

The background of the cover is a detailed black and white illustration of a church interior. In the center, there is an altar with a canopy, flanked by two large, ornate vases. Behind the altar, a large window with a cross is visible. To the right, there are rows of pews. The architecture features Gothic-style elements like pointed arches and a large circular window on the right wall. The overall style is a high-contrast, stippled or halftone print.

Ministry

International Journal for Pastors

September 1997

Pastoring Small Churches

6

Hello, pastor

A member of a small church shares important insights with his new pastor
Maylan Schurch

8

Mini churches, maximum challenges

A pastor perceptively tells the stories of his ministry in four small churches
Hal Gates

11

How group dynamics impact your ministry

Congregational size decides some "ground rules" for pastors' roles and leadership
Monte Sahlin

14

We're still here

An illuminating view of the plusses of life and ministry in smaller congregations
Loren Seibold

18

Our church has risen to a new life!

The inspiring and instructive story of how a small, dying church rose to become a dynamic congregation
Daniel B. Martella

21

Sexual sin: Could it happen to you?

A pastor's candid account of what precipitated his fall and how he has dealt with the consequences
I. B. Lazarus

24

Dynamic new computer resource for pastors

New CD provides pictures, video clips, graphics, charts, and sermon texts for the busy pastor
James A. Cress interviews Don Gray

26

The music of great preaching

A great musician draws lessons from a great preacher
Wayne Hooper

3	Letters	28	Pastor's Pastor
4	Editorial	30	Resources

Ministry

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Homosexuals in the church

As a reader of 8-10 years' duration, I want to commend you for your openness to the sins and the stumblings of us humans—Christian and otherwise. I particularly appreciate the thoughtfulness and love that went into the production of your November 1996 *Ministry* on homosexuality. The whole debate is a challenge to all Christ's people, and your treatment of it was refreshingly nonjudgmental.—E. Bruce Ross, retired pastor, United Church of Canada.

AIDS educational tools

In order to devise an effective strategy for fighting the spread of AIDS and caring for those already infected, I would like to suggest that it is necessary to have factual analytical information as to how HIV is spread and the agencies directly involved from unbiased sources. This would enable major efforts to be directed at the primary cause or causes. A balanced approach is also necessary to overcome the influences of orchestrated misinformation.

To this end I would like to recommend two videos: *AIDS: What You Haven't Been Told*; and (for use with young people in SDA high schools and youth meetings) *No Second Chance*. They are both available from Jeremiah Films, Inc., Box 1710, Hemet, California 92546. Telephone: 909-652-1006. Although both have been made in an American context, they address the issues from a worldwide perspective.—David R. Lowe, pastor, Edenthorpe, Dorcaster, United Kingdom.

Sabbath: nailed to the cross?

I found the article by William Richardson on "Sabbath: Nailed to the Cross?" (May 1997) very interesting. Mainly because he admitted that the word "Sabbath" in Colossians 2:16 refers to the weekly Sabbath and is the same form (plural) as in "the heart of the fourth commandment." Most Sabbatarian that I

have read from deny that this verse refers to the weekly Sabbath.

After admitting that, however, he declared that the weekly Sabbath is still binding, only it should be "stripped of its Jewishness." If that is true, should we keep the appointed feasts (yearly) and new moons (monthly), and just strip them of their Jewishness? Didn't Jesus do for those feasts the same thing He did for the weekly Sabbaths?

The passage says not to let anyone judge (condemn) you for not keeping the appointed feasts, new moons, or the Sabbaths. If the annual feast days and the monthly feast days of the Old Law are not to be bound on men, according to the same verse, neither is the weekly Sabbath!—Frank Jamerson, Lakeland, Florida.

William Richardson replies: *Given its creation origin (Gen. 2:1, 2), the weekly Sabbath God planned and sanctified did not have any "inherent" Jewishness. It was designed to bless and meet the needs of the human race. This permanent aspect of the Sabbath and its continuing observance, Paul does not refer to in Colossians (see H.C.G. Moule, quoted in my article). In contrast, the feasts and new moons were part and parcel of Judaism, so were radically altered when symbols gave way to the reality of Christ on the cross. So also any narrow, limiting Jewish elements that had become attached to the weekly Sabbath (keep in mind the various "Sabbath controversies" between Jesus and the Jewish leaders). But because of certain gnostic learnings, some Colossians were clinging to rituals while denying Christ. Such behavior is anathema for Paul. But the only weekly Sabbath he faults is a Christless Sabbath. My belief that Paul continued to observe a Christ-filled weekly Sabbath is based on what he seems to have done every Sabbath (preached), and the lack of any scriptural evidence that the creation ordinance (Gen.*

2:1, 2) regarding Sabbath sanctity was ever changed. Incidentally, post-canonical writings and later Christian practices don't count.

Ministry's new look

● Wouldn't you know it! As you properly praise the "new look" of *Ministry* while maintaining a "certain professional dignity" one comes to the closing paragraph of your March 1997 First Glance only to find therein the mistaken use of the two words "in tact" instead of "intact."

These embarrassing little glitches will somehow creep in no matter how attentive one is to detail.

In any case, *Ministry* is attractive, very readable, and dignified to an ever-increasing degree and here is one reader who votes affirmatively that you have succeeded in your efforts to improve your publication. I wish you well.—Michas M. Ohnstad, North Branch, Minnesota.

Editorial Comment: *Thanks, you're absolutely correct!*

● Excellent magazine! I look forward to the articles—often very beneficial.

The new layout may please you; however, the print is too small.—Dennis Wiggs, pastor, Ruth's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church, New Bern, North Carolina.

● Because I have been a busy, well-intentioned pastor (just retired, Barstow Church of Religious Science) for 24 years, I have found *Ministry* the first read and most respected of all monthly periodicals. I will never need a more "reader friendly" or white-spaced magazine to inform and excite me as I continue with my teaching and writing.

Thank you for 24 (and continued) good years!—Reverend Dr. Scotti Dole, Barstow, California.

Free Subscription

If you're receiving Ministry bimonthly and haven't paid for a subscription, it's not a mistake. Since 1928 Ministry has been published for Seventh-day Adventist ministers. We believe, however, that the time has come for clergy everywhere to experience a resurgence of faith in the authority of Scripture and in the great truths that reveal the gospel of our salvation by grace, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. We want to share our aspirations and faith in a way that will provide inspiration and help to you as clergy. We hope you will accept this journal as our outstretched hand to you. Look over our shoulder, take what you want and find helpful, and discard what you can't use. Bimonthly gift subscriptions are available to all licensed and/or ordained clergy. Requests should be on church letterhead and addressed to the editorial office.



That was our first year of ministry.

The conference president phoned Jim and told him to assume sole responsibility of our

large, prestigious congregation for a few months during the interim between two senior pastors. Jim hung up the phone, wiped the nervous sweat from his face, and informed me that “the lemonade incident” was not held against us after all.

That incident had taken place two weeks earlier, during the crowning glory of our congregation—the debt-free dedication of our beautiful church. The weekend-long celebration included important church officials from all levels of the church. Even the division president had promised to joined the celebration.

The head host was known for her meticulous organization. A church matriarch, her expectations for me as a young pastor’s wife were high. I was simultaneously awed and scared to death of her. She performed every task perfectly, with a professional ease that came naturally. I was determined that I would show her and the whole congregation that I could live up to all that they expected. They could count on me.

When the day arrived, things were going well until the time for refreshments. The church matriarch stationed me at the door of the fellowship hall with strict instructions that I was to permit absolutely no one to leave the room until they had finished their lemonade and cookies. She did not intend to have our beautiful edifice sticky with drink and crumbs. So I began my duties. Members and guests were politely turned back as they attempted to exit with their snacks. Things were going well—until he started through the door.

I knew he was important. After all, he was one of the featured guests for the weekend and was seated at the VIP luncheon table. He made “life-and-death” decisions concerning pastoral careers. He was a respected and prestigious official in

Pastors can be funny too!

SHARON CRESS

the union office. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Jim and the matriarch standing several feet away.

Now, you must understand that I was brought up with the philosophy that all people are created equal. That meant rules apply equally to everybody. So I began my speech: “Excuse me, sir, but you will need to finish your lemonade and cookies before you leave the fellowship hall.”

He did not slow down.

“Sir,” I continued, stepping closer and wondering if he was hearing-impaired, “we are asking that everyone finish their snacks before they enter the rest of the church.”

“Young lady, do you know who I am?” he loudly questioned.

“Of course,” I smiled. “That’s why you want to set a good example.”

The matriarch turned beet red while Jim blanched. Rushing up, they began mumbling diplomatic explanations to the perpetrator while I was quickly relieved from guard duty.

So the conference president’s telephone call was a relief. Maybe that union official didn’t hold a grudge. Maybe he did not report me to our conference president. Maybe he did, but because our conference president was such a great guy, he ignored it.

