

## Proposal Presentation

**Title:** Adventist Views on Creation

Please consider our proposal presentation for the category of other topics: relevant and timely information on controversial social issues in the Adventist church.

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**Introduction:** The issue of Creation science is important for Adventists as “Creation” is one of the key doctrines of the church and is inextricably linked to other doctrines including the “Sabbath.” Recent discoveries in science seem to challenge the traditional and strongly held Adventist belief in a literal six-day, 6,000 year old Creation. Well-meaning church members differ in their views and claim support for their positions using both Biblical and scientific sources. In a 2016 survey, Adventists were asked to indicate their views, among other things, on the timeline of Creation and the nature of God’s role in it. In a related 2016 survey, Adventist Pastors were asked whether they supported the idea of teaching Creation science in public school. These primary results, along with a comparison by demographics as well as religious and political orientation, will be shared in this presentation. The presentation will include a discussion of the implications of various views on the integrity of Adventist doctrine and suggestions for continued exploration of views on this important issue.

**Methodology:** Just days after Donald Trump’s surprising victory in the 2016 national election, *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today* readers were invited by email to participate in a short survey about their religious and political leanings, voting behavior, and positions on several controversial social issues including beliefs about Creation. Over a two-week period in November 2016, 1,621 responses to the survey were collected using SurveyMonkey, within them several hundred responses to optional open-ended items. These comments were varied and substantive, and some dealt with Creation. While the survey included questions about religious and political orientations, voting behavior, and other controversial issues, one question dealt specifically with views on Creation. A 2016 survey of pastors, with 772 respondents, included a question related to teaching Creation science in public school. Data from both surveys were analyzed focusing on frequency distributions and cross tabulations using the chi square to test for significance.

### Findings:

Among other things, researchers found that 55% believed that “God created the earth and humans pretty much in their present form in six literal days within the last 6,000 years or so”; 28% agreed that “God created the earth and humans pretty much in their present form, but many thousands of years ago”; and 12% believed that “Life has developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, but God guided this process. The beliefs of pastors, elders, and Sabbath school teachers, who participated in the surveys, follow a similar pattern of beliefs. Additionally, the relationships between religious orientation, age, gender, ethnicity, and education along with particular viewpoints were explored. Respondents with lower levels of education and who were more religiously and politically conservative were significantly more likely to believe in a short-chronology, literal six-day Creation. Women were slightly more likely to hold this same view. About two in three respondents ages 18 to 35 believe in a literal six-day Creation in a short-chronology. About half of those in

other age groups held the same belief with those over age 65 somewhat less likely to adhere to the traditional view. Ethnicity and whether one was born in the U.S. seemed to make little difference in beliefs about Creation. Findings from a survey Adventist pastors indicated that nearly two in three favor teaching Creation science in public schools.

### **Implications:**

These findings have significant implications for the Seventh-day Adventist church. Fully 83% of Adventists who participated in the survey believe in a literal Creation. This indicates strong support in for the traditional Adventist view about Creation in general and across various demographics. Strong support by pastors, church elders, and Sabbath school teachers for teaching Creation science in public schools is further indication that large segments of the church believe that God created the earth and humans. Key differences in beliefs about Creation center on the timeline. Was the earth created by God in six literal days within the last 6,000 years or many thousands of years ago? This question is the center of the debate. Interestingly, belief in a literal six-day Creation seems to wane as Adventists age and among the more educated. Given that the Adventist population is both highly educated and aging; church leaders and Adventist educators will face increasing challenges on how to reconcile the long held traditional position with new understanding seeming supported by science and more varied viewpoints.

### **Presenter Information**

- **John T. Gavin** is Chair of the Social Work Department at Washington Adventist University and serves as Director of the Center for Metropolitan Ministry.
- **William W. Ellis** teaches Political Studies at Washington Adventist University and is affiliated with the Center for Law & Public Policy.
- **Curtis J. VanderWaal** is Chair of the Department of Social Work at Andrews University and serves as the Director of the Center for Community Impact Research at the Institute for Prevention of Addictions.

**Abstract** – Where do Adventist laity stand on the controversial issue of Creation and teaching Creation science in public schools? Key findings from a survey of Adventists and one of Adventist pastors in 2016 addressing these questions are shared along with comparisons by demographics and implications for the church.

### **References**

- Gavin, J. T., Ellis, W. W., & VanderWaal, C. J. (Fall 2012). Checking the Political Pulse of the University: Findings from the 2012 SDA Religion and Social Issues Survey [Abstract]. *Spectrum Magazine*, 40(4), 52-64.
- Gavin, J. T., Ellis, W. W., & VanderWaal, C. J. (2016). The Adventist Vote: Findings from the 2016 National Election Survey. *Spectrum Magazine*, November 23, 2016.