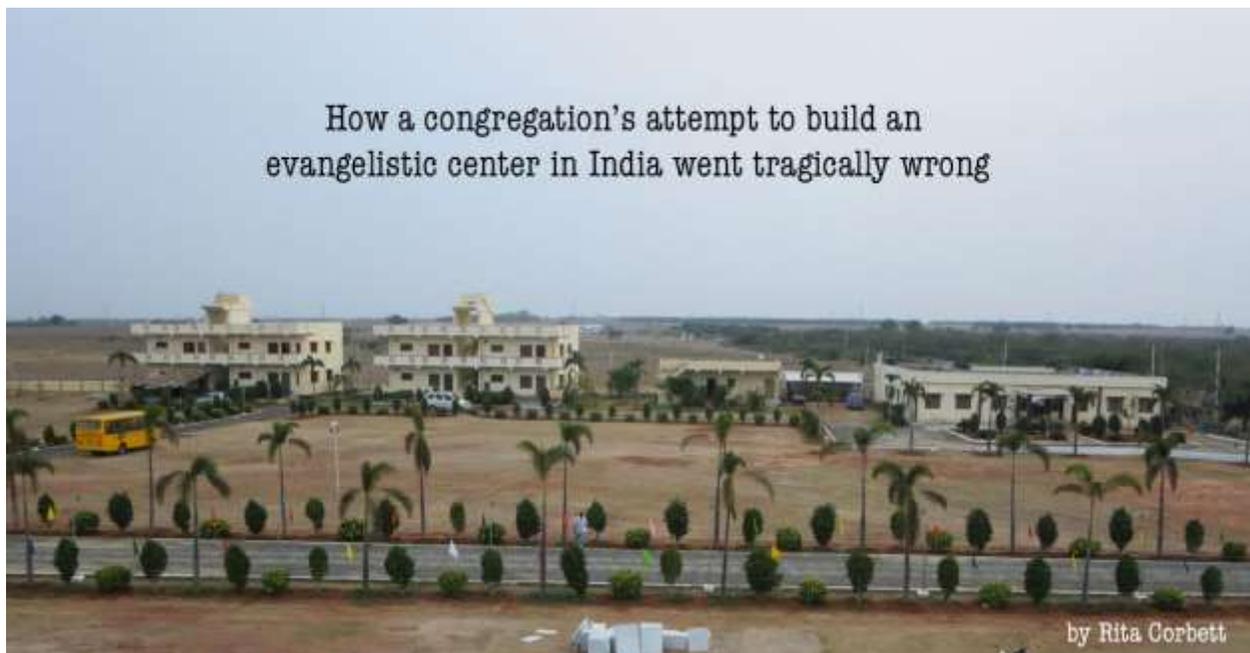


# Adventist *Today*

## The Sad Saga of the Hope Center



by Rita Corbett | 8 April 2018 |

The story I'm about to tell is a difficult one, with many loose ends remaining, and I'm reluctant to tell it.

I'm a lifelong Seventh-day Adventist, a missionary's child, and I love this church. When an opportunity arose to help out with a major project in India, my husband and I were excited! What has happened since, however, has made us wonder whether we did the right thing to invest in the Hope Center in the South East Andhra Conference.

In 2006 I began working with local church officers and numerous Gospel Outreach volunteers in South East Andhra Conference. At the time, we thought the conference's organization was effective. We saw a lot of evangelism, and we wanted to help them to do more. We asked, "What does this part of India most need?" Conference president John Victor Chinta and treasurer Y. Subhakar Rao said that having to rent buildings for conference offices depleted their resources.

How about building up a conference center? Together we envisioned a multi-purpose conference center with offices, staff residences, a training center and school. Our vision was to offer programs to benefit the local villagers socially, mentally, physically and spiritually. We would call it the Hope Center.

We made contact with church entities on both sides of the ocean to ascertain if such a project was feasible. Prospective donors included former missionaries, mission-minded small groups, and Adventist business persons. We consulted Ron Watts, a former British Columbia Conference president then working in India. The program had blessings from all sides. The Southern Asia Division (SUD) and the East Central India Union (ECIU, one of 3 unions in India), agreed to contribute an administration building if land were purchased.

One stipulation of the British Columbia Conference, as required by Canada Revenue Agency (Canada's equivalent of the IRS), was that an agreement be made between the sponsoring non-profit agency in Canada and overseas project leaders. This standard document spelled out what kinds of accountability would be expected from both sides. I was appointed as representative for the project. It would be sponsored by the Williams Lake Seventh-day Adventist Church, which would also accept and disburse the funds. Signatories included the church treasurer and myself, as well as the South East Andhra Conference president and treasurer.

The first order of business was to buy a 10-acre parcel suitable for long-term development. When I was shown the purchased property, it was only five acres. Still, conference leaders said, the property was "ideal", and land had been costlier than they'd expected. The size seemed sufficient, so we didn't question it; after all, they know how to do business in India better than we do!