Humor and embarrassment seem to have followed me through 25 years of ministry. Jim thinks I attract “incidents” like some dogs gather fleas.

Dinner for two?

Just a few weeks later, while we were basking in the joy of our interim leadership, two more church officials (from the General Conference, no less) arrived unexpectedly just as Sabbath school was beginning.

I had fought the flu all week and had

not left our apartment even for groceries. Jim was fending for himself, and his lack of housekeeping skills was evident. Dishes filled the kitchen in all stages—unwashed, washed, drying, and ready to put away. As I struggled to get ready for church, I surveyed the mess and was glad the church would be cleaner—their rules on confining food to one room had not changed!

Between Sabbath school and worship service, the head elder met me in the foyer. “We have two very important guests here today,” he began. “You must take them home for dinner.”

“Are you kidding?” I was stunned. “You know I have been sick all week, and I don’t have anything prepared or even any groceries to fix, and my house is a disorganized mess. We will have to make other arrangements.”

“No other arrangements! You are the pastor’s wife. It’s your job.”

I knew it was futile to argue, so I got in the car and drove home. Nothing there had changed in the hour I was gone. Surveying the meager rations in the pantry, I realized the meal would be much less than I would want to serve to guests. So I got out the best china, trying to convince myself that the simple rations would look better on pretty dishes.

When Jim brought the men, they were gracious. However, when we sat down at the dinner table, it was evident that I had not planned this meal very well. What can you do with two packages of macaroni and cheese, a box of frozen peas, and hard bread? I scraped the frost off some old ice cream so we were able to have a bit of dessert.

I was thoroughly embarrassed, not knowing the worst was yet to come. Our two little Yorkshire terriers, Kouchie and Ajax, were thrilled we had guests. Thankfully, their friendly antics diverted much of the attention from the food and lack of housekeeping.

It didn’t take long to finish this meal, so Jim invited all of us to sit in the living room, which was only about three steps from the table. I decided not to clear the dessert bowls, because the guests might

decide to help carry them into the kitchen—horror of horrors!

Trying to make polite conversation, we were unaware that Kouchie and Ajax were no longer with us. Then the tinkling of china caused us all to look simultaneously at the table. The dogs had somehow managed to jump from floor to chairs to table and were now contentedly walking on the white linen tablecloth, methodically licking the last of the ice cream. I was mortified.

Shooing them off the table, I began explaining that they had never before done anything like this . . .

The guests left abruptly, explaining that they had suddenly remembered other appointments.

"They will go back to the General Conference and tell everybody about the pastor's wife whose dogs walk on and eat on the table," I moaned. "They will talk about how these young ministers are

'going to the dogs.' " I could imagine colleagues spreading the story throughout the headquarters. Physical sickness gave way to mental anguish!

Four years ago, when we were asked to come to our present positions, my first question to Jim was "Are those two men still working there? If so, we can't go—I could never face them!" He assured me they had long since retired.

Share the spice in your ministry

Now, why tell these tales from the past? They are only the first of such "events" that have spiced up 25 years of ministry in which I have managed to embarrass myself or those around me.

When we visit with other clergy families, I find that they too have experienced their share of memories that they would just as soon forget!

Here at Shepherdess International we are collecting humorous and embarrassing

stories from pastoral families around the world for a new book—a collection of parsonage humor. And we need your entertaining tales. In this editorial I have shared with you a couple vignettes to which I am attaching my name. Not all of my own escapades will be identified. You can choose to have your name attached or remain anonymous! Specify, please!

So send in *your* most embarrassing or humorous stories to Shepherdess International, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904, U.S.A. If you use a computer, send the diskette along with a hard copy. If you use only a pen, by all means, send us your handwritten experiences.

The book will be published in 1998. As with the cookbook *Seasoned With Love*, all proceeds will go to help pastors' spouses share the good news of Jesus Christ and His soon return. ■

What's the Funniest or Most Embarrassing Thing That's Happened to You?

Shepherdess International is compiling the funniest and most embarrassing things that have happened to clergy wives. We want your story in what promises to be a delightfully humorous compilation. Your name may be withheld in the publication if you wish.

Also, suggest a title(s) for this collection of parsonage humor. If it wins, you'll receive \$100 (ministers' wives only).

Proceeds from this book will fund pastors' wives' projects to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Please send your story to:

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HELLO, PASTOR

Small-church insights shared
by a member with his new pastor

There you are, sitting in the speaker's chair on the platform, with a stiffly self-conscious elder on either side of you. You look like a nice person. We're glad you're here, and we hope you like us.



Maylan Schurch is pastor of the Shoreline and Bellevue churches in Washington.

I don't want to add to your already-burdened shoulders, but I've got some things I wish to say to you. You've already driven 75 miles to get here this morning, and as soon as your sermon is done you'll shake a few hands and speed toward an early-afternoon service 50 miles farther down the road.

By the time this large, sprawling district lets you spend enough time with us so we really start knowing you, and before you get a call to greener pastures, here's what I would like to say to you while you're still fresh in the saddle.

You're a stranger to us

It's more important than you think. We're off the beaten track here. We don't have a lot of practice dealing with strangers. You're probably the first new person through our doors in—what? Six or seven months? So you'll find most of us cautiously polite while we learn about you. You may feel like an outsider for a while, but bear with us.

There are a couple ways you can help move us more rapidly through this period.

Tell us about yourself. True stories. Tell us where you grew up. Were you a farm kid or a city kid? Describe your childhood home

and tell us what your parents were like. Tell us about your hobbies—then and now.

I'm not saying make your entire sermon a string of autobiographical adventures, but right now you're like one of those life-size cardboard celebrity photographs people stand beside to get their pictures taken. The quicker you tell us who you are, the quicker the "cardboard you" will disappear. The more human we think you are, the quicker we will tell you our stories, if you care to listen to them.

Assume we mean well. You don't know Grandma Growl yet, but trust me, you will. That's her across the aisle, giving you a penetrating gaze. (Don't call her Grandma Growl, of course, and if it slips out, don't tell her where you heard the nickname.)

Grandma Growl rules the organization she still insists on calling "Dorcas." Her deep concern for the poor is lacerated regularly by the cynical knowledge that every third client is probably "working the system." All this internal pressure doesn't always make her a pleasant person. Grandma can't stand change. She's seen fads, including earnest, whirlwind-change-stirring pastors, quickly come and go. She's convinced that change often signals erosion of prin-

M A Y L A N S C H U R C H

ciple, that first lurch down the slippery slope.

But if you'll just listen to some of Grandma's stories and deep concerns, and try to see things from her point of view, in a couple years she'll be your most loyal backer and cry like a baby when you have to leave.

Because she cares, she cares fiercely and uncompromisingly. We all care, in our way. Otherwise we wouldn't be here any more. And if you show us that you care too, you'll find that as we watch you and how you care, the way you care will begin to rub off on us.

We wonder why you're here

I mean, get real. Nobody begs the conference for this district. So (a) you're very inexperienced and we're supposed to train you; (b) you're entering the ministry after coming from another career, and we're your launching pad; (c) you're within a few months of retirement and this was the only place they could find for you; or (d) forgive my frankness, but you've been a bad boy or girl somewhere else and you're starting over here.

One thing we are sure of: if you're like our previous pastors, the very instant you get a sniff at something better, you're outta here, maybe to a two-church district, or maybe a plum single-churcher. And of course, we don't blame you—you've got your career to think about. But again, there are a couple things you can do to help defuse our cynicism.

Promise us a specific time period. If you can solemnly vow you'll stay with us three years or maybe four, this will give us a deep sense of encouragement. Time and again we've come to the place where we've just begun to see those humorous chunks of humanness in our pastor and have dared to let ourselves begin to love him or her when we hear by the grapevine that the following Sabbath is his or her last.

We've seen our church program just begin to gather momentum and enthusiasm only to be swept out of the way to make room for someone else with a different personality and set of skills.

Turn down a couple calls while you're here. And let word of those refusals get out. That will refresh us like watered flowers. You refused a better offer because you like us! And I can promise you one thing—the longer you stay here (assuming we're both willing to work on the relationship), the more you will be loved and respected.

Tell us why you love us. We've had precious little positive feedback about ourselves. Nobody ever sent a *Mission Spotlight* team out our way to talk about our exploding growth. Rather than encouraging us, it seems as though the conference is always riding us about goals we never had a hand in setting.

Give us a pat on the back once in a while. One single, solitary personal note from you, written in your own handwriting (even though you claim it's wretchedly unreadable), will earn you a place in our hearts. A relaxed, lean-back-on-the-couch, non-fund-raising visit (call ahead first, please, so we can show you our best side) can charge our spiritual batteries for weeks.

