

Paulson, David

(1868–1916)

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David Paulson was a medical missionary physician and social reformer who, with his wife, Dr. Mary Wild Paulson, led an array of humanitarian endeavors in Chicago and founded Hinsdale Sanitarium in the city's western suburbs.

Early Years

David's parents, Jörgen and Carrie Paulson, emigrated from Denmark to the United States in 1863, settling on a farm near Raymond, Wisconsin. They accepted Seventh-day Adventism in 1867 through the evangelistic ministry of John G. Matteson, who spearheaded the church's work among Scandinavians. David, born October 27, 1868, was the fourth of their six children. He had four brothers—Nels (1864-1941), Hans (b. 1865), Martin (b. 1868), and Julius (1874-1923)—along with one sister, Louisa (1877-1953).¹

In 1874 the Paulson family migrated westward to the Dakota Territory, settling near Vermilion, Clay County, on land made available by the Homestead Act of 1862. There, like most homesteaders on the western plains, they lived in a sod house. Decimation of successive years of crops by grasshoppers added hardships to the normal rigors of frontier life. While still a boy, David was hired out to herd cattle and recalled having to do so on bare feet because his father could not afford to buy him a pony such as the other boys had.²

David was baptized at age 10 at a camp meeting held in Sioux Falls in July 1879. James and Ellen White were among the principal speakers for the event, the first of its kind to take place in Dakota Territory (which became



David Paulson

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

the states of North Dakota and South Dakota in 1889).³

Disease and death hit the Paulson family hard in the 1880s although some of the details are sketchy. David's mother, Carrie Paulson, died in February 1884.⁴ Then, an outbreak of virulent diphtheria that took the life of his brother Hans also brought David near death when he was about 15, probably in the winter of 1884-1885. Feeling unprepared for eternity, David promised God that "if He would heal me I would unreservedly dedicate my life to him."⁵ The experience marked the beginning of a lasting journey of faith in partnership with God.

Education

Within a year of David's recovery, his father, Jørgen Paulson, died in September 1885, leaving David's older brother, Nels, in charge of the farm and responsible for his younger siblings.⁶ A sermon by William W. Prescott, president of Battle Creek College, at the 1887 Dakota camp meeting inspired David to attend the Adventist school. Support from his brother Nels helped make it possible but, as David later put it, he was "poorer than proverbial Job's turkey" when he arrived at Battle Creek.⁷ To help meet expenses he did every kind of work he could get at Battle Creek Sanitarium: he delivered hot water to patients early in the morning, washed dishes, floors, and windows, and was a bell boy, messenger, and eventually, a night watchman.⁸

His limited primary education in frontier Dakota left him behind his fellow students academically, but he advanced rapidly, graduating from the college's academic course in June 1890. He then began medical school in the Fall along with a group of Adventist students who, by arrangement with the University of Michigan Medical School, took their first year of training at Battle Creek Sanitarium during the 1890-1891 school year before going to the university's Ann Arbor campus to complete their degrees.⁹

While a student at Battle Creek, Paulson had been inspired by the medical missionary ideal of linking spiritual with physical healing, with particular emphasis on reaching the poor and oppressed. This conception of wholistic healing and social benevolence, set forth in the writings of Ellen White, animated the far-reaching work of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, medical director of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Paulson thus had a dual purpose in transferring to Bellevue Medical College in New York City in 1892. He wanted both to gain clinical experience under renowned experts at Bellevue and "to secure greater opportunities in real medical missionary work." In New York, he stayed at a mission operated by Dr. George D. Downkott, who was "conducting a splendid medical missionary work in the slums." Pastor of Mariners' Temple Baptist Church and a prominent figure in Christian medical missions, Downkott gave Paulson "a glimpse of the world's need" and practical experience in meeting it.¹⁰

Battle Creek Years

After completing studies at Bellevue in 1894, Paulson joined the medical staff of Battle Creek Sanitarium as a specialist in nervous diseases. He was also a member of the faculty at the first Adventist school of medicine, the