At that point we hadn't been told about the difference between purchased land and assigned land, which is land belonging to the villagers as heritage property. Assigned land cannot be sold except in particular circumstances. That this piece of land was from the latter category was not revealed to donors until many years later, a fact that still remains a threat to the project.

At each subsequent stage in the plan, estimates for the next step would be handed to me during the agreement-required annual visit. Amounts could be sizable, often between \$35,000 and \$100,000 CDN. In addition to land and building costs, smaller amounts were sometimes requested for medical supplies, surgeries, bicycles for pastors, church buildings and parsonages, items for health clinics, evangelistic campaigns, and motorcycles for organizational supervisors. Eventually we backed away from some of these additional items, deciding we wanted to focus on finishing the Hope Center buildings without delay.

### **Problems and a Meeting**

Initially things appeared to be going well. The first hint of trouble came when we were alerted that an employee who was in some unrelated difficulty had documentation that, he claimed,

showed dishonest use of funds designated for this project. (He had presumably collected these documents to protect his own job.)

At that point, all we had were rumors. But we became increasingly suspicious when, in response to our questions, we couldn't seem to get straight answers or financial records from the leaders we had trusted to build the Hope Center. Finally on July 25, 2016 we received an email from then conference president (now union president) John Victor Chinta, stating that the Hope Center had "no land and finance issues."

Yet his assurance continued to be contradicted. Increasingly serious questions about project integrity came our way, from questions about the land purchase, to registration, building permits, and conflicts with the local authorities. Notices were forwarded to us from government entities, including a frightening warning that the buildings would be destroyed if the land issues weren't resolved and proper building permits obtained.

My next visit was planned for December of 2016, during which I had arranged a stopover in Delhi to meet with division leaders to thank them for their support of the project. Because we now had so many unanswered questions, I prepared a detailed presentation for that meeting. Those present included the SUD president Ezras Lakra, treasurer Selvin Moorthy, secretary Dr. M. Wilson; union president (formerly South East Andhra Conference president) John Victor Chinta, and the former and current treasurers of the South East Andhra Conference, Y.S. Rao and K. Prasad.

In my presentation I was very clear that I didn't want to cast blame, but to find a remedy that would minimize damage to the project and to the reputation of the church. Documents that were required by the agreement, and that were so necessary for our relationship with both our donors and Canada Revenue, were urgently needed.

We did not receive the documents from the brethren then, and have received none since, despite repeated requests to all levels. Any documents received have come from sources other than church officers.

However, in the meeting a troubling suggestion was floated. If I would quit asking questions and just sign off on the finances of the project so far, the plans we'd had for the Hope Center could then be continued. This smacked of developmental blackmail.

At the same time, South East Andhra Conference officers pled that they were inexperienced and therefore confused by the land and building proceedings. That claim did not ring true to us, especially since during the Hope Center development the man who is now the Southern Asia Division president, Ezras Lakra, had been the head of the India Finance Association, the denominational entity that is charged with holding and managing all church property titles within India. Why not ask for help from the experts?

Although Mr. Lakra attended the December 2016 meeting, he spent the majority of the time on his phone, not participating in the meeting nor answering questions. It felt to us like he wasn't taking us very seriously. The meeting ended with no evident concerns on their part, and no plan. And of course, no documents.

The denials and excuses didn't stop the current South East Andhra Conference Treasurer Mr. Prasad from asking me, near the end of that same visit, for a great deal more money which he said he needed to correct the legal and financial problems with the Hope Project—problems which his superiors had told us not long before didn't exist!

### **The Situation Now**

At best, the recipients of our donations have not met the reporting expectations of the accountability agreement they signed; more likely there has been a misuse of funds, and possibly fraud. We've brought our concerns and documentation requests to all levels of church leadership, up and down the organizational pyramid on both sides of the ocean: from our supportive local church and British Columbia Conference, to legal entities for the Canadian Union and North American Division, the General Conference President's office and the GC Auditing Service, as well as division, union, and conference officers in India. When the issue was communicated to the GC President's Office, the response was that they would leave the matter with the SUD.

Beyond the local church and the British Columbia Conference, communication has come to a standstill. There is no offer of a plan to remedy this situation, or even to discover the truth about the threats to the project that we've documented. Meanwhile, scores of emails keep coming to us from other sources that seem to indicate that the shady practices we encountered may be widespread. At this point we are refusing new donations to the project because their usage cannot be validated. Further development was planned, but is not possible under the present circumstances. The Lake Williams congregation has dissociated itself from the project.

Outside sources have requested information; we received an email from the *Boston Globe* Spotlight division, which in the past investigated abuse in the Catholic Church.

Of particular concern to us is the church's relationship to Canada Revenue and the Internal Revenue Service. Will this reflect on the denomination's reputation with these entities? Canada Revenue can, and has, pursued reports of non-profit fraud.

