

# Conflict Seeking Resolution

*Douglas Hackleman*

*Adventist Today Sept/Oct 1993*

Hackleman served as a delegate to last fall's Southeastern California Conference constituency meeting. He then extensively researched the failure of the first presidential nominee's candidacy and was consulted by the SECC's executive committee on the issue. Hackleman here writes the highlights of a complex case that is more fully documented elsewhere in a 130 page report. Thomas Mostert, president of the Pacific Union Conference, has been invited to respond. As we go to press, his response has not been received. We hope to present it in the November/December issue. — *the editors*

**O**n February 25, 1993, the executive committee of the Southeastern California Conference (SECC) voted (20-2) to censure Pacific Union president Thomas J. Mostert for his actions at and surrounding the SECC's 1992 constituency meeting.

The action stated that Mostert "made serious errors in judgment and possibly committed unethical conduct ... by releasing a memo [about SECC presidential nominee Craig Newborn that was] clearly misleading." The memo "listed nine references . . . [but] Follow-up of the references does not support Elder Mostert's statements."

Over a period of three weeks preceding the September 20, 1992, SECC constituency meeting, the nominating committee met together for almost thirty hours and eventually voted unanimously to nominate Elder Craig Newborn as president. Reasons for this choice included: his Christ-centered approach to daily living; the mission-driven focus of his ministry; his distinguished administrative experience under extremely difficult conditions; an extraordinary rapport with young people; and his demonstrated ability to deal effectively with ethnic issues, including those that face the church in SECC.

Newborn, a graduate of Pacific Union College, has a master's degree in history and has completed 70 percent of the course work required for his Ph.D. in religious education.

Ordained in 1975, Newborn has spent most of his denominational service in the Middle East and the East African Union as pastor, evangelist, educator, departmental director and field president. Since 1990 he has taught religion at Loma Linda Academy where in 1991 he received the Loma Linda Chamber of Commerce Teacher of the Year Award and in 1992 the Zapara Excellence in Teaching Award.

Mostert sat with the nominating committee throughout its three, long Sundays of pre-session work and told its members that he would support their nominee.

## **Mostert and Newborn meet**

"How do you feel about the division you have caused in this conference during the past few weeks?" was the first question Newborn remembers Mostert asking when they met at the conference office on the Thursday evening before the constituency meeting. Newborn had wanted a third party present for this pre-session meeting, but the union president refused. After two or three more questions based on statements that Mostert claimed the nominee had made, Newborn told Mostert he would be happy to answer any straightforward questions on any topic but he would not answer any more questions based on hearsay and innuendo. When Mostert continued this interviewing approach, Newborn left the room.

A few minutes later, Newborn encountered members of the nominating committee who were at the conference office in hopes of meeting with

## Conflict Seeking Resolution

him. Shortly after Newborn began to convey to them what had just transpired, Mostert joined the group, and more than twenty minutes of highly charged conversation ensued.

Eventually Mostert said he was going back to the library, and if Newborn wanted to cooperate, he could join him there. The others persuaded Newborn to resume the interview with Mostert.

One of the questions the union president asked Newborn during their reconvened meeting was, “How does it feel to know that you are less qualified to be president than any pastor in this conference?” It was a question that Mostert turned into an assertion on the floor of the constituency meeting three days later.

Finally, Mostert told Newborn that he had contacted nine leaders under whom the nominee had worked overseas and not one of them believed he was qualified for the position. (Mostert made this assertion later on the session floor.) Newborn asked Mostert to name any of the nine leaders he was claiming to have contacted, but the union president refused.

Neither Newborn nor the members of the nominating committee (with one exception) knew that Mostert had already named the nine leaders in a two-page memo (see box, p. 4) that he had been distributing to select delegates earlier that day at the SECC executive committee meeting, or that copies of his memo were circulated extensively among black SECC pastors, one of whom read it to his congregation on the Sabbath morning before the constituency meeting.

Mostert’s memo purports to describe Newborn’s work and character in a ten-point summary that is attributed to the nine church leaders whose names and titles are listed as ‘persons interviewed’ (see box, p. 11).