We're rather discouraged about our role in the remnant

Evangelists have conditioned us to believe that Jesus' coming is right around the corner. If that's true, we ought to be grabbing friends and relatives by the wrist and hauling them to church every week. But we're not. We're proud of our faith and ashamed of it at the same time. Our last evangelistic series, six years ago, brought in a beautiful young family that has now moved across the state, and a woman who's now living in a halfway house for the developmentally disabled. People who've lived out here a long time (normal people, anyway) don't change affiliations very quickly.

And you need to remember that church really isn't a huge part of our lives. We're not a large congregation with something happening every night. Basically, church for us is 9:30 to noon on Sabbaths, and for six or seven diehards, prayer meeting.

Tell us true, recent, and as-local-as-possible stories about how the church at large is going forward. Be our grapevine for good things that are happening in the big church in the state capital. Tell us the latest news about the thrilling radio ministry that several physicians are sponsoring in the next state. Keep us posted on the evangelistic explosion among migrant workers. And please don't tell us these stories merely to "guilt" us into getting our own program going. Even though such stories aren't quite as thrilling as if they were happening to us, they might just spark a flame of creativity in our own hearts someday.

Remember to cherish Mary Ann and the Jensens

I mentioned Grandma Growl earlier. Mary Ann and the Jensens also work hard and care a lot—but best of all, they're happy Christians.

Mary Ann teaches our one adult class and spends as much time preparing for the 17 who attend as she would if the class were 300 strong. She encourages class discussion and keeps us going with her humorous comments and questions.

The Jensens are quieter, but just as friendly. They don't toot their own horn, but you will notice that somehow the church budget is always met at the end of the month. And you'll probably never know how many potlucks Mrs. Jensen has saved with her three casseroles or how many kids' boarding academy tuition they helped pay.

I've got a few suggestions for cherishing these saints of God.

Lavish attention on them. Behind her quirky smile, Mary Ann is struggling with some of the same theological issues your professors guided you safely through back in the seminary. Once she thinks she can trust you, she'll ask you about them, and she will gasp with relief as you explain the reasons you still believe.

And the self-sacrificing Jensens need to be earnestly and regularly thanked. Write them notes every time you hear of some benevolence they've bestowed. Spend time with them too. They, like Mary Ann and Grandma Growl, are your disciples.

Back our dreams. Don't let us fool you. At first we'll give you the impression that we want you to come up with all the programs. Maybe a few of us even believe that. But what you need to do is get us all together—formally for a visioning session or informally after a church potluck—and ask us what dreams we have for our community.

We will watch you cautiously for a while to see if you're serious or whether you're just going through the formality of asking us our opinions before you launch your own carefully crafted plans in our direction. But if we sense you really mean it, we'll step forward cautiously and offer our views. And then if you stay out of the way, we will catch fire, and you will not be able to extinguish us!

So welcome, Pastor. Glad you're here. I'll be praying! ■

MINI CHURCHES, MAXIMUM CHALLENGES

The small church congregation has become the experimental laboratory and proving ground for new, usually inexperienced interns. Pastoring one or more small churches often develops the gristle a new minister needs before moving on to bigger and broader fields of pastoral endeavor.



Hal Gates, L.L.D., is pastor of the Oak Harbor/Friday Harbor districts in Oak Harbor, Washington.

However, having enjoyed 14 years pastoring in a number of small churches, I might aptly be described as having a small church mindset. Here are some of my reflections on the essentials of four small church situations in which I have pastored.

The little lost church

As a 44-year-old task force lay pastor, I was called to take over a small church in an economically distressed logging and lumbering community. The congregation was made up of survivors from a neighboring small church, closed as a result of the dwindling membership's inability to meet church obligations. The original membership had been decimated by "church bashers" who, from inside the church had succeeded in completing the shattering that outside forces had started.

The church officers—consisting of two older deacons, one active woman elder, and six or eight other members—were committed to making the church survive. Half of this membership commuted some 25 miles to the church on narrow, crooked roads.

Outreach to the 15 or so inactive members was nearly nil.

The little lost church suffered from a lack of identity and low congregational esteem. It was striving to survive a severe collective depression. It was wounded, abused, rejected, suspicious, and grieving. Its condition was, without question, critical, and life-threatening. Barring a miracle, any positive survival prognosis for the church was doubtful.

This church needed a purpose and establishment of goals that were simple, attainable, and measurable. Only with a lot of JOY (Jesus, others, yourselves) mingled with love, affirmation, acceptance, and forgiveness could it hope to survive.

The first order of business was to apply the principles of the serenity prayer: we needed the courage to change the things we could, accept the things we could not change, and insight to know the difference. As a church we prayed openly and honestly to accept the fact that without divine intervention, we were dead! We sought diligently to apply the principles of Philippians 4:4-8.

The courage to change the things we

H A L G A T E S

could started with our facility. We were attempting to “look alive.” After much yard work, cosmetic and structural repair, and disposal of years of accumulated stuff, we had a fairly modern-looking facility.

Then came the work of “fixing the folks”! My experience as an Air Force medic taught me three principles of triage: (1) start with the least wounded, (2) get them up and going, and (3) make them ministers to the more seriously injured.

The healing that took place dovetailed with the new identity the church took on as a congregation of “hugs and healing.” All of this coincided with God’s divine intervention in response to our determined requests. With these changes came a foundation upon which to build a strong small church. Soon a visitor or two showed up on Sabbath. We welcomed and loved them; accepted, affirmed, and forgave them. We hugged them, helped them, and invited them to our weekly healthful fellowship dinner. Our Sabbaths became celebrations of God’s Lordship and leadership through Christ Jesus.

We held a small but enthusiastic Christ-centered evangelistic series, as much for the congregation as for the community. We saw that we could do “all things through Christ who strengthens [us]!” (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

Soon we had two baptisms in the restored baptistry, which had, through lack of use, become a storage area. It was a joy to repeat this more times in two years than in the previous two decades. Our spirits soared on the wings of an eagle. We were restored and transfused with the blood of Jesus our Lord! We were becoming a functional member church in the family of God!

We did all we could to hold high before us the fact that it was the restorative, regenerating power of God, through Jesus Christ, who had brought about these changes, and not our own efforts. We thanked God humbly for all He had done. He had “supplied all [our] needs according to riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (verse 19, NKJV).

After two years I was called into full-time internship and hesitantly left the little lost church, which had found its way.

The superachiever small church

Our next small church had altogether different challenges. It was the new babe on the big city block.

With high expectations and enthusiasm, this humble congregation also suffered with identity problems as it struggled to become a church in the Seattle, Washington, megalopolis. My wife and I were the second pastoral family to serve this new 2-year-old congregation, birthed by volunteers from other surrounding churches who saw the need for an Adventist church in this older, densely populated area of the city.

These brave saints came together and started a church in the living room of the first pastor’s house. From this humble genesis came the growing need for a bigger

The little church suffered from a lack of identity and low congregational esteem. It was striving to survive a severe collective depression. . . . This church needed a purpose and establishment of goals that were simple, attainable, and measurable.

church home. A rented church facility provided a place for a dynamic series of meetings, conducted by a visiting evangelist. As a result of this and other activities, many came into the new congregation, including the pastor from whom the church had been rented. However, as a result, the church we were renting canceled the lease, leaving our growing congregation homeless. Attempts to rent other facilities brought an array of problems as we searched for a permanent home.

Our congregation was like a beautiful crown adorned with an array of diverse jewels. A Caucasian pastor; an Egyptian head elder married to a Lebanese head deaconess; a Samoan elder. Then there were Afri-

can-American, Chinese, Tongan, and Spanish teachers and other leaders—all working together in one accord!

Our outreach and evangelism programs included: public meetings; Revelation and felt needs seminars; group Bible studies; Regeneration, a Christ-centered, 12-step support group network dealing with addictive-compulsive family dysfunctions; the Go Ye prison and street ministry; and the COSA (Christ Overcoming Sexual Addiction), COPE (Christ Overcoming Problem Eating), and SOA (Survivors of Abuse) outreaches.

We tried to touch people where they hurt, ministering to their needs by becoming a place where they could deal with and find healing for their dysfunctions. We strove to make our church a place of recovery and regeneration, where brand-new creatures in Christ could each become ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for God (see 2 Cor. 5:17-21).

Our membership grew, became stable, and achieved church status. A term lease was finally secured, and later a building was purchased. We had come together in the beginning with Jesus Christ at the center of our life together. We stayed together, made progress, worked beside one another, and achieved a measure of success that the Lord had blessed!

I believe that in all of this it is important to make sure that we as leaders are processing our issues and not falling into some of the control, codependent, chaotic traps that are often so much a part of any recovery ministry. If these personal issues are not dealt with, we may end up a “dependent” pastor leading a “codependent” congregation.

The small church seeking to adapt

After four years of exciting city ministry in Seattle, another call came to another small church several miles and a ferry ride across Puget Sound, in a quaint and quiet fishing town with a Norwegian heritage. The church had been established many years before by seriously committed, salt-of-the-earth, fiercely independent Seventh-day Adventists.