Of course, problems still exist with local Indian authorities. On February 12 of this year a government notice I was sent a copy of said *"You have constructed buildings in Vallur Grama Panchayat without Grama Panchayat permission. We issued notice in the past. Then you informed Grama Panchayat in written form on 2.04.2015 that you would construct buildings only after taking permission from Grama Panchayat. But so far you have not produced any document to Grama Panchayat for permission. Therefore, on receiving this notice, within 7 days you need to submit concerning documents to Grama Panchayat. If not, it is to let you know that Grama Panchayat will take legal action against you."* This may be related to our having

purchased *assigned* village land, which is usually not sold and then only in very special circumstances. If this is what happened, we may have stolen from the very people we were sent to redeem. If such land is found to be fraudulently obtained, I have been told it is subject to being restored to the rightful owners, which may be the legal action that is threatened.

### **Rumors and Fears**

In trying to understand the situation, I contacted several other charitable nonprofits that worked with the Adventist church in India. We heard stories that were duplicates of ours, and some even more shocking. While none of us object to Indian church leaders seeking money from donors abroad—indeed, we feel it is necessary for us to be generous—many reported strong resistance to any ongoing accountability once a project was begun, and consequences to those who tried to insist on project integrity.

Since then, rumors have come to us that I am hesitant to repeat, yet I fear them enough that I feel I should. Trusted sources have told us of Indian church leaders who have far more money to spend than can be accounted for by their salaries, including enough to purchase various properties. One of my pastor friends was told by an officer that the conference didn't have enough money to help him with housing (local pastors are sometimes treated very poorly) then added, "Just wait until you get into leadership—your money problems will be over." Another pastor told me candidly that because of the degree of corruption that is reputed to exist among church leaders, they have lost moral authority to enforce church standards or discipline.

A friend I trust in India interviewed a Hindu contractor who had built much of the Hope Center. In addition to noting that the building costs reported to us were inflated above what he'd been paid, the builder also said that he was asked to sign the completion certificates without the final amounts written in—in other words to apply his signature on blank certificates so that later any amount could be written in. His concerns have been recorded, and he is willing to come forward with his testimony. This businessman, a non-Christian, called the church leaders he worked with "crooks." According to the interviewer, he "many times told the officers not to indulge in dishonest billing, etc., under his contract."

### **Lessons Learned**

Could we donors have handled this better? The efforts of the Williams Lake SDA Church have been unimpeachable, though in hindsight there are things we would do differently. When estimates were received and payouts made, discussion with builders and the comparing of all documents for each expenditure might have helped. At this late date those documents might not reveal the whole story even if we could access them: the estimates and payouts would align, camouflaging what was actually taking place.

As I said, we tell this story reluctantly. We are aware that we in the West are far richer than those in the organizations we sought to help. The donors will not be put out of house and home because of their willing contributions. But we have become disillusioned by our experience. This

story is shared, at least partially, to call for more serious auditing and attention to accountability in the denomination, as well as to warn those like us who make substantial donations to projects where accountability may be cleverly circumvented.

Mostly, we grieve for the lost effectiveness of the church's message in Southeastern India. What about the salvation of those who may have orchestrated fraud or embezzlement? What of the ensuing loss of outreach interests? What of the abused rank-and-file pastors, left to celebrate our great hope in unspeakably difficult circumstances?

It was expected in the first place that leaders would be honest, and that when there were problems, they would be honorable. Sadly, in the case of the Hope Center, we fear neither has been true.



*Having grown up on an African mission station in Zaire, Rita (Schaffner) Corbett jumps at any chance to be involved in a church development and health-education classes overseas. Her husband Grant is an orthodontist, and they have 6 children, 4 of whom are adopted and are the colors of the rainbow. Rita is very involved in her home church in Lake Williams, British Columbia, and teaches family health classes in the community.*



## Donor Group Releases Lakra Letter about Hope Center

29 April 2018 | The group of donors, headquartered in the Williams Lake (British Columbia) Adventist Church, that has accused the denomination's South East Andhra Conference of mismanagement of funds for a million-dollar conference center, has made public their letter to Pastor Ezras Lakra, president of the Southern Asia Division of the General Conference.

The letter, written by group spokesperson Rita Corbett, details a 21-month effort to get to the bottom of persistent rumors of an illegal land purchase, builder's receipts with altered amounts, and large amounts of donors' money unaccounted for.

An interview with the primary builder, a Hindu man, revealed that he'd suspected fraud when he'd been asked to sign completion certificates with the amounts not filled in. The interview confirmed that what he had billed the conference was less than what the conference billed the Hope Center donors.

The Hope Center project, conceived in 2006, was begun with a contract, as required by Canadian Revenue, that offered protective conditions for the project. The conference has never produced the requested, agreed-to documents, or allowed the specified audit. Instead, says the letter, donors have been met with persistent stonewalling and excuses from conference, union and division leaders. The donors' group has since discontinued supporting the project, and refuses all further donations, until documentation and audits are completed.