“All had the same general impression as

expressed below,” wrote Mostert, and there followed characterizations of Newborn as “stubborn,” “arrogant,” “contentious,” “argumentative,” and “unpredictable.” He “often scraps with people” and exhibits “poor judgment in critical situations;” he “doesn’t accept counsel;” he “has had a record of tearing down and disrupting the work where he has been;” he is “definitely not administrative or presidential material;” and “It would be the biggest mistake the conference could make were he to be elected president.” These and most of the memo’s other claims have been pointedly contested by several of the leaders to whom Mostert attributed them.

### **The Constituency Session, September 20, 1992**

During the hour the nominating committee met immediately preceding the constituency session, Mostert still did not share any of his memo material with its members, even when the chairperson, Jay DuNesme, asked whether there was anything further of which the committee needed to be made aware.

When secretary Marta Salcedo presented the nominating committee’s slate of officers to the 763 registered delegates, Mostert was the first to speak at a floor microphone:

I must stand today to vigorously oppose this nomination, as do the other [Pacific] union officers, leaders in the [North American] division, and the General Conference. . .

There are thousands who have similar virtues, . . .

. . . the heart of the concern-is the fact that we have contacted nine people that he worked with overseas . . . . None of those nine union and division presidents that he worked under would recommend him today for president of this conference, and they have quite a list of reasons relating to matters of judgment and temperament . . .

## Conflict Seeking Resolution

“Why,” Mostert asked in conclusion, “would we call someone for president who is less qualified than any ordained minister in this conference?”

The next speaker moved to refer the slate of officers back to the nominating committee, and it was so voted.

After listening to forty-seven delegates, singly and in groups, and stopping for supper, the nominating committee returned the same slate to the delegates--including Newborn for president.

A failed motion to refer the slate to the nominating committee a second time moved North American Division president Al McClure to speak about the Newborn nomination.

“I do not know the nominee,” said McClure. “To my knowledge, I have never seen the gentleman.” But he went on to “question that one year in the mission field with three churches demonstrated administrative skills.” This was an inaccurate representation of Newborn’s fifteen years overseas and his varied administrative experience.

“I personally think,” added McClure, “it [Newborn’s election] would be a drastic mistake to him and to the conference.”

The division president had a final point: “I believe, Brother Chairman, that the person who is elected to the presidency of this conference needs to be loyal to the organization. And some of the publicly stated positions that I have heard by the nominee for president—” Here the acting chair stopped McClure, not because he was starting to speculate about the candidate’s loyalty to the church, but because his three minutes were up.

A few speakers and considerable procedural wrangling later, weary constituents, now depleted

by some 200 representatives, voted Newborn’s nomination down—361 to 202—but not before the nominating committee’s leadership was called “alarmingly inept.” It was told it had done a disservice in bringing Newborn’s name before the body, and a call was made for its replacement--all on the assumption that Mostert had told the truth about the assessments of the nominee supposedly provided by Newborn’s highly positioned past superiors.

### Post-Session Discoveries

As a constituent delegate and a reporter for the Loma Linda University Church newsletter, Dialogue, I succeeded in reaching by phone eight of the nine church leaders that Mostert listed in his memo as the “individuals interviewed” regarding Newborn’s qualifications. I contacted the ninth leader, Manoug Nazarian, indirectly through his son-in-law, an SECC pastor.

Each of these nine leaders was asked whether he had been contacted by Pacific Union president Tom Mostert (or anyone on his behalf) for his assessment of Craig Newborn’s qualifications to be SECC president. Three said they had been contacted by Mostert. A fourth had been contacted by Gary Patterson, assistant to North American Division president Al McClure. The other five said that they had not been queried about Newborn by anyone.

Of the four actually asked for an assessment, two said they hardly knew the man, had never served as his administrative superior, and had no basis for assessing his qualifications.

The only two who actually had provided Mostert with any assessment of Newborn whatsoever were Maurice Battle and Neal Wilson. Wilson, who had never worked with Newborn, admitted frankly, “I was speaking for myself about things I’d heard.”

# Conflict Seeking Resolution

## Mostert's Memo

### Craig Newborn

Only administrative experience:

Interim president of Iran field for one year; 3 churches, 124 members, one pastor—No United States pastoral experience.