American Medical Missionary College (AMMC), opened in 1895 with training locations both in Chicago and Battle Creek. On December 15, 1896, David married Mary Anna Wild, M.D. (1872-1956). Lycurgus McCoy conducted the ceremony held in a newly-built chapel at Battle Creek Sanitarium. Mary, or Mamie, as she was usually called in her childhood through young adult years, was born in Pleasantville, Westchester County, just north of New York City. Like David, she was raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home and they met as students at Battle Creek College. Mary had completed her medical degree at Northwestern University earlier in 1896. She, too, joined the medical staff of Battle Creek Sanitarium and the faculty of American Medical Missionary College, specializing in gynecology.¹¹

In his work at Battle Creek Sanitarium, David Paulson became noted not only for his medical expertise but also his impact on the spiritual life of the institution. In December 1889, while he was still a student, the preaching of Ellen G. White for a Week of Prayer at the sanitarium brought Paulson to another milestone in his Christian journey. The Battle Creek meetings were among those conducted at several locales around the nation in the aftermath of the 1888 General Conference emphasizing the theme of justification by faith in Christ.¹² An experience of confession and renewal led David to become a more ardent student of the Bible and the counsels of Ellen White. He returned to the sanitarium as a physician four-and-a-half years later holding a deep conviction that the sanitarium “must not be merely medical, but spiritual in its work.”¹³

Paulson found that Bible classes for the sanitarium staff recently initiated by Percy T. Magan, Bible and history teacher at Battle Creek College, were well-attended despite a 4:00 A.M. start time. Paulson then expanded what Magan had begun, “organizing classes for the study of all phases of religious life in every department of the institution.” These efforts led to a “mighty religious awakening and revival in the Battle Creek Sanitarium,” according to Magan, and to renewed zeal for medical missionary service.¹⁴

Mission to Chicago

In 1893, Dr. Kellogg organized the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association to advance Adventist medical and humanitarian ministry in cities throughout the nation and eventually beyond (it was renamed International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association in 1896).¹⁵ In Chicago, particularly, Kellogg focused on bringing relief and uplift to the neediest classes of humanity. During the 1880s and 1890s, Chicago epitomized America’s rapid industrial growth and the enormous social problems associated with it. Between 1880 and 1900 the city’s population tripled, from a half million (fourth largest in the nation) to 1.7 million (second largest).¹⁶ A growing wave of immigrants supplied the factories with labor but lacked a social “safety net” to protect them against unemployment, disease, or injury—not infrequent in hazardous workplace conditions. Their families lived in overcrowded and often unsanitary tenements with uncertain access to education, health care and social services needed to thrive in American society. Meanwhile, crime, vice, alcoholism, and other addictions did thrive, compounding the debilitation and despair.

Kellogg used a \$40,000 donation from the diamond fortune of South Africans Henry and Frank Wessels to fund a sanitarium for paying customers on the near south side of the city, called the Chicago Branch Sanitarium, opened in May 1893. His plan was to use the profits from this sanitarium to fund his project on behalf of the city's destitute.

The Chicago Medical Mission opened in June 1893 in the "skid row district." Its services—a medical dispensary, bath and laundry facilities, and a visiting nurse service—were all provided free of charge, and a penny lunch counter soon followed. When a sharp economic downturn beginning in 1893 added thousands to the ranks of the unemployed and homeless, a Workingmen's Home was opened providing lodging for 10 cents per night and food for a penny a dish, while those unable to pay even that could earn their keep by making brooms or weaving rugs or carpets in the "industrial department." Gospel services were conducted nightly at the nearby Life Boat Mission. Nursing students at Battle Creek Sanitarium and medical students in the AMMC gained a part of their training in connection with the Chicago mission.¹⁷

The benevolent work in Chicago thrived, spawning a plethora of institutions and organizations targeting specific needs. By the late 1890s, though, enthusiasm for it had begun to wane in Battle Creek, and denominational leaders became concerned about the costs of sustaining it.¹⁸ A turning point came in 1899 when William S. Sadler, who was in charge of the Life Boat Mission and editor of the *Life Boat*, a monthly periodical begun in 1898, came to Battle Creek with a proposal to bolster the work in Chicago by recruiting freshman nursing students to come to the city to serve the poor on a self-supporting basis.