When the issue was communicated in writing to General Conference President Ted Wilson, Corbett says, a reply was received from Magdiel

Perez-Schultz, an assistant to the president on behalf of the GC President's office, simply stating this was a matter to be left with the Southern Asia Division.

According to church policy, Divisions are only offices of the General Conference, not separate entities.

Efforts to work with Lakra have been unsuccessful.

The entire letter can be read [here](#).

Corbett says that some donors are now pursuing legal opinions from lawyers in India, Canada and the United States. "I would prefer that donors didn't go to law," says Corbett. "But I understand how frustrated some of our donors have become with the impossibility of getting accountability from anyone. At this point, it seems nothing short of a forensic audit could satisfactorily clear this up."

Corbett says that the donors' going public with the problem has put them in contact with donors to other projects in India who have had similar complaints, as well as frustrated Indian church members and denominational employees who are aware of financial irregularities in church leadership. "Our desire remains for Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic outreach to continue in India," says Corbett. "But we cannot do it if leaders are being dishonest." She encourages others who have faced such problems to write to General Conference leaders, asking them to take a stronger hand in ensuring financial accountability in India.

From: Rita Corbett <ritacorbett1234@gmail.com>

Subject: Concern for India

Date: March 26, 2018 at 11:38:30 AM PDT

To: Ezras Lakra <ezraslakra@sudadventist.org>

Dear Brother Lakra,

It is with great dismay that I received the attached document, which has been translated into English for the reader's benefit. Both copies are included for reference.

For 21 months, multiple attempts have been made to get to the bottom of what initially appeared to be rumors of corruption at the Hope Center. Sadly, those inquiries have turned into very serious allegations. Summarized, my understandings are as follows:

1. In mid-2016, information was received indicating that officers of the South East Andhra Section may have robbed the local populace of 'assigned' land, and that requested building permits had not been obtained. Officers had apparently been warned, and a written response had been sent indicating that a Hope Center officer would comply. (All those documents are in hand.)

However, as time passed, it became apparent, in addition to the land issue, that funds appear to have been embezzled by officers—funds that were slated for Hope Center development. Some of this was achieved by inflating estimates.

2. Later in 2016, on December 7, as representative of the Williams Lake SDA Church, I had arranged a meeting to thank Division leaders for their support of the Hope Center project. When myself and a donor arrived, many additional officers were present. The group suddenly included the Division President, Secretary and Treasurer, the Union President, and the former and current Section Treasurers. Due to circulating rumours, a presentation was given in hopes of exploring the difficulty and offering a remedy for any irregularities. At that time further documents were promised, which have never been sent, even after further requests. There was no attempt to discuss or rectify the issues supported by leadership, and conversation simply ceased.

3. The above presentation by myself included:

- a. a summary of current understandings,
- b. suggestions as to how the issues could be resolved for the benefit of all, and
- c. specific requests for documents as noted in the signed agreement between the supporting church, Williams Lake SDA Church, and the South East Andhra Section.

4. Multiple letters have since been sent to various offices of the South East Andhra Section, East Central India Union, Southern Asia Division, General Conference, North American Division, SDA Church in Canada, the British Columbia Conference, and various of their legal representatives, including GCAS. In other words, contacts have been made requesting assistance from both sides of the issue up to all levels of the church organization. Donors and the sponsoring church have both been kept informed of the continuing lack of progress.

5. Another issue that has repeatedly arisen, while the agreement provides for a chosen committee to conduct an 'audit', is that the chosen committee has never been allowed to begin its work, even though input from that committee into the audit was also promised me by a legal voice for the church.

6. Some additional information that has been communicated with me I have been denied permission to disclose. Still, I believe each of these can be confirmed at present either by myself or committee members:

- a. the urgent contents of the document below
- b. that a Hope Center builder is willing to share his experience with estimates and payouts
- c. a government employee has lost his job as a result of a possible bribe from SDA officers
- d. much confidence has been lost in church leadership in the Section, Union and Division
- e. there is serious concern as to the long-term effect and safety of Adventist and Christian work
- f. requests for copies of relevant, agreed-upon documents have been repeatedly ignored

- g. a request was received from a large US newspaper for information
- h. President Ted Wilson's recent visit to India was highly controlled
- i. there are multiple officers who should apparently be released from their responsibilities, and sadly, could in some cases be jailed
- j. politics and financial gain appear to be driving multiple leaders
- k. some rank-and-file pastors and workers have been mistreated due to politics
- l. problems within leadership are not being dealt with, and nepotism is being practiced
- m. personal, monetary desires have become a driving force
- n. serious issues are not being handled because some leaders can be blackmailed due to their financial dealings, and are seen as "cheats".
- o. many items have now been reported to the government of India
- p. there has been a total refusal of the request for a 3rd party, independent audit
- q. communication with the General Conference indicates they will "leave it with the Division"
- r. it was urged to SUD leaders at Fall Council in 2016 that the 'issues' with the Hope Center be repaired, indicating that the issue is known.
- s. multiple persons have promised me reports or updates but none have materialized
- t. those to whom I have sent reports and documents no longer communicate with me
- u. donors are left with a sense of no accountability on the part of the church

Those that I believe should be suspended immediately from their positions due to possible complicity and multi-faceted issues until accountability is restored, include, but are not at all limited to the list below. General Conference and General Conference Accounting Services officers may also figure in, as may be multiple other connected officers.