The church found itself beset by culture shock, reeling in its nonacceptance of the reality that “change happens.” A growing boat industry, tourism, the U.S. Navy submarine base, commuters, and shopping

centers created a demographic revolution in the area.

The congregation needed to ask, "How do we respond to the expansive changes brought about by growth and development all around us?" But fear of an unknown future and fear of change was paralyzing them. Again, the lesson to learn was to accept the things that cannot be changed and have the courage and creativity to change what can be changed!

Visioning became a foundational concept. To paraphrase a well-known biblical text: "Where vision is lacking, the churches fail" (see Prov. 29:18). We saw the mere possibility of embracing a viable vision as something to get excited about. It was inspiring simply to think of the possibilities opened

to us for outreach, growth, evangelism, support groups, community service—even the church school had the potential of developing into an outreach program.

With elders in charge of "visit teams" and lay pastors in training, our vision became our mission. We claimed the promise that with the faith of a grain of mustard seed we could move the mountains of doubt, fear, frustration, and resistance to change. God built mountains of hope, one fulfilled promise at a time. John said: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18, NKJV).

One important aspect of small church ministry is the discipleship of lay and assistant pastors. A retired Marine officer came to help with the work in the church and became a literature evangelist. As my head elder he was ready, willing, and able to take on the task of pastoring the church when I was called to my next district. He has since become a full-time intern pastor of two small churches.

The mother church and the mascot

Nearly three years ago I was overjoyed at a call that came to me to pastor a two-church district that stretched 105 miles, with 45 islands in the upper northwest corner of the state of Washington. What a homecoming! Seventeen years before, my wife and I had been baptized together in the Friday Harbor church, now the second church in this district. The challenges to minister and meet the needs in this most unique and pristine place are, to say the least, awesome.

Oak Harbor, the first church, is on Whidbey Island. Fifty-five miles long and less than two miles wide, Whidbey is accessible by ferry at the south and west, and by bridge to the north. The Oak Harbor church, located in the northern part of Whidbey Island, is also the home of the naval air station and the sea plane base. The church congregation has a foundation of island pioneers, retirees, civilian support persons, and an ever-changing body of military personnel.

Severe weather conditions in winter and the presence of many tourists during the summer tend to impede the three forms of travel available: road, water, and air. Thus a ready and willing laity is a necessity, not only to brave these elements, but to be minutepersons in the services of the church, filling in wherever needed, and from time

to time assuming actual pastoral duties.

The Oak Harbor congregation gladly shares its pastor once a month with Friday Harbor. The time, distance, and geographic and demographic conditions make this two-church district nearly impossible for one pastor to conduct any kind of consistent ministry in both churches.

The Friday Harbor church provides worship services and nurture to four primary islands, each with sparsely populated rural areas, plus 20 tiny, mostly summer-populated islands. Given these constraints, the only possible solution has been to find a qualified layperson who, as a task force pastor, can carry out the day-to-day ministerial and pastoral services of the church.

Chris, baptized in Friday Harbor, understood the island temperament. He had worked in youth evangelism with me in Russia and had spent two years in the Washington Conference. As the task force pastor, Chris has been instrumental in establishing lay training in all the islands. He has now stepped into the role of full-time intern pastor in Friday Harbor.

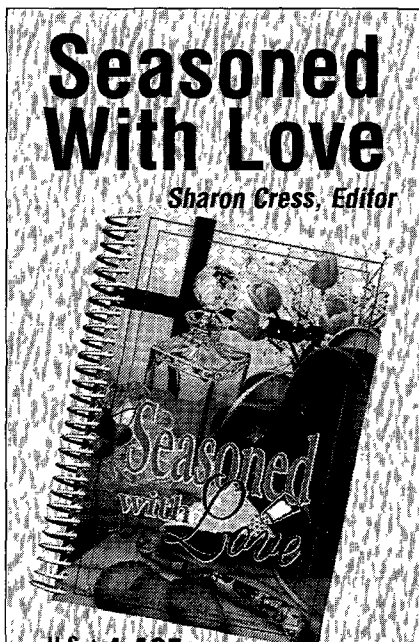
In less than three years, all church growth statistics have doubled, proving again that the discipling of lay pastors in small church training grounds is a win-win plan.

The bottom line

I believe God calls us to minister to folks in out-of-the-way places, to teach them to be the ministers of reconciliation. As pastors we are to disciple, enable, and empower our people to do ministry. When specially called persons come along, we need to train, assist, and allow them to take on the work to the degree they are led, and are willing to be led.

Our ministry needs to be from a Jesus-filled heart spilling over into every life we meet. Being Acts 1:8-type people, we need to empower others wherever we are sent to serve. There is a desperate need among us and our people to know God. Introducing people to God in a small-church setting is often easier, friendlier, and more fulfilling than it is in larger, more stress-filled church situations.

Increasingly I find this prayer rising in me: "Just give me a little church or two, with a few disciples, O Lord. Open the door for us and give us the strength of Your Holy Spirit to be ambassadors for You. In the name and power of Jesus Christ. Amen." ■



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Sharon Cress, Editor

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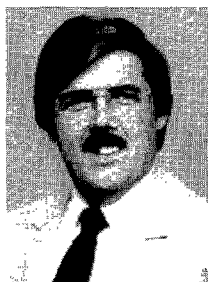
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HOW GROUP DYNAMICS IMPACT YOUR MINISTRY

Pastors who have served congregations of different sizes know that “little” churches are different from “big” churches. If they took a course in “group dynamics” years ago, it is likely that the textbook focused only on the relational processes typical of small groups.



Monte Sahlin is assistant to the president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists for research and development.

More recently, however, researchers have identified “congregational dynamics” as a systems view of life in a local church. It works from the assumption that a significant portion of what happens in a congregation is influenced by patterns related to the size of the group.¹

The most significant indicator in the life of a congregation is the average attendance at worship services. This is a count of people present, regardless of age or membership status.² Where this number is 50 or less, the group is called a “single-cell” congregation. The group dynamics are much like those of an expanded small group or an extended family.

Churches with an average attendance of 51 to 150 are called a “pastor-centered” congregation. The role of the pastor becomes central in this type of congregation.

Attendance of 151 to 300 qualifies the group as a “program-centered” congrega-

tion. A structure of programs and sub-groups under a team of leaders working in partnership with the pastor is the central dynamic for this pattern.

Where the average attendance is more than 300, the group is called a “corporation-style” church. These are complex institutions. The largest actually contain several congregations, each more like one of the other patterns present in smaller congregations.

Single-cell congregations

About 20 percent of all congregations in the United States and 59 percent of Seventh-day Adventist congregations in North America have fewer than 100 members. Many studies indicate consistently that average worship attendance is equal to about one half the membership of a congregation, so almost all of these are “single-cell” churches³

Leadership in this type of congregation is informal and rests in the hands of two or three

“patriarchs” or “matriarchs.” These individuals have influence largely because of their long tenure in the group. They exercise leadership even when they do not hold any elected office and even when they do not wish to.

The pastor is usually not the leader of a single-cell congregation, especially when his or her tenure is only two or three years and he or she has one or more other congregations to serve. What the members of single-cell churches want is someone to preach and provide quality pastoral care, not leadership for change or growth.

Entry by newcomers into a single-cell congregation is difficult. The group is comfortable with those whom they’ve known for some time and not motivated to assimilate new members. This is one of the reasons small congregations usually do not grow except during the first few years of their existence.

Successful soul winning in small churches requires the involvement of one or more of the patriarchs or matriarchs. An influential person must adopt the new member into the fellowship in order for the group really to accept the new person and make a success of the relationship. The same is true for membership transfers.

The highest value in these small churches is survival. Members have found over the years that one survival tactic is to not take the clergy seriously. They have come to expect a high turnover rate among pastors.

Pastor-centered congregation

The largest portion (42 percent) of congregations of all faiths in the U.S. have 100 to 299 members. This range accounts for 28 percent of Adventist congregations in North America. Again assuming that for almost all of these churches the average worship attendance is about half the membership, these would fall into the pastor-centered pattern.

In these churches the role of the pastor is central, and he or she is expected to relate personally to every individual. The primary expectation is that the pastor will serve as primary caretaker, nurturing the fabric of relationships that make up the congregation.

A pastor who does not visit the members and does not announce to the congregation each week who is in the hospital, who is having a baby, who is moving away, etc., is in trouble. This size of church has grown too large to function like a small group, and

now the members depend on the pastor to keep them connected.

Church growth in a church of this type is directly related to the work of the pastor. The congregation expects the pastor to win new members and guide their assimilation into the group. When the pastor introduces a new member and asks the members to accept the person into fellowship, most in the group will readily do so.