A composite evaluation of all the leaders who have worked with Craig Newborn in Africa and the Middle East over a period of 15 years. These were the people in charge of the fields where he worked. All had the same general impression as expressed below:

1. Had some ability—friendly way about him
  2. Did well as chaplain in East Africa working on non-Adventist campuses
  3. Did poorly in Kamagambo, Kenya—made blunders in judgment—Resulted in a major upset because of his careless, insensitive ways—Had to be moved in the middle of the school year
  4. Didn't shine in the Middle East—often scraps with people
  5. Poor judgment in critical situations
  6. Doesn't accept counsel—Is stubborn, arrogant
  7. Always been contentious, argumentative, unpredictable
  8. Has had a record of tearing down and disrupting the work where he has been
  9. Definitely not administrative or presidential material—There were several places open that he could have been put into that role. He was not chosen.
  10. Administrative qualities are lacking. "It would be the biggest mistake the conference could make were he to be elected president." None of the group saw him in this position.
- Note: This information was gleaned by phone from September 3-16, 1992, by Tom Mostert, Pacific Union Conference president.

Persons interviewed:

1. D.K. Bazarra President, East Africa Union
2. C.D. Watson President, Afro-Mideast Division
3. Manoug Nazirian President, Middle East Union
4. Bekele Heye President, Afro-Mideast Division President, Eastern Africa Division
5. Jerry Karst President, Middle East Union
6. Dunbar Henri President, East Africa Union
7. Maurice Battle Secretary, Eastern Africa Division
8. Neal Wilson General Conference President-Middle East Union-directly attached to the General Conference in recent years
9. James A. Finn President, Middle East Union

## Conflict Seeking Resolution

### The Memo Assessed

Seven of the ten items in Mostert's memo were categorically disputed by those who had actually worked closely with Newborn in East Africa. C.D. Watson, who was Afro-Mideast Division president at the time, told me he didn't remember an incident in Kamagambo, Kenya, the way Mostert had reported it. D.K. Bazarra, then Newborn's union president, wrote:

The ramifications of the charges brought against Elder Craig Newborn . . . is downright wrong, as far as East Africa was concerned . . . .

Morally, Craig was all that could be desired in the mission field. He was an asset to us. He was a man of determination but not a stubborn fellow. To brand him as arrogant is to reveal a lack of good judgment . . . .

Had he messed up things as it has been alleged, he would not have been invited back to serve as our Departmental Director and, later on, University Chaplain in East Africa.

More recently (May 28), retired East Africa Division president, Elder Bekele Heye, wrote SECC president Lynn Mallery:

May I reiterate for all of you in writing that I was never contacted by anyone who wanted to know my opinion of Elder Craig Newborn's fitness to serve as any conference president, much less for the presidency of the Southeastern California Conference.

Had anyone asked me about his qualifications, I would have told them that Elder Newborn is absolutely qualified for that position and well able to serve in any position to which the Church might wish to appoint him.

The use of my name in a way that totally misrep-

resented me and my respect and esteem for the abilities and character of Elder Newborn is hard to understand.

In closing, Heye asked Mallery to share his letter with the members of the executive committee, whom he thanked for "all that you have done . . . to try to rectify the grievous wrong that was done to Elder Newborn." But as of August 13, the executive committee members remained unaware of the letter.

### The Reconvened Constituency Session, October 18, 1992

At the second Sunday of the constituency meeting, nominating committee chairperson DuNesme proffered a motion of apology to Newborn and his family. The delegates voted this unanimously, although most of them were unaware that Mostert's remarks on the floor a month earlier had been misleading, or that he had circulated even more defamatory material about Newborn in his memo.

Pacific Union vice president David Taylor, the committee's second choice, withdrew his name from nomination. The nominating committee then offered a third candidate for president, SECC secretary Lynn Mallery, who was voted into office.

By November 5 my efforts to contact the nine leaders named by Mostert were concluded. In the spirit of Matthew 18, Mostert was invited by DuNesme and me to discuss the evidence. He did not respond.

A week later DuNesme and I met with the newly seated SECC executive committee. DuNesme provided an oral overview of the episode, and I distributed copies of my 23-page documentation of the evidence entitled, "Protecting the Process." The committee voted to ask Mostert to respond.