Paulson, who was functioning as acting superintendent of the sanitarium while Dr. Kellogg was on an extended trip to Europe, quickly warmed to Sadler's idea. He ran into strong resistance from some members of the institution's board, however, who, in his words, worried that "some of the young people would probably go to the devil in Chicago." But Paulson insisted that "it would do them good to get them into *direct contact* with the needs of humanity." The board finally agreed to the plan when it was further proposed that the Drs. Paulson go to Chicago with the cadre of young people from Battle Creek and oversee their activities.¹⁹

With the board's approval secured, David and Mary along with 40 first-year students set out for Chicago. Their lodging was provided at the headquarters of the Chicago Medical Mission, then at 1926 Wabash Avenue, but it was up to them to find ways to cover all other expenses. Fifteen of them found home nursing positions that required only basic services, not professional training. Another 12 earned money by selling copies of the *Life Boat* magazine throughout the city. Emma L. Allison, who had wide experience in urban social ministry, led a smaller group of female students ministering to the physical and spiritual needs they found. Others assisted with mission activities wherever they could be useful, such as conducting cottage meetings, doing gospel work in the jails, and helping at the Workingmen's Home. Since the amount of funds each could bring in individually varied, the students all agreed to put everything into a common fund, from which the needs of all were provided.²⁰

Each day began with an hour of sharing experiences followed by instruction on methods from the Paulsons. In the evenings, the students attended gospel meetings at the Life Boat Mission, helping with the music and personal ministry.²¹ New groups of students came in the years that followed, but for Paulson the joyful service, consecrated energy, and prayerful innovation of the 40 students in the 1899-1900 class defined the ethos of love for suffering humanity that he sought to impress upon the young Adventist professionals whom he trained.

In addition to oversight of the Medical Missionary Training School, the Paulsons were also resident physicians at the free dispensary and surgical ward, also located at 1926 Wabash Avenue. In 1901, the Training School and the AMMC Chicago campus moved to a new location at Cottage Grove Avenue and 33^d Place along with the Chicago Branch Sanitarium, which offered care to all on a paying basis, while the free dispensary relocated on Halstead Avenue. Dr. David gave overall supervision to the Branch Sanitarium and the Training School and, at the latter, taught Bible study and missionary methods. Dr. Mary was the general nursing instructor and resident physician at the Branch Sanitarium.²²

After sharing editorial responsibility for the *Life Boat* magazine with W. S. Sadler, David Paulson became sole editor in 1903. The magazine was integral to the Chicago Medical Mission as a means for publicizing the multiple facets of its work, raising funds, and providing information on the urban social problems it addressed, such as unemployment, poverty, the plight of prisoners and ex-convicts, indigent youth, prostitution, and addiction to alcohol and other harmful substances. Circulation was estimated at 150,000 in 1903.²³

Hinsdale Sanitarium

The Paulsons' initial connection with Hinsdale, an upscale suburb 17 miles west of Chicago, came about through another facet of the Chicago mission. The Life Boat Rest, opened in February 1900 on South Clark Street amidst a district of several blocks filled with saloons and brothels, was described as a "snatch-station," providing lodging and aid to young women desiring escape from prostitution, then an enormous and tolerated business in the city. The Life Boat Rescue Service sent out mature female workers during the night to seek out "their lost and fallen sisters who are so entangled in the intricate meshes of sin and vice to be unapproachable in any other way."²⁴

Because the small number of beds at the Life Boat Rescue could not accommodate the demand, Mary Paulson led out in the search for a better facility, preferably outside the city.²⁵ As David put it, "The Lord had wonderfully blessed" the rescue work "but we found that we were leaving the fish too near the shore."²⁶ The Paulsons thus gladly accepted an offer from C. E. Kimbell, a wealthy businessman who had benefited from treatment at the Chicago Branch Sanitarium, of a two-story house in Hinsdale, rent free for six months, with a minimal charge thereafter. The Suburban Home opened in October 1903.²⁷

By then similar factors were already in play leading to a new sanitarium. As with the Life Boat Rescue, the Chicago Branch Sanitarium was thriving and regularly filled to capacity, but it was small with limited facilities for

medical work. Rather than expand in the city, Paulson began to envision a sanitarium “out in the country.” By this he meant a suburb in close proximity yet far enough away for patients to enjoy fresh air, sunshine, and a serene natural environment—important among the natural therapies that Adventist health reform recommended for getting well and staying well. Meanwhile, the Battle Creek Sanitarium, after a devastating fire in February 1902, could no longer support the Chicago mission. Then, in 1904, as a result of a highly-contested reorganization of the denomination’s medical work, the sponsoring agency for all of the humanitarian initiative in the city, the Kellogg-led International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association, was dissolved. These developments left Paulson with greater freedom of action should he move forward in Chicago, but also with a formidable financial challenge.²⁸