Leadership is invested in the pastor. Influential members expect him or her to communicate with them, but they also look to the pastor to chair the decision-making

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meetings of the church and provide a sense of direction. They expect their pastor to provide leadership in the “big” projects of the church—painting the children’s rooms, the annual fund-raising program, or an evangelistic seminar. In order to get members involved in various church tasks, the pastor must delegate.

Expectations are high in pastor-centered congregations and they can be hard on the pastor’s spouse and children. As church growth moves toward an average attendance of 150, it often slows to a halt simply because the pastor becomes exhausted and incapable of keeping up with all of the expectations.

Unlike most Protestant denominations in North America, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has most of its pastors who serve this type of congregation assigned to two- or three-church districts. The classic literature and the baseline studies presuppose a full-time pastor in a pastor-centered congregation, while almost all Adventist pastors in this category are half-time or less per church.

Large churches

About a third of the congregations of all faiths in the U.S. have 300 or more members; 21 percent have 500 or more members. Only 13 percent of Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America have more than 300 members, although these 600 congregations contain the majority of the total membership.

Most of these congregations likely fall into either the program-centered pattern or that of the corporation-style church. A significant number of churches with 300 to 400 members continue to hold on to the pastor-centered dynamic. This can be noted where there are 300 or more members and yet average worship attendance stays at 150 or below.

If the pastor-centered pattern is the model for the literature on pastoral ministry, then the program-centered pattern is the underlying assumption upon which most denominational policies and materials are based. For example, the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* calls for the church board to be made up of the departmental leaders in the congregation. This is typical of the program-centered pattern, but can be dysfunctional in other dynamics.

In a program-centered church, leadership is invested in a team, not one, two, or three individuals. Formal processes of electing leaders and making decisions are important. The congregation sponsors a number of activities or groups—a choir, a Pathfinder Club, a witnessing program, seminars of various kinds, etc.

Strong lay leadership for the variety of specialized ministries is the key element in a program-centered church. The role of the pastor is no longer primarily “front-line” delivery of pastoral care, but planning and program development, recruitment and training of volunteers, coordination, and consensus building.

Church growth comes indirectly from a

well-honed strategy that involves the work of many individuals. Public evangelism is important, and equally important is a careful, intentional program of individual follow-up and new member assimilation. Many successful pastors of program-centered congregations are using computer software that allows them to track potential and current members, groups, and activities.

When a church moves toward the corporation-style pattern, additional pastoral staffing is added. Typically a program-centered congregation has one pastor even though it has other staff members—office manager, youth worker, personal evangelism worker, family counselor, social worker, or parish nurse. These staff members are usually not clergy. When another clergyperson comes into the congregation, things become more complicated.

Associate pastors inevitably have a “congregation” of their own, no matter how much they are committed to supporting the senior pastor. This is normal, and the most productive pastoral staffs simply use this dynamic for church growth.

The fast-growing megachurches actually consist of a number of small congregations within the church. Associate pastors are assigned to specific congregations and held accountable for their growth.

Large churches are important to the mission of the church today because of mounting evidence that the baby boom generation (now 32 to 51 years of age) and the baby bust generation (now 22 to 31 years of age) prefer the high quality of worship and wide menu of programs that large churches can provide. For example, Adventist boomers typically want to be in a church near a day academy.

Don't be confused by the fact that these same generational segments prefer a high degree of personalization, such as small group ministries and informal dress at worship. In fact, large churches have the resources necessary to provide personalization.

Church growth in large churches is related to meeting the needs of younger adults (under 50) and providing a wide range of choices for those who participate. This includes opportunities for significant public service in collaboration with Christian charitable organizations such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

What does it all mean?

Most pastors will never serve in a program-centered or corporation-style congregation. Most will, however, spend the early part of their career trying to apply their professional education to single-cell churches that seem to defy the textbooks.

The exceptions are important. African-American congregations, at least in the Adventist Church, tend to be larger than Anglo congregations, although they rarely have multiple pastors on staff. And there is no evidence that the research reported here applies to other congregations—Hispanic, Asian, etc.

Many pastors will experience greater professional fulfillment if they recognize the kind of congregational dynamics that define the context of their ministry. More can be achieved by guiding the boat through the currents than rowing upstream.

Some will undoubtedly object that group dynamics should not determine the mission of the church. I agree! Mission is about where the boat is headed, not how we get to our destination.

This approach is consistent with Paul, the great missionary pastor, who first announced: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . . . To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:19-22, NIV). ■

¹ Arlin J. Rothauge's seminal work in this area, *Sizing Up a Congregation* (1984), is available from the Episcopal Church Center in New York City. Lyle E. Schaller has produced a series of books and articles along the same line, and other studies have been published by the Alban Institute in Washington, D.C. Studies by the North American Division Office of Information and Research and the Center for Creative Ministry also show that the same dynamics can be observed in Seventh-day Adventist congregations as well.

² Data on percentage of Adventist churches by size is from the North American Division Office of Information and Research Report 1, *Demographic Profile of the Adventist Community in North America*. Data on percentage of churches of all faiths by size can be found in *From Belief to Commitment: The Community Service Activities and Finances of Religious Congregations in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1993).

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WE'RE STILL HERE

When I was a boy growing up on the North Dakota prairie, I'd look in every encyclopedia and geography book I could find for a mention of my state.



Loren Seibold is pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Palo Alto, California.

I hoped that someone in the bigger, busier world where things *really* happened sensed the significant things about us: how we filled our days, the richness of our lives, the texture of our relationships, the satisfaction we felt in our achievements. As I paged through those volumes I'd see, under the headings of other states and countries, pictures of tall, snowcapped mountains (in North Dakota you can see for miles from the most insignificant knoll); tall city skylines (the tallest building in my world was a grain elevator); and oceans (on our farm a cattail-crowded pond was a significant body of water).

When I finally found the section on North Dakota, I was always disappointed. The article was invariably short and included pictures of wheat fields, cows, and a grain elevator, all of which I could see by looking out of my classroom window.

It seemed like every other state had some attraction that merited attention: Disneyland, Mount Rushmore, Old Faithful, the Empire State Building, the Golden Gate Bridge. North Dakota had cows and wheat. It's the breadbasket of the nation, but so what? Wheat and cows don't make interesting reading. All the interesting things were happening someplace else, where there were more people and more resources than we could lay claim to.

This is how many members of small churches feel: they wonder if anyone out there knows that the heart of God's church is still beating in the thousands of little congregations across this country and around the world.

As I read through professional journals or study new church programs that have tumbled down from somewhere far above me in the church hierarchy, it is evident that even though most churches are small,¹ programs are designed for the fewer that are large. The journals are rich with resources to help the youth minister run a jet-hot youth program. But most churches don't have a youth pastor—or even a skillful, trustworthy, highly motivated layperson with enough time on his or her hands to fashion an active program. There are informative articles on how to set up committees for music and worship, and how to divide your church into small groups. But many congregations are no more than a small group. The articles on innovative leadership are fine, as long as you don't forget that the *real* leadership often lies with patriarchs and matriarchs of the congregation who are kind enough to allow the pastor to think he or she is running things. Leadership, in that case, often has more to do with love and personal attention than with organizational flowcharts.

Disappearance

"It is ironic," notes Carl S. Dudley, "that the ubiquitous majority of churches (the small congregations) needed to be 'rediscovered' by the minority (the larger congregations)."² Large Protestant congregations are a relatively recent phenomenon in North America. Even though there had always been a few large "first churches" in downtown areas, by the turn of the century the size of the average congregation was only 150 members. The model of a

L O R E N S E I B O L D

successful church was a congregation served by one full-time “generalist” pastor.

But the startling growth of some congregations in the rapidly swelling suburbs after World War II led to a new model of what a congregation should strive to be: a top-managed organization, with abundant financial resources, led not by a generalist, but by a team of specialists. Such congregations are modeled unashamedly on the corporate world and are run by standards of “organizational efficiency.” From the denominational headquarters on down, it has become accepted without question that good churches are big churches, and that the kind of clergy positions these big churches provide are the standard of professional success.

As a result, small churches have nearly disappeared from the serious planning agenda of most denominational offices—other than as a thorny problem of finding people and resources to serve them. High-profile models of what a small inner city church should be are few, and models of what would constitute success in a village or rural church are virtually nonexistent. Most programming for ministries targets the larger suburban church, and for good reason: small churches are less likely to possess the people, the means, or the will to respond to the kinds of programs denominational planners generate.

Similarly, even though small church ministry is strikingly different than large church ministry, there are few denominations that recognize a track for small church specialists. If small churches are merely failed big churches, small church pastors are thought of (and sometimes think of themselves) as those who aren’t skillful enough to have been promoted to a larger venue.

But most ministry doesn’t happen in churches of thousands, with choirs and pipe organs, multiple pastors, full-time secretaries, vast parking lots, and packed sanctuaries. Most of it happens in the thousands of small parishes across the country, where dedicated pastors are marrying and burying, trying to find someone to lead the teens or organize the potluck or sing special music. Never exploding with growth—but far from dying, either. Never particularly efficient, and often organized more like a family than a corporation, small congregations dominate Protestant Christianity in number, if not in collective attendance and prestige.