## Conflict Seeking Resolution

He did so by bringing copies of a ten-page statement to the January 28, 1993, executive committee meeting but refused to pass them out to members until the meeting was over. This was despite two hours of wrestling with him that included a motion for a vote of no confidence. This motion was eventually tabled in favor of a vote to invite Mostert, DuNesme and me to be available at the next month's meeting.

Mostert's statement described my report as "distorted," "inaccurate," "irresponsible," "twisted," "character assassination and half truths." He expressed "total denial of any action or statements that were either false or inappropriate relating to the events cited . . . I have nothing to hide or be ashamed of on this matter. . ."

"What many do not know," Mostert wrote, "is that the Newborn nomination was promoted by a small group who over a period of years have worked in various ways to take the Conference independent of the World Church." And he cited as proof "Bylaws changes at the last two [constituency] sessions; the attempts to ordain women outside of Church policy, and a presidential candidate who indicated his support in both areas. . . Little wonder," he wrote, "some are so intent on destroying the credibility of those whom they see as interfering with their agenda."

Apart from the fact that Southeastern has been doing its best to find ways to accomplish women's ordination within church policy, Mostert himself, when he was SECC president, seemed to favor women's ordination. Speaking on a Sabbath afternoon in San Diego in 1984, he said:

I think North America is ready to go with it. I don't really think there's that much of a problem in North America, frankly . . . I sense

in North America a greater support for it. And, theologically and biblically, uh, there's no problem; there's nothing to prohibit it. It's simply a policy of the church at this point. . .

Before the February 25 SECC executive committee meeting, DuNesme and I each provided the committee with formal, written responses to Mostert's ten-page attack on our credibility and that of our conference.

During this meeting, to which Mostert, DuNesme and I were invited, the union president described more candidly—but vigorously defended—the way he had actually acquired his assessment of Newborn. Mostert had gleaned his information from second and third parties. He acknowledged that he did not know from whom some of his sources got their second-hand information, but he insisted on its accuracy.

Mostert did, however, apologize for the pain and anger that resulted because he did not present his information to the nominating committee prior to the constituency session. Nevertheless, he insisted that the action taken by the executive committee was grossly unfair—that it was tantamount to calling him a liar--and he questioned the committee's right to act as his judge and jury.

On March 5 Mostert sent a letter to SECC president Lynn Mallery protesting the way in which the February 25 meeting had been conducted, and on March 14 persuaded an SECC department director, who is a member of the executive committee, to lobby with the committee for the removal of certain words from its earlier action. As a result the phrase "possibly committed unethical conduct" was replaced by "engaged in disturbing conduct." The allegation was deleted that "follow-up of the references does not support Elder Mostert's

## Conflict Seeking Resolution

statement,” and the action was expanded to include more specific and clear language.

Not wanting to come across like junior officers advising senior officers, the SECC executive committee voted that its action regarding Mostert be conveyed to the Pacific Union executive committee, without asking the union committee to take any particular action.

Before the union committee met on May 5, DuNesme and I sent each of its 48 members a 130-page book that contained everything on which the SECC Committee had based its action--my original report, Mostert’s response, my rejoinder and DuNesme’s reply, the SECC’s actions, and an epilogue.

When SECC president Mallery concluded reading his executive committee’s action to the Pacific Union committee, the repeated efforts of an SECC representative to have the action discussed were emphatically ruled to be out of order, and a motion to receive without discussion was voted, 31 to 11.

Two weeks later, Southeastern’s executive committee pressed Mostert about the written apologies it had requested of him at its February 25 meeting--to Newborn, the SECC nominating committee and the SECC constituent delegates.

Toward the end of May, Elder Mostert provided the following note for the SECC office to photocopy and mail to its constituents:

Over the weeks since the Constituency meeting, I have become aware of some delegates who were upset and offended by my actions relating to the original presidential candidate, the nominating committee, and how information was shared.

Please accept my sincere apology if in any way

my words or conduct seemed to you unchristian or inappropriate. As I reflect back there are several things I would do differently.

May the Lord continue to bless your life and witness for Him.

The SECC office did not include with the note any document to explain its appearance or the events preceding it, and the matter appeared closed.

---

*Douglas Hackleman, a member of the Loma Linda University Church, is a free-lance artist and writer with a master’s degree in psychology. He has just completed and is now marketing a limited edition art print of Christ.*