Once again, C. E. Kimbell facilitated new opportunity, this time by purchasing an idyllic 10-acre property in Hinsdale for \$16,000 and turning over the deed to be paid for in 20 annual installments without interest. The Paulsons initially intended to continue working in Chicago while overseeing the new venture in Hinsdale. But, after an unsuccessful search for someone else, they finally concluded that it was their calling to take direct charge of developing the new sanitarium, and moved to the Hinsdale property in March 1904.²⁹ Two months later, Ellen White, during a long layover while traveling by train through Chicago, spent five hours with the Paulsons in Hinsdale. “It is just the place for a sanitarium,” she wrote. “The atmosphere is good and the surroundings are beautiful.”³⁰

Nearly a year and a half of intensive labor—developing the facilities while raising funds—remained ahead before the sanitarium opened its doors. To conduct legal business, the Hinsdale Sanitarium and Benevolent Association was formed in October 1904 as a charitable, non-profit organization, structured so that no one could gain income from it other than their own salary.³¹ Independently owned and managed, the sanitarium would function in cooperation with the denomination but not under the jurisdiction of any church governing entities until 1917.³²

The property had been the summer estate of Judge Corydon Beckwith (1823-1890), a respected Chicago jurist who had served a brief term as chief justice of the Illinois State Supreme Court.³³ The Paulsons lived in the servants’ cottage. The main house was renovated for treatment and accommodation of patients and a new wing built onto it that provided an additional 17 rooms. A large, two-story brick building that Judge Beckwith had used as a chicken coop was renovated into a kitchen and dining hall along with housing for sanitarium workers.³⁴ Dedication ceremonies on September 20, 1905, marked the official opening of Hinsdale Sanitarium. It was filled to capacity with patients within three weeks.³⁵

Another wing, completed in the fall of 1906, contained a gymnasium and a surgical department. The changes increased the number of patient rooms to 40 but demand continued to surpass capacity. The following summer the sanitarium teemed with 56 patients, some on beds set up in the offices of both doctors Paulson.³⁶

C. B. Kimbell, the sanitarium's initial benefactor, had promised that after a small beginning was made, he would take the lead in raising \$100,000 for a larger, main building. But his untimely death in early 1905 had dimmed hopes for moving forward. It had taken a series of well-timed donations and extensions of credit, all of which Paulson saw as answers to prayer, in order for him to scrape together enough to reach the modest scale achieved by 1907. However, rapid realization of Kimbell's plan suddenly became possible in December 1908. Paulson's skill at cultivating the confidence of wealthy supporters, along with that of business manager Horace E. Hoyt, suddenly paid off in the form of a \$30,000 bequest, opening the way to completion of a four-story sanitarium building in the fall of 1909.³⁷

The Rescue Home and Good Samaritan Inn

All of this, however, represented only a partial realization of the mission that Paulson envisioned for Hinsdale Sanitarium. In the fall of 1904, when the plans were being formulated for developing the sanitarium in a wealthy suburb, Paulson was determined not to neglect the "sick poor"—the disadvantaged classes to whom he was dedicated with a sacred passion. When the sanitarium board was organized, Paulson vowed to the members: Unless you are going to help me do something for the poor here there is no use for me to go on, for I am going to do something for them. Let my right hand forget its cunning, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth when I cease to be a missionary to the earth's sorrowing and distressed multitudes. We are going to *act* in Hinsdale what we preached in Chicago.