A special ministry

“Small churches,” according to Dudley, “are usually portrayed as miniature versions of the larger congregations,” when in fact they are psychologically and socially quite different.³ Dudley was among the first to note that small churches are so unlike large churches that they require an approach to ministry quite different from the corporate one. Rather than giving small churches a condescending pat on the head and a few hints and tips, Dudley paints them as the

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living skeleton of Christianity. In a world of social change and mobility, he says, they provide strengths that are sadly lacking in many of the more “successful” churches: stability and continuity of relationships.

It is that stability that most often bedevils the ambitious pastor. “They won’t let me change *anything!*” a pastor once complained to me. This pastor was the sixth this church had had in 10 years. Each one had flown into town with the intention of changing everything—and each one had become frustrated at not being able to overturn 100 years of tradition in six months.

Tradition is sometimes the only thing

small churches have to hold to. That’s especially true in small towns and rural areas, where not just church membership but even the population of the community is dropping. The world all around them is changing; but the church is at least one place that will stay relatively the same. In the church, members can conserve their values and beliefs, their relationships and friendships, and their sense of what is right about their world. The present seeks reference in a sacred past that seems, at least in the soft-touch photos of collective memory, more glorious and successful. It is no accident that small churches pass both their strengths and their social pathologies along from generation to generation, even though the entire group is replaced.

Small churches conserve not just traditional ways, but traditional relationships. Where large churches are composed of many overlapping social groups, small churches are often just one social group in which everyone knows everyone else—the good and the bad about them. New people may have a difficult time being assimilated. Someone who has been in the church for 10 years is still a “newcomer.” That goes for new pastors, too.

Leadership is also a matter of tradition. I once served in a country church in which one family had for generations supplied the church elders, another had always supplied the Sabbath School teachers, and a third had supplied the treasurers. My first attempt to mix things up a bit crashed in flames in nominating committee.

Small churches are sometimes infuriatingly tenacious. They survive long after it would have been efficient for them to close or merge—greatly complicating the task of district pastors and denominational managers.

Conventional church growth wisdom prescribes a flexible organization, responsive to new ideas coming from professional leadership, serving a flexible and open social group. Though this approach has been a source of success in some congregations, it undervalues small churches.

Small churches, while stubbornly conserving the traditions of the past, also conserve such valuable qualities as traditional theology and traditional attitudes. Where Christian love and caring have been the foundation of the church, those qualities, too, are conserved from generation to generation.

The strength of the small church is in human relationships, Dudley explains. "If we define the church by the business Bs of religious institutions—budgets, buildings, and bodies—the small church comes out on the short end. But the small church appears much stronger when measured by human relationships. If the church is defined by the number of people who know and care about one another by name, then the small church has already grown."⁴ Often folks spend generations finding ways to absorb even rather eccentric characters into the fabric of the church family. While it is true that they don't accept newcomers quickly, Dudley asserts that, given time, small churches do something even more significant: they adopt them into the family. Relationships, once formed, are for a lifetime. "In the small church," Dudley explains, "everyone has a place."⁵

New pastors are no exception; they too must earn their place in the social fabric. Given enough time (which seldom happens), a pastor can become a trusted part of a small church family rather than a transient and meddlesome outsider. All of this takes a special sensitivity that can never be taught in organizational efficiency training.

The best small church pastor I ever met served a Methodist congregation in the rural Midwest. I rarely saw him exhibit either organization or efficiency, but he never lacked warmth and enthusiasm. He opened doors by being friendly and a good listener. All the town businesspeople knew him; so did the residents of the nursing home. If he'd nothing else to do, he'd wander up and down Main Street meeting people or visiting in the café. He attended every Kiwanis Club meeting, and was almost always at the sidelines in the team colors, rooting for the high school basketball team. He became fully and deeply a part of the community and betrayed no ambition to be anywhere else. In his congregation he knew who the traditional leaders were, and he was sensitive to their authority. He waited years before cautiously suggesting changes to them. By that time, they loved and trusted him, and would have followed him anywhere. He was the first true small church expert I ever met, and he was an inspiration.⁶

Failure and excellence

There is much that is lovely about small church life. In many small churches the cur-

rents of Christian love run strong and deep. Dedication to the Lord's work is second to none. Children continue to learn about Jesus, discouraged people find strength for another week, thinkers find challenging discussions, lonely people get a hug or a solid handshake, and friends clasp hands. In many small churches you'll find surprisingly excellent preaching and music, thoughtful Sabbath or Sunday school discussions, spiritual lives of remarkable richness, and people passionately active in outreach ministries.

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Yet as they compare themselves to what they see as the ideal church—the growing, energetic suburban congregation—many small churches live under a cloud of failure. Recently I read an article written by a denominational executive recommending that small churches that haven't grown in a decade be closed. They're not showing signs of success, he opined, and are wasting personnel and other resources.

I thought of the little family church in which I grew up in the barely-there hamlet of Cleveland, North Dakota. I recall the folks in my church often feeling somewhat left behind by the rest of the world. New church members were being added by the hundreds in California and in Africa and in Argentina—but not among the farmers of Stutsman County.

Far from growing, the church has lost people decade by decade, just as the community where it is located: some have grown old, some have moved away, some have met untimely deaths, and nearly all the young people have gone elsewhere to seek their fortunes. I can think of very few baptisms into that congregation other than the church's own children or an occasional person marrying into one of the church's families. By all the most frequently mentioned standards, that church has been a failure and should close.

But an evaluation based on growth alone cheats the church of the credit it deserves. Looking back several generations, I can count at least two-score children who grew up in that little church who went on to live lives of Christian service: church school teachers, ministers, denominational presidents and treasurers, literature evangelists, Christian book center managers, college professors, physicians and nurses, directors of church hospitals and nursing homes, and overseas missionaries. Even among those who didn't serve the church professionally, an extraordinary proportion are still faithful believers and raising their families as faithful believers.

In short, the effect of that little congregation on God's work has been phenomenal! There are emissaries from the Cleveland, North Dakota, Seventh-day Adventist Church across this continent and around the world. That little church has been a success! I often wonder how that congregation, and thousands like it, would react if the comparisons with large church programs that make them feel inferior were replaced with affirmations of their own successes.

Now I am far from the prairies. The church I pastor in California is small too, but instead of looking out on wheat fields and cows, it fronts on some of the most expensive real estate in the country. Instead of farmers, I preach to Stanford students and Silicon Valley engineers.

The dynamics here do, in fact, differ from those of the rural churches I once served; education and resources and a surrounding city do make a difference. Yet even here we treasure the rich qualities of small church life: the network of relationships, the respect for tradition, the desire to build trust with one another, the preference for a personal rather than a programmed ministry.

The most important thing I've learned is that we're not at our best when we try to play big church instead of being what we can be: an excellent, intelligent, thoughtful, and active little congregation. I think of my 200-member church as a specialized ministry to our community. We're not Macy's; we're a small, classy boutique. We're not Safeway; we're a little gourmet deli. We know we can't do it all, and so we focus on trying to do what we can do best.

I am convinced that this specialized ministry has a niche. There are enough people who choose small churches in preference to larger churches with more people and programs just down the road, that it would be a mistake to insist that every church reach for megachurch status.

We can do much to attend more thoughtfully to the needs of smaller congregations. More programs won't do it, but more sensitivity and appreciation might. Pastors of small churches, especially those in rural areas, often feel lonely, discouraged, and frustrated in their attempts to put into practice what their seminary professors, professional journals, and denominational leaders suggest they ought to be doing.⁷ These clergy and the members they serve need frequent and sincere assurance that they are part of God's church, accepted by grace for their best efforts and celebrated for their successes, even if they never grow numerically. Most important, we can begin to regard ministry to small churches as a specialty, not a failure.

Until the day when God pours out on earth an unprecedented measure of the Holy Spirit, there will be small congregations that grow little, if at all. The good news (and there is, indeed, much of the paradox of grace in it) is that we're still here, in thousands of small congregations, quietly ministering Christ's love to the communities we touch, and God is still at work among us. Whether you read about us in the journals or not, there is a gentle richness in our small church lives, a loving texture to our relationships, a thoughtful fullness to our days and an excellence to our efforts.

Not all of God's churches are growing in membership. Some are simply growing in grace. ■

⁷ 63 percent of churches in America have less than 300 members on their books; 47 percent have

fewer than 200 members. Source: *From Belief to Commitment: The Community Service Activities and Finances of Religious Congregations in the United States, 1993 Ed.*, (Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector, 1993). However, it is social structure, not book membership, that defines the small church; while a big church is a collection of many small social cells, a small church operates as a single social cell.

