo@osu.edu))

## **Laugh Out Loud (LOL)**



(August 1990 – Lebanon, IN) - The Lebanon Reporter carried the story about a preacher who wanted his church board to approve the purchase of a new chandelier for the structure's lobby. But, every time he brought the subject up, he was voted down. Even his secretary voted against it. Finally, he asked her what the trouble was as far as getting a new chandelier.



**"First**, she answered, I don't know how to spell it for the minutes.

**Second**, no one here knows how to play one.

**And finally**, what we really need around here are some new lights."

**For More Information Contact:** Regional Conference Retirement Plan

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