Though he acceded to a suggestion from Kimbell, the first president of the board, to first get a sanitarium for those who could pay up and running and then establish a charitable work, Paulson vowed that if God helped him build the sanitarium, he would "make it a blessing to the sick poor."³⁸

He fulfilled this vow in part by conducting a campaign for a major upgrade in the aforementioned Life Boat Suburban Rescue Home, also established in Hinsdale two miles away from the eventual sanitarium. Simultaneous to a major push for the remaining funds needed to complete the main sanitarium building, Paulson conducted a major campaign to construct a well-equipped, four-story building with 30 rooms, located closer to the sanitarium. The Rescue Home continued to receive young women referred by social workers and probation officers in Chicago, and others from around the Great Lakes region. It not only provided shelter in a time of crisis but also helped the women find work and, if needed, a good home for their babies. Additionally, said Paulson, the staff ministered "the gospel of Christ to them," leading eight to choose baptism in 1913. He made the rather imprecise estimate in 1914 that out of every hundred of the young women who spent time at the Home, "we know that eighty-seven or ninety are making good."³⁹

In 1909, Paulson also led out in establishment of another institution in Hinsdale to serve the poor—the Good Samaritan Inn. While hospitals and dispensaries that served the poor could be found, the Inn sought to make the distinctive sanitarium experience—healthful diet, simple treatments, rest and rejuvenation in pleasant

outdoor setting—available to those unable to afford the usual costs.⁴⁰ Even before setting up a separate institution, Paulson “never turned away a needy case” and wrote thousands of dollars off the books to charity each year, according to his sister-in-law Caroline L. Clough, who worked closely with him.⁴¹ By pushing forward with the Good Samaritan Inn during the same year in which the main sanitarium and Rescue Home buildings were being completed, Paulson may have stretched the sanitarium’s resources and his own energies too far. The Inn opened in June 1909 but the house acquired for it lacked proper heating and it became necessary to move patients to the sanitarium. Services were suspended in 1910 but despite this false start, the Good Samaritan Inn reopened in an enlarged facility in January 1914.⁴²

With the sanitarium campus well-developed, Paulson now re-focused on connecting the institutions in Hinsdale with work for the poor in Chicago. The move to Hinsdale, Paulson explained, was not to abandon the Chicago mission but “to establish a permanent headquarters for this city work.”⁴³ The Hinsdale Nurses Training School, begun in 1905, would be the primary link between Hinsdale and Chicago. Along with a high standard of education for the nursing profession, recognized by the New York State Board of Regents, it offered training in “city rescue work, mission work, jail work, visiting nurses’ work and all lines of soul-winning endeavor.”⁴⁴ Students were required to do such work in the city for a portion of their practical training.⁴⁵ A center for the program, with a free dispensary and treatment rooms, was established in 1912 at Lake Street and Western Avenue. It was the only medical facility serving the “poorer working class” population in a 12-block section served by at least 12 saloons.⁴⁶

The Life Boat Mission, relocated from 471 State Street to 828 35th Place, in May 1910, remained a venue for the student nurses to engage in gospel work. Also in May 1910 a new Life Boat Rescue Home for Women in Chicago opened in a renovated, four-story building at 528 East 33^d Place.

For the Betterment of Humanity

During the same years in which he was launching, managing, and raising funds for the Hinsdale institutions, Paulson became a popular lecturer for health, temperance, and other reforms “for the betterment of humanity.”⁴⁷ He was, in other words, an evangelist for the “gospel of health” as formulated in Adventism, and found abundant opportunity to proclaim it in a variety of public settings—schools and education associations, civic, cultural, and reform organizations, and several of Chicago’s largest churches.

For example, the anti-lynching crusader and progressive reformer Ida B. Wells-Barnett invited Paulson to speak at least twice at the Negro Fellowship League that she founded in Chicago as a social service center for young Black men and a base for Christian activism for racial justice.⁴⁸ In September 1910, Wells-Barnett announced that Paulson, “who gave such an eloquent address in July” would be speaking again the following Sunday on “The Mystery of Health and Healing.”⁴⁹ Paulson also supported an effort to establish a sanitarium in Chicago, to be named after the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), for the prevention and cure of tuberculosis among

African Americans, though the endeavor appears to have been short-lived.⁵⁰

Paulson was a lively lecturer who made his exhortations to radical health reforms entertaining. A newspaper reporter wrote that his address in 1915 at an Adventist annual state meeting at Columbia, Missouri, was “illuminated by as keen and as intellectual humor as Columbia has ever heard and Columbia has heard some of the world’s great men.”⁵¹ To dramatize the importance of fresh air Paulson advised an audience of Chicago schoolchildren in 1911 “to break the glass in their bedroom windows if they found them nailed down.” He added: “Don’t worry about the cost. Send the bill to me.”⁵²