² Carl S. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ironically, it was his success that brought a

reluctant end to the practice of his specialty: after six years of building an excellent reputation in his community, he was judged by his bishop to be a pastor who *must*, whether he liked it or not, be promoted to a large suburban church!

⁷ From time to time I read of denominationally sponsored retreats for pastors of large churches. They face special needs, it's argued, and need particular encouragement. It occurs to me that lone pastors of small churches, particularly those in rural areas, probably need the camaraderie and support more than any other clergy in the Christian church, and could most benefit from an encouraging program focusing on their unique needs.

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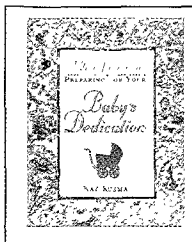
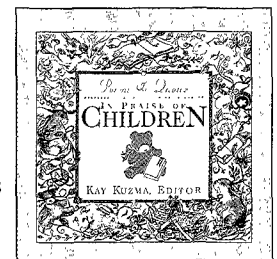


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Through the years millions have marveled at the lifelike appearance of the man who founded the Soviet Union. But the secret to the fine preservation of Lenin's body is a team of artists who monitor the decomposition of the corpse and replace missing or decomposed pieces with wax!



Daniel B. Martella is pastor of the Provo, Utah, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In the end only 40 percent of the serenely reposing body is actually Lenin, while the remaining 60 percent is nothing more than wax.

How like my small church! I thought to myself. Caught in the vortex of a death spiral, our church had become decaying flesh and wax—an Ichabodlike shadow of its former glory. Sabbath mornings bore the chill of death, as a faithful few sat with frozen faces and vacant stares for what felt like an extended funeral.

Assessing the church

Our journey out of the dead church cemetery began one evening when I found the courage to ask our church board some hard questions: *How in the world did we get this way? What is it that has pushed us to the brink of congregational extinction? Like a dam breaking loose, a torrent of pent-up frustrations rushed forth.*

Fran reminded us of the families who had moved to Boise to find work in the growing software industries. Another cited the familiar litany of our limited success in influencing our strong Mormon community. Carlos

noted the language barriers in reaching the growing Hispanic community. One woman wiped away tears as she remembered how the church body had been wounded by angry dissident church snipers.

As we talked we began to see that these things—community demographics, membership transfers, and angry departures by dissidents—were factors over which we had little or no control. They were beyond our ability to change and therefore beyond the realm of our responsibility. Only after releasing ourselves from artificial guilt were we free to focus our energies on things we had the power to change.

We turned an important corner when Bill suggested that our church's future must be linked to our shared identity. "Who are we as a church?" he wanted to know. "What things are important to us? What are the assets of our church? What changes do we need to make in order to embrace our opportunities for the future?"

Answers fell into place slowly in the months to come, like pieces of a puzzle, and with each piece God's vision for our future

DANIEL B. MARTELLA

came into sharper focus. Together we defined our objectives and strategic plans for the church's future. United in our mission, we were on our way to becoming a dynamic little church with big dreams.

An outward focus

The next step in our growth caught me by surprise one afternoon when I happened to meet Ralph puffing on a health club Stairmaster. "What are you doing here?" I asked my friend. "Paying the price for my holiday indulgences," he answered, smiling. "Like the church, I've been eating too much and exercising too little." His words hit home. The church paradigm by which we operated was rich in nurture but lacking in outreach.

Ralph took his ambitious resolve from the health club to the church. In his Sabbath school class and hallway conversations he began to inspire the saints with a new passion for soul winning. "There is little to attract new Adventist families to our community," he would tell them, "so we need to focus on growing new converts."

With Ralph's encouragement, we left the church "fat farm" and committed ourselves to an ambitious outreach endeavor that would culminate with evangelistic meetings. Our new plan for congregational health worked magic. Church board meetings became focused on outreach instead of on mundane maintenance matters. We planned a parenting seminar that brought a steady stream of fresh faces to our church. Our members became experts in hallway evangelism. Church growth through friendship became the heartbeat of our congregation.

One morning I drove a group of our Community Services leaders to the regional federation meeting in a nearby city. We couldn't help noticing a number of beautiful megachurches along the way. "Sometimes I wish we could have a church like that," Karen mused, "with a full slate of ministries and heart-stopping worship services." The others agreed. "On the other hand," Irene interjected, "trying to imitate these tall-steepled ministries is a surefire recipe for mediocrity and burnout for a small church. I think that it is better for small churches to concentrate on doing a few things well."

As we moved through the intersection, my mind slipped into a reflective gear. *Irene was right. A multitude of muddled ministries*

disgrace a church. A few things done well would serve us better in renewing a positive church image.

When we got back to our church that afternoon Irene announced, "The first thing we're going to do is give this place a facelift." We agreed that the peeling paint, frayed carpeting, and weeds reflected the run-down spirit of our church. With a little paint from the hardware store, some inexpensive, lightly used secondhand carpeting, and a few volunteer work bees, the church was given a whole new look without costing us a fortune. As weeks passed, church members could be heard to say, "We don't have to be embarrassed to bring our friends here any more."

One evening

at an elders' meeting, one elder nudged another and said, "Let's update the worship service. With a growing number of members and guests coming to church, we simply must make this time count."

Commitment to excellence

Seeing the church building newly refurbished inspired us with other possibilities. One evening at an elders' meeting, one elder nudged another and said, "Let's update the worship service. With a growing number of members and guests coming to church, we simply must make this time count." Pulling an old bulletin out of his Bible, Ralph pointed out the advantages of updating the design with some new fonts and a bit of computer clip art. Susan added, "Our congregational singing could be given new wings with a combination of classic hymns and contemporary choruses." Another elder suggested we begin a garden of prayer. Wrapping it all up, Carlos advised us to tie each worship service together with a theme that both believers and seekers could follow easily.

On my way home from the elders' meeting it occurred to me that my role in refining our essentials was to provide excellence in preaching. I pulled over to the side of the road and on the back of an envelope wrote down my credo for an effective pulpit ministry: Christ-centered grace, biblical integrity, Spirit-driven passion, practical relevance, and a commitment to Adventist basics. These are the principles that are now helping me connect with our congregation in a way that edifies believers and evangelizes seekers.

Scaling back the scope of ministry in our church and committing ourselves to excellence in the essentials has been a vital element of our church's comeback. While we will never replicate the high-octane worship services and ministries found in large churches, a warm glow of satisfaction settles over our congregation when we know that we have done our best to honor God in the basics.

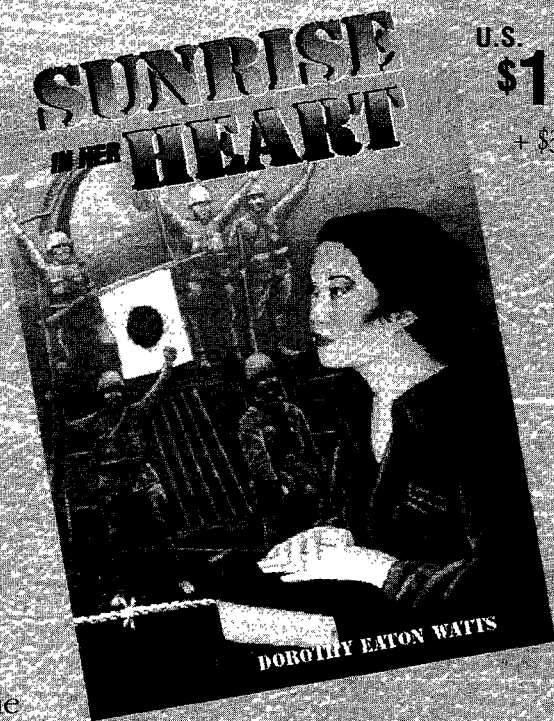
Pastoral credibility

Church life on the fast track had taken its toll on my pastoral personality, so I was looking forward to a reality check at our annual ministerial conference. The keynote speaker hit a home run for me when he said, "The ability of our churches to reach their God-given potential will be in direct proportion to the spiritual integrity of our pastors. Building a bond of credibility with your congregation is one of the most basic requirements of successful pastoral ministry. If your people can't count on you, you've lost it."

During the break I wandered off by myself to consider the implications of what I had heard. *Pastoral credibility begins with me, I mused. It rises out of the kind of person I am. My vital connection with God. The quality of relationship shared with my family. The consistency of my convictions as a person and pastor. My capacity to love people genuinely.*

During the second session we broke into discussion groups. "What does it take to establish pastoral credibility in the church?" our facilitator asked. A colleague next to me suggested that people become comfortable with their pastor when he or she is a real person who shows honesty, sincerity, and a true concern for each member of the church. Another in the circle reminded us that ministry is more than keeping church machinery going; it is loving people radically and being there for them.