Ezras Lakra, President, Southern Asian Division

Dr. M. Wilson, Secretary, Southern Asia Division

Selvin Moorthy, Treasurer, Southern Asia Division

Pr. John Victor Chinta, President, East Central India Union

Mr. E. Pilli, Treasurer, East Central India Union

Leroy Samuel, past Treasurer, East Central India Union

Mr. Y. Subhakar Rao, Treasurer, South Andhra Section and former Treasurer, South East Andhra Section

Mr. K. Prasad, Treasurer, South East Andhra Section

Mr. V.P. Singh, President, North India Union

During the past few months, in view of the donor group's inability to observe any cooperation with the signed agreement in the face of serious issues, and with mounting evidence of fraud and corruption of various sorts, the donors group has contacted me. The donors are considering putting a multi-pronged approach into action in order to clear up the matter and re-establish integrity.

This is being done entirely for the sake of the future of the Adventist Church work in India and worldwide. Their efforts may include, but not be limited to:

- i. legal means available in Canada, the US, and India
- ii. the assistance of Canada Revenue Services
- iii. the assistance of the Internal Revenue Service
- iv. involvement of inquiring reporters
- v. involvement of the Indian Government
- vi. recovery of all funds, legal costs, and damages

Donors have informed me that due to the lack of response from the church organization this is the last opportunity they will have to communicate on this matter personally and directly.

Frankly, there seems to be no cause for further delay, given that reports of 'cover-up' and such continue. It appears to me that the integrity of the Section, Union, and Division are in dire straits. Furthermore, multiple charitable agencies that have long cooperated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church have reported similar troubles to me. Donors have requested from me copies of all documents in my possession relating to the Hope Center. Those currently number in the thousands.

The donors' desires have never been other than to help, even now—to support the church, enable evangelism, and offer positive development. It is beyond sad when practices within an Adventist organization do not reflect those same values. They care nothing for the funds. Donors wholeheartedly believe that once funds are given to the church, they are no longer ours, but God's.

However, some feel they have a responsibility, an accountability to God, in the case of planned, serious, misdirection. My personal hope is that involved leaders in the church in India will once again recognize they have been called to be servants.

Donors have hesitated to take action for a long time as their thought was initially to let the wheat grow with the tares, but it now appears, given how widespread the issues appear, that it is no longer a case of wheat and tares, but rather a case of wolves scattering the sheep. Those who have impeded the work of God in India may have a terrible price to pay. The cost in the judgment may be beyond our saddest imaginations. Personally, my primary concern is for the villagers and the errant spiritual leaders in the church, whom I have loved as my own family.

Sincerely,

Rita Corbett

cc: All mentioned in the email

Various involved church levels & advisors Committee chosen according to agreement

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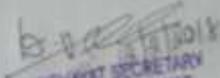
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PANCHAYAT SECRETARY  
GRAMA PANCHAYAT  
VALLURU (M.S.)  
Sensory Mod. Panchayat Office

Vallur

Date: 12. 02. 2018

Notice

It is to let South East Andhra Section that is in Vallur Grama Panchayat know through this notice is,

You have constructed buildings in Vallur Grama Panchayat without Grama Panchayat permission. We issued notice in the past. Then you informed Grama Panchayat in written form on 2. 04. 2015 that you would construct buildings only after taking permission from Grama Panchayat. But so far you have not produced any document to Grama Panchayat for permission. Therefore, on receiving this notice, within 7 days you need to submit concerning documents to Grama Panchayat. If not, it is to let you know that Grama Panchayat will take legal action against you.

Panchay Secretary

Grama Panchayat

Vallur

Tanguturu Mdl: Prakasam dist



# Adventist *Today*

## India Union Director Confronts Officers about Financial Misdeeds

22 July 2018 In a letter obtained by Adventist Today, Elder Joshi Victor Rayavarapu, Health and Temperance Director of the East Central India Union, writes to the union's executive committee and church constituency, documenting financial misdeeds being committed by union officers, president Chinta John Victor, secretary Cherukuri Samuel Paul, and treasurer Pilli Edward Prasad.

In the letter, Rayavarapu claims that the budget is not adhered to nor reviewed by the Union Committee, nor is there committee approval of money spent. "I see lakhs [hundreds of thousands] of rupees of loss in the union statement, and how was it processed without the committee approving?"

The entire letter can be read [here](#).