That speech was part of a campaign by the Anti-Cigarette League to educate the city’s schoolchildren about the harms of cigarette smoking. Organized in 1890 by Woman’s Christian Temperance Union activist Lucy Page Gaston, the Anti-Cigarette League (ACL) sought to persuade individuals not to smoke and advocated anti-tobacco legislation to ban smoking in public venues.⁵³ Paulson lectured at ACL events as early as 1901 and became president of the organization in 1906.⁵⁴ This would be his most prominent public cause. “No sane man offers an apology for cigarette smoking except the man who makes them,” Paulson declared to a gathering of the Cook County (Illinois) Teachers’ Association in 1909.⁵⁵ The ACL’s campaign won wide support during the first two decades of the 20th century, with 15 states enacting laws against the manufacture, sale, and use of cigarettes. However, all the laws were repealed by 1927 due to a shift in public sentiment after World War I.⁵⁶ It would not be until the 1960s that American culture would begin a shift back to what Gaston, Paulson, and the ACL had advocated more than a half century before.

Paulson was also an outspoken advocate of prohibition and women’s suffrage. The latter was imperative, he argued, as did many progressive reformers, to empower a distinctly feminine influence in the public arena. “It is time for the settlement workers, the W.C.T.U., the Federated Women’s Clubs, and other women’s organizations to band together and rise to the necessity of the ballot for women so that they may have a hand in cleaning the city,” he urged in 1910.⁵⁷

Turbulence Over the Testimonies

Paulson’s manifold achievements during the first decade of the 20th century came amidst a deep crisis that brought the Seventh-day Adventist church close to schism and set the two dominant influences on Paulson’s life and thought over against each other. In Battle Creek during the 1890s Paulson became an avid devotee of Ellen White’s writings, not just her books but also a large collection of manuscript copies and periodical articles that he developed. During these same years Dr. John Harvey Kellogg became his mentor and teacher as a physician while Paulson rapidly became one of Kellogg’s closest colleagues at Battle Creek Sanitarium and the American Medical Missionary College. Beyond this, Paulson found inspiration and purpose in the medical missionary ideal—the uplift of humanity through benevolence and healthful living—that Kellogg championed.

Ellen White's "testimonies" and Dr. Kellogg's "Battle Creek idea" had together formed and driven Paulson's tenacious commitment to serving the poor and suffering, and he had thought them fully harmonious. By 1900, though, a chasm between the two was becoming increasingly apparent and with that a sharpening conflict over the direction of Adventism. Paulson's grappling with the competing claims of these two preeminent influences is an instructive episode in the overall history of Adventism's struggle with the question of authority.

The Chicago Medical Mission became a major source of conflict in the late 1890s. Mrs. White became critical of Dr. Kellogg's heavy investment in it, particularly because its emphasis on humanitarian activism came at the expense of direct evangelism.⁵⁸ Then, Dr. Kellogg's plan to publish his book *The Living Temple* to help fund rebuilding of Battle Creek Sanitarium after the fire of February 1902 stirred a firestorm of controversy in the church. Some Adventist leaders believed that Kellogg veered dangerously close to pantheism in the book by uplifting God's presence within created life in all its forms. Paulson, however, believed that Kellogg's exposition aligned with what Ellen White herself had written, and was part of the majority on a small review committee that found nothing objectionable in the planned book. But the General Conference Committee, under the leadership of Arthur G. Daniells, disagreed and rejected plans for high-profile publication of the book.⁵⁹

Paulson remained adamant about the theological soundness of *The Living Temple* and placing holistic restoration of humanity through the gospel of health at the center of the church's mission. Leading ministers who thought that this emphasis would turn attention away from the apocalyptic prophecies that gave urgency to the church's evangelistic message saw Paulson as a leading influence in a pro-Kellogg alignment against the Daniells' administration.⁶⁰

A showdown between the two sides anticipated in October 1903 at a council of denominational leaders in Washington, D.C., was averted by the timely arrival of testimonies from Ellen White that starkly denounced *The Living Temple* and the course Dr. Kellogg was pursuing. One of the letters, addressed to Paulson, emphatically denied his claim "that the sentiments expressed in *Living Temple* in regard to God can be sustained by my writings." Paulson was "accepting as truth the specious sophistry of the enemy," she wrote. Reportedly stunned by the forcefulness of the testimony, Paulson readily yielded.⁶¹

Kellogg also acquiesced but hostilities between him and the General Conference leadership soon resumed, eventually leading to the doctor's break with the denomination in 1907. In the meantime, Paulson focused on establishing Hinsdale Sanitarium and generally tried to stay above the fray.⁶² Ellen White, however, was disturbed by Paulson's continued support for training Adventist physicians and nurses at Kellogg-controlled institutions in Battle Creek. "I ask you, Brother Paulson, no longer to grieve the Spirit of God by accepting Dr. Kellogg as one who is firm in the faith," she wrote on April 2, 1906. "Break the spell and be a free man."⁶³

She also included Paulson by name in a letter sent March 30, 1906, inviting all who had "objections" and "criticisms" about her testimonies relating to the medical missionary work to write them out and send them to her for response.⁶⁴ Paulson took the opportunity to ask Ellen White what she thought about the solutions he

had worked out to the dissonance he experienced over her writings.

He explained that during his intensive study of her writings in the 1890s, he concluded, based on her assertions about the divine source of her testimonies, “that *every* word that you spoke in public or private, that *every* letter you wrote under *any* and *all* circumstances, was as inspired as the ten commandments.” Paulson held this position with “*absolute* tenacity” until 1900 when he discovered, from *Review and Herald* articles in the 1860s, Ellen White’s explanation that she had to use her own, human words to describe what she saw in vision. This accounted for the fact that the “reform dress” she saw in a vision extended down to the top of the shoe⁶⁵ but then in a later testimony she indicated that it should be nine inches from the floor. “This thing came to me like a thunder-bolt out of a clear sky,” Paulson declared. The experience forced him, he told Ellen White, to conclude that he had been “contending for a position that you yourself never warranted” and since then he had discovered further statements indicating “that you yourself did not claim to be infallible or inspired in every thought, word and action.”⁶⁶

This recognition, Paulson said, did not lead him to treat lightly anything that came from Ellen White’s pen, nor did he claim the discernment “to draw the line and to say, ‘This is *human*, while this is *divine*.’” Yet if another believer pressed him to accept a particular statement from her testimonies as “the word of the living God,” he could not do so without gaining the same conviction by taking it before the Lord himself. Paulson’s question, then, for Ellen White was whether he was right in: 1) rejecting verbal inspiration of her writings; and 2) affirming a role for prayerful discernment on the part of the believer in determining the sense or ways in which counsel from her should be appropriated as an authoritative word from the Lord.⁶⁷

Ellen White’s response affirmed that Paulson’s pre-1900 belief in the verbal inspiration of her writings—a misconception widely held among Adventists—was incorrect. She had never “made any such claims” nor had “the pioneers of our cause,” she wrote. Further, she indicated that what she wrote in the preface to the book *Great Controversy* (1888) about Scripture was also true of her writings: “The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language; yet it is the testimony of God.”⁶⁸

Published in the *Review and Herald*, Ellen White’s reply was a significant public clarification of how she understood the spiritual authority of her writings. Yet it did not provide a full, direct reply to Paulson’s questions nor is it clear that the two ever had a full meeting of the minds. More than a year later Ellen White wrote that Paulson was still “so connected with the opposing element at Battle Creek, that God is not honored by his course” and called upon him “no longer to halt between two opinions.”⁶⁹

By then, though, the denominational power struggle between Kellogg and the General Conference was nearly over. Perhaps that closure made it easier for Ellen White, in a talk given August 4, 1909, at the Rescue Home in Hinsdale, to say without qualification that “Brother Paulson is doing a great work” and so were “those that are united with him.”⁷⁰ For the remaining years of her life, Paulson remained on friendly terms with Ellen White

while also remaining a friend of John Harvey Kellogg.⁷¹

Prayer and Action

David Paulson's autobiographical reflections, collected and published posthumously in *Footprints of Faith* (1921), are a series of testimonies to answered prayer. He believed in making specific requests to God, and his accounts of endeavors in Chicago and Hinsdale are replete with instances in which just the right amount of funds or help in other forms came at just the right time. "The trouble with some folks is, their prayers are so general that if they were answered they would never know it, and if they were not answered they would never miss it," he said. He did not mean by this that prayer is a magical tool for manipulating God. The Lord may have a purpose in delaying the answer or sometimes "gives us something else that is better for us" but, he insisted, "God hears every sincere prayer offered in the name of Christ."⁷²