Rayavarapu says that the required salary audits are done privately, without the committee's involvement. Health insurance details, overseas travel budgets and cell-phone purchases are not disclosed or approved, as required by policy.

In addition, he notes that:

- The treasurer spent money on property in Hyderabad "without the permission of the committee. Is this not unauthorized spending?"
- "Many court cases are going on and not one is brought to the attention and approval of the committee; thousands of rupees are spent. No committee approval. ... What is our response to the constituency and the Lord?"
- "The retired workers have been suffering so much for the non payment of the gratuity to them. Even after two to three years after their

retirement. The union executive committee has appointed a gratuity committee of which I am a committee member; so far in the last three years not once the chairman, the treasurer of the union, has called for a committee nor the available funds made known to anyone. This has to be brought to light and the suffering of the pioneer workers be set right.”

Rayavarapu writes, “The Union Committee has been reduced by these three officers to the level of nothing, and lakhs of rupees spent by these three [the officers] and the business office.”

He adds, “The financial situation is so alarming an emergency is needed to be declared.”

This follows a long history of allegations of financial misdeeds by the leaders of the Indian church, some of which have been reported by Adventist Today.

Adventist Today has requested a response from the accused ECIU officers.



Joshi Victor Rayavarapu



# SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

## East Central India Union

Post Bag No.21, Chapel Road,  
Hyderabad - 500 001.

Telephone : 040 - 23201832, 23200079, 23202704

Fax : 040 - 23200079

Email : [eciuroffice@gmail.com](mailto:eciuroffice@gmail.com)

Joshi Victor Rayavarapu  
Director, Health and Temperance Dept  
ECIU of SDA  
Hyderabad 500001

July 20, 2018

To All The Elected Members of the East Central India Union Executive committee and the East Central India union Constituency.

Subject: Miss Management of funds , unauthorized spending and contempt of the committee

Dear Respected members:

The East Central India Union Constituency held in the year 2016 has elected us as members of the union executive body to run the union on behalf of the union constituency, during its absence, and make use of the funds that are given by faithful members , in the form of tithes and offerings and made us the custodians of the funds to make use of the funds for the proclamation of the gospel and be responsible and accountable for the funds.

This letter of mine comes to you after, a lot of prayer. I have a question to place before you. Have we been performing the responsibilities that have been entrusted to us, and have we reviewed the situation of our field, its progress and its aims and goals and be responsible for the finance?

The union has the following to be set, about which I have time and again in writing and orally have informed the chairman about the need to set things right but nothing has been done and hence I bring this to the attention of the committee for its judicial judgment and action.

1.The Budget that is approved by the committee has never been adhered to nor any time has been reviewed . Its mandatory that the audited statement is presented to the year end committee and be approved which has not been done nor is the committee aware as to have far the union has been able to stay with the budget approved. I see lakhs of rupees of loss in the union statement and how was it processed without the committee approving. Is this not mis management of funds and unauthorized spending without the knowledge of the committee.

2. For the last two financial years the salary audit committee was not appointed by the union executive committee but the salary audits are done. How was this done? Is this not contempt of the committee? we as members why are we over looking this gross mistake committed by this chairman. Many workers are harassed and others are audited with no rule or rhyme. These audits are done on the wishes of the ones that are doing the audits settings their own standards. Leaving the union committee as silent spectators. We as a committee have failed to set this in order. This I bring to your attention

3. The retired workers have been suffering so much for the non payment of the gratuity to them. Even after two to three years after their retirement. The union executive committee has appointed a gratuity committee of which I am a committee member so far in the last three years not once the chairman, The treasurer of the union. Has called for a committee nor the available funds is made known to anyone this has to be brought to light and the suffering of the pioneer workers be set right.

4. The funds available in the health insurance is not made known to the committee nor to the committee that was appointed by the union executive committee. This must be brought to the committee and the names of the defaulting units and the names of the beneficiary be submitted to the union executive committee.

5. The financial statement must be reviewed by the union committee with the exhibits which will tell the actual nature of accounts.

6. How WERE the CELLPHONES Bought by the union officers must be presented to committee this was not authorized by the committee how was this purchased? Is this not unauthorized expense.

7. Travel of the union treasurer to the united states was met by the union. This was not authorized by the union executive committee. How was this possible this must be taken up.

8. lakhs of rupees was spent by the treasurer on the Hyderabad property without the permission of the committee. Is not this unauthorized spending.

9. Many court cases are going on and not one is brought to the attention and approval of the committee thousands of rupees is spent. No committee approval. What should be done? And what is our response to the constituency and the lord.

10. The vehicle maintained by the union. I was told by the office manager that I cannot be given the vehicle for official use because that car is only ment for the three officers of the union. As a committee member I would respectfully want to known from you members as to who made this rule and is this union a pleasure area for the officers. The driver has a conflict of interest by owning two vehicles on the campus and how this is being permitted? By these officers. This has to be taken up.

11. The financial situation is so alarming an emergency is needed to be declared.

12. The UNION COMMITTEE HAS BEEN REDUCED BY THESE THREE OFFICERS TO THE LEVEL OF NOTHING AND LAKHS OF RUPEES SPENT BY THESE THREE AND THE BUSINESS OFFICE.

Respected members

I have all the documents to support what has been mentioned above and much more. Its time that we fast and pray and make plans for a needed proceedings, for a better team to work with the union executive committee to do HIS will.

MY NEXT LETTER WILL COME WITH MANY MORE DETAILS LETS GIVE A TRANSPARENT AND CLEAN GOVERNANCE.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely,

SAWA received copy..

Joshi Victor Rayavarapu.



## **Donor, Beware: A Crisis of Integrity in the Mission Field**

By Loren Seibold | 11 August 2018 |

A friend who runs a small Adventist-based non-profit organization told me this story. A few years ago she'd gotten a request from a pastor in Africa, describing how he and his wife were running ministries for children and the elderly which included school, daycare and eldercare, feeding people, as well as transportation to and from events. They wanted a small bus that they could use to pick people up and deliver them to the various programs.

My friend didn't know the African group personally, but this was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and what they described seemed like a good project. Her board agreed, and sent them the money they'd asked for.

A year or so later, a friend of hers was traveling in that part of Africa. "Stop by and see the group we gave the bus to," she said. "Take some pictures for our newsletter, and let us know how the ministry is working, and if there's anything else they need." The friend called her when she got back to the United States. "They didn't buy a bus," she said. "Everyone is still walking to school and eldercare and daycare. But the pastor has a really nice late-model Toyota that he drives his family around in." When the visitor had pushed the issue, the pastor had admitted that he needed the car more, because he'd been promoted to conference president.

My friend didn't resent the pastor having a nice car. After all, she has a nice car. But it did bother her that she had raised money from her donors to buy a bus for a ministry, not a nice car for a conference president. She didn't make a fuss about it. But the next time a request came from them for money, she didn't respond, and she learned that another non-profit that had been supporting the ministry had quit contributing, too.

### **Donor to End User**

At one time we gave all of our offerings to our congregation's treasurer, who sent them via the conference, the union conference and the General Conference to the church's various ministries. The early media ministries—Voice of Prophecy, Faith for Today, It is Written, The Quiet Hour—may have been the first to appeal directly to the donors. That was dribs and drabs compared to what's happening today. Three Angels' Broadcasting Network has become

extraordinarily successful from direct appeals, with large donors willing to overlook 3ABN's moral and financial misdeeds.

Adventist leaders overseas have taken up this direct-to-donor fundraising methodology, which is much helped by Adventist "mission tourists" who got their first taste of mission work with Maranatha or Share Him, but wanted to do more than drop in and do some manual labor or deliver a canned evangelistic series.

But India, Africa and Asia are a long ways from here, and mostly we've just had to accept that our investments were wise ones, given to honest people. But what if that isn't the case?

Rita Corbett is a missionary's daughter who was attracted by the possibilities for evangelism in India when she was doing a health education program there. She went back to her home congregation in Williams Lake, British Columbia, and got others excited about building a conference center for Southeast Andhra Conference. Being good business people (and because Canada Revenue expects a certain level of documentation to establish the legitimacy of projects people are taking a non-profit tax deduction for) the Williams Lake group wrote a contract with the Southeast Andhra Conference which required full transparency and documentation for the Hope Center project.

The bills started coming, but the documentation didn't. In meeting after meeting, Williams Lake representatives heard excuses for the lack of documentation, followed by requests for more money.

Meanwhile, the Williams Lake group began to hear rumors that the land didn't have a clear title. The Hindu builder said in an interview with an outside investigator that he had signed completion certificates without the amounts he was being paid written in, and that the bills that Williams Lake received were higher than what he'd charged the conference. He told the interviewer he felt the Adventists were cheating their donors, and he wasn't happy about it.

None of this could be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. But neither was there the documentation to show it *wasn't* true. The Williams Lake group was reluctant to withdraw funding from a project they believed in. It wasn't until about two years ago that they felt they'd waited long enough, and pulled the plug. The Hope Center got partially completed, but whether the money was spent as promised they may never know for sure.

### **A Major Problem**

Since *Adventist Today* began reporting the Southern Asia Division allegations, the response from Adventists in India has been overwhelming. We receive hundreds of emails and comments saying, "We have long known about this, but we can't get anyone to listen us." Intern level pastors have told us, "They barely pay us anything in the field, but they tell us, 'Just

wait until you get into leadership: your money problems will be over.” When I asked a well-known administrator from India for a comment on the record, he said, “I cannot. I would be hurting friends of mine”—which I took as an admission that he knew some allegations to be true.

It would be horribly unfair to imply that this is happening everywhere, in every developing world field, with every project. But it *is* happening. Yes, I know that every field has malcontents who love to make accusations. We at *Adventist Today* don’t believe everything we hear, and we have published very little of it, because we require good documentation. Yet if even a fraction of what we have received is even partially true, the Southern Asian Division has a problem.