Paulson wanted to avoid association with instantaneous "faith healing" that drew attention away from following the principles of healthful living, yet prayer for patients was central to the care given at Hinsdale. In one instance, Paulson prayed at the bedside of a patient whose cancer was so far advanced that Dr. Franklin H. Martin, an eminent Chicago surgeon called in to operate, declared that nothing could be done for her. The woman recovered and months later went to Chicago to tell her story to Dr. Martin, who pronounced her completely free of malignancy. Some years later, Martin, in telling the story to Dr. Percy T. Magan, said that he would have dismissed as a fanatic anyone else who talked about prayer the way David Paulson did, but somehow sensed that with Paulson he was "in the presence of one to whom God was a real, living, personal Friend and confidant." Martin added that "many a soul who came to the Hinsdale Sanitarium would be under the sod today were it not for David Paulson's prayers."⁷³

For Paulson, prayer was meaningful only in the context of consecrated cooperation with God in meeting human need. In a *Life Boat* article on the problem of indigent children living on the streets of Chicago, Paulson wrote that social problems such as this "will not be settled in prayer meetings or in conventions" but rather by "individual effort on the part of men and women in whose hearts throbs a genuine love of humanity, and who have the patience and perseverance to stay by the problem year after year."⁷⁴

Final Year

David Paulson's life of remarkable accomplishments for the health of others was also an ongoing "battle against a naturally frail constitution." In February 1916 he became ill with "a raging fever and profound toxemia" and never made a full recovery. Respite at Madison Sanitarium in Tennessee, then at Boulder Sanitarium in Colorado, and finally in Asheville, North Carolina, brought only partial and temporary improvements. His death in Asheville on October 15, 1916, less than two weeks before his 48th birthday, was attributed to acute pulmonary tuberculosis. After a service in the gymnasium at Hinsdale Sanitarium, he was laid to rest in

Bronswood Cemetery, Oak Park, Illinois.⁷⁵

In 1921, Dr. Mary Paulson married Adventist physician John H. Neall, who joined her on the medical staff at Hinsdale. They moved to southern Illinois in 1933 to serve at Quincy Memorial Sanitarium, an institution that Mary was instrumental in establishing. She remained there at least a year after John's death in 1936 before retiring in California. She died in Azusa, California, on March 11, 1956, at age 83, and was interred next to David Paulson at Bronswood Cemetery.⁷⁶

Legacy

The College of Medical Evangelists (later Loma Linda University School of Medicine) dedicated a memorial to David Paulson on its Los Angeles campus on March 13, 1932. David Paulson Memorial Hall, a 1,000-seat assembly hall, came about at the initiative of David Paulson's close friend, Percy T. Magan, president of the college, supported by A. G. Daniells, president of the board. "My beloved husband looked as though he were giving one of his loving and earnest talks to the audience," wrote Mary Paulson Neall regarding a large portrait of David hung beside the front stage.⁷⁷

Hinsdale Hospital, Paulson's most enduring institutional legacy, became the largest hospital in DuPage County, Illinois. It was renamed UChicago Medicine AdventHealth Hinsdale after a joint ownership agreement between University of Chicago Medicine and AdventHealth was reached in September 2022.⁷⁸

More difficult to measure but more distinctive in its significance is Paulson's legacy as Adventism's preeminent medical missionary to urban America. He did not move his base to the suburbs to escape the nation's second largest city but to reach it more effectively through a holistic mission that joined health care, humanitarian activism, and gospel witness. Hinsdale offered not only an atmosphere more conducive to physical and spiritual health but also as a center for training and sending workers to minister healing and restoration to the impoverished and oppressed in Chicago. Though some of his endeavors were short-lived, Paulson succeeded, perhaps more than any other Seventh-day Adventist, at integrating the sanitarium work outside the city and Good Samaritan work in the city into an all-encompassing redemptive mission.

Dr. Franklin H. Martin captured something of the personality and the character that sparked these achievements: "His inspired and inspiring life, his clear vision, his irresistible enthusiasm for the promulgation of the truth, his wise counsel, his ability to impart knowledge, his love for the outcast, the downhearted and neglected of the earth, all combine to make David Paulson one of God's noblemen."⁷⁹

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