And like the bus in Africa, like the Hope Center, when donors feel they’re being misled they withdraw. One response we read from a Southeast Andhra Conference treasurer spends a thousand words blaming the donors and those who told the story. In spite of he and his fellow leaders having not produced the documentation that was agreed to, the donors, he implies, are being unfair. Even if he sincerely sees it that way, it doesn’t seem like a very good way to encourage continued giving: assuming everything was above board, wouldn’t it have been better to have kept records, and produced them when asked? Why should people keep giving if you’ve told them your failure to account for the money they gave you is their fault?

### **Excuses**

One man thought us ungenerous for pointing any of this out. “You in the west are so rich,” he said. “While we’re struggling from day to day.” I have no doubt that’s true. Some fields have remunerated their workers poorly, and that needs to change. But it just seems to us that helping yourself isn’t the right way to get it. I know that some cultures may not frown on skimming a bit. But mine does. And, it seems to me, Christian principles are against it, too.

“There are countries where corruption is a way of life,” a General Conference officer told me in a hallway conversation at Spring Meeting. “The whole economy is based on corruption. Westerners are upset when they hear about it, but it’s how you do business there.” He’s right. There are places where bribes grease the wheels of commerce. But I didn’t find that a fully satisfying answer in *this* situation. This isn’t about appeasing government officials or the local construction mafia. Here, church leaders are alleged to have taken advantage of the generosity of their fellow Seventh-day Adventists.

There has been a lot of blaming the messenger. No one likes whistleblowers, and the church is no exception. Complaints of sharp practice or dishonest dealing are troubling, and mostly we’d rather not hear them. Indian church leaders vent their spleen at K. Rajee Mathew, an Adventist agricultural engineer from Chennai, who as a concerned layman and church elder has been trying to expose dishonesty, favoritism, lying, fake credentials, criminal actions and abuse

from across the division. Mathews' manner costs him credibility, but he is not, as his opponents accuse, merely making trouble. He wants to see the church change.

Nor are they happy that *Adventist Today* has given voice to these complaints. "But why did you go to *Adventist Today*?" a church official asked Mrs. Corbett. "I came to you first," she said, "and you didn't do anything."

Theft and corruption happens in the western church, too, but there are three things that are better here. First we pay our workers equitably. Second, in the west this kind of behavior is not an accepted part of doing business; it is recognized as dishonesty, and not only not overlooked, but prosecuted. And third, we're more diligent about bookkeeping and auditing. Organizations here don't work in cash, so most of what we do has a trail.

### **What to Do?**

What the Williams Lake/Hope Center group experienced should be a warning to those who give directly to an overseas mission project: should you suspect your gifts aren't being well-used, you may have no recourse. Williams Lake thought they could appeal to the General Conference for help. But that expectation was deflected: Elder Ted Wilson's associate replied, "This will be addressed by the SUD officers." But Elder Lakra has been largely uninterested: when the Williams Lake representatives went to meet with him and his team, he talked to someone else on his phone the entire time rather than participate in the discussion with the donors.

But what about audits? A locksmith once told me "Locks are only for honest people: those who want to can break in anyway." So with audits. A man in GCAS (the General Conference Auditing Service) explained to me that the purpose of an audit is to find out whether the financial records match the actual financial situation. That's a pretty narrow definition. "We may find fraud," he said, "but that's not the purpose of an audit."

A financial audit assumes that honest records are being kept, that everything that is done passes through the treasury. In some parts of the world, that's not a safe assumption. If a contractor is being asked verbally to falsify his contract, as was alleged in Southeast Andhra Conference, how can that be found out? If people are diverting cash into the wrong pocket without ever recording it, who would know? How do you guard against kickbacks? For this you need a messy and expensive *forensic* audit, the kind used by law enforcement to discover financial fraud. No church wants to do that, and I can hardly blame them.

There are things that could be done, though. We have a General Conference that has been very proactive in enforcing policies on women's ordination. We'd appreciate that strong hand more, I think, if we saw them trying to make sure that church leaders around the world deal honestly and lead with integrity in their fields. Lay leaders like Dr. Suranjeen Prasad Pallipamula are

ready to lend their expertise to changing the church culture there. Administrators like Elder Joshi Victor Rayavarapu are exposing what they see in their own offices. They and others like them are just waiting for someone in leadership to hear them and lend a hand.

But the bottom line is this: donor, beware. If you are giving to projects that have no oversight, trusting to the handshakes of brothers in Christ, then you can't complain should you be taken for a ride. Good relationships require good records and honest brokers. No amount of prayers and pious words will substitute for that. I would go so far as to suggest that donors hold back your money from any independent overseas project until the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists takes as much interest in examining the ethical and financial behavior of its division leaders as they do in forcing compliance about theological differences.

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*Loren Seibold is the Executive Editor of Adventist Today*