"Before we break for lunch," our facili-



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This is the true story about a woman named Natividad Mallari who was taken prisoner and placed in Fort Santiago, Manila, in the Philippines. The name alone struck fear into Nati's heart. To Filipino resistance fighters it was a symbol of terror, torture, and death. And now Nati herself was about to become the fort's next prisoner.

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tator said, "let's make a list of practical how-to's for building pastoral credibility." One young woman said, "You've got to be with the people. You've got to move slowly through the crowds at church and get on your knees to talk with the kids." A silver-haired pastor remarked, "You've got to perform your basic pastoral roles in a competent way. Keep your promises. Live within your budget. Meet your deadlines." Another added, "Be there when it counts: when there's a death in the family, when the kids graduate from high school, when they're in the hospital. You've got to love them through times of tragedy and triumph." Rounding off the discussion, a grinning seminarian stood to remind us that a positive attitude always makes a difference.

In the months following this "mountain-top" retreat, the challenge to show personal integrity has continued to hold my feet to the fire and my heart close to the people God has given me to love. A bond of credibility is slowly building that will hold us together as we move toward God's glorious horizon.

Celebrate success

The renewal of our church culminated at the end of the year with a praise and thanksgiving celebration. The glow of new life shone in the eyes of members old and young as they crowded into the church to rejoice in God's goodness.

After a time of exuberant singing and heartfelt prayer, members began sharing their perspectives on our journey through the year. "When so many moved away," Karen reflected, "I felt abandoned and defeated. Now I am beginning to see that those folks are a gift from our church. They are disciples we have helped develop and have given to other congregations across the country." Ralph jumped to his feet to recount the joy of seeing seven new members join the body through baptism. "This is not the same church I joined 12 years ago," an elated Fran beamed. "We are truly a family now."

As fellowship melted into worship and we lifted our praise to God for effecting a resurrection and new life in our congregation, we knew that a new day had dawned for this small church. Though the journey has been slow and sometimes painful, Spirit-inspired principles have sparked a resurgence of hope, vision, and morale. ■

SEXUAL SIN: COULD IT HAPPEN TO YOU?

My life was like a storybook. The beginning was mistake prone and painful. Youthful curiosity, willful ignorance, and poor choices contributed to placing me on the fast track from childhood to the adult life.

I. B. Lazarus is a pseudonym.

Dissatisfied and unfulfilled, I needed something to give me purpose. It was then that the story changed, and it was scripted better than I could have dreamed or planned.

It began the summer of 1979 when I gave my heart to Christ. I had a new Master, and He was in control. The most powerful part of this new life was a deep yearning to tell others about what I had found. This was my calling. I was to be a minister of the good news. What had touched and changed me was now to be shared so that it would be the same for others. There was nothing that concerned me more. It didn't take long for my unique abilities and talents in ministry to be recognized. As a result, I was chosen to fulfill some rather special ministry assignments.

With the passing of months and years I saw what the Spirit of God was doing through me. It was exciting. I had found

what my contribution to this world was. I was making an impact. I was making a difference. I was seeing firsthand lives changed and many people becoming enthusiastic about Jesus. Life was good, or so I thought. For with every special assignment or project, evangelistic meeting, revival, or Week of Prayer, I was building a wall that grew taller and taller. This wall symbolized my successes and accomplishments. On this wall I stood tall. Yet on this wall there was barely room for me, let alone family, friends, or even the One I claimed to love most, Jesus. Nevertheless, I felt that life was good and all was well.

The story of my life was playing out far better now than years before. There was no call for alarm. I was destined for a happy ending. Little did I realize that the higher the wall became, the more distant I would become from those I claimed to love.

This distancing began with Christ. I

found myself studying only to deliver a powerful message or to have the correct and most informative answer for the many people who depended on me for their spiritual growth. I had lost sight of my own need to grow and fellowship with the Saviour. The higher my wall became, the farther I seemed to be from Christ.

The distancing continued with my wife. I found myself neglecting her for the sake of ministry. I assumed she'd understand my calling and take her rightful place to the rear of the work I held so dear. I rationalized that if I was the best at what I did professionally, she would be proud to stand at the foot of my wall in support of what I was called to do. Yet by

not supporting her, I became more aloof from our relationship.

The wall even affected my family. I was too busy to stop work to visit parents and siblings, attend family reunions, bond with nieces, nephews, cousins, and close friends. I was too high to come down from my wall, and there was no room up there on top for all of these.

It was at this point that my balance became disrupted. Having separated myself from all those who truly loved me, I was "successful" but lonely. I was riding the crest of pastoral excellence, but all by myself. I wanted desperately to reach out to my wife, my family, my God, yet I didn't know how. It seemed any attempt to

extend myself to them was ignored or treated coldly.

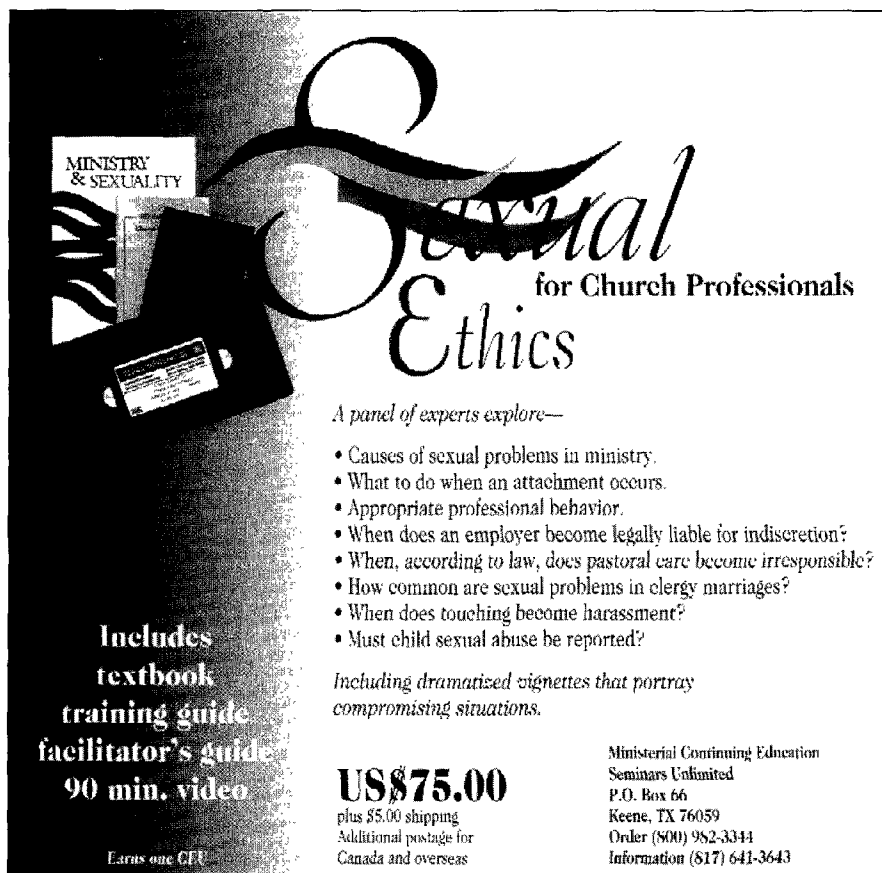
They had adjusted. They had learned to negotiate their lives without me, or so it seemed at the time. With this loss of balance, Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.

I began to gulp down the appreciation of others in large quantities. Their attention was used to fill the void in my own life. My needs were being met by those I served. The need to communicate and relate, to belong and fit in, to feel special, were no longer supplied by my God or my family, but by those I worked with and for. I no longer listened for encouragement from my wife, but only from those whom I felt understood me, my work, and my now misguided purpose. The more I paid attention to others, the less I paid attention to my wife. The more I talked with others, the less I talked to my wife.

The more I left my wife on the outside of what I was thinking, feeling, and desiring, the more I needed others on the inside. I was reeling like a drunkard on the top of my self-built wall. Knowing what I needed and where those needs could be supplied, I, like a drug seeker in need of a fix, passed the God-ordained sources that had been graciously given me in my wife, family, and Saviour to be satisfied by those I worked for.

Then came a massive jolt. News that my mother had died floored me. A hurt like no other penetrated every part of my being. But I had to be strong. Others would need me. I must get the family through. My shoulders would be the cushion that the family could rest on and draw strength from. I would dry tears, hold hands, and be there. I would stand on my wall, for this is what the family needed. Yet, I was missing the greatest need, my own.

Once the ordeal was past for everyone else, it was only beginning for me. Who would I talk to? Upon whose shoulder would I lean? Who would help to dry my tear-stained eyes or hold my trembling hands? The answer would change my life forever. A month after my mother's death, during a concert I promoted, the choir sang an old Negro spiritual, "Sometimes I



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Feel Like a Motherless Child.” As I listened, grief overwhelmed me. Retreating to a private place, I thought to spend a few minutes alone to collect myself.

But I was joined by a woman whom I had helped through a difficult time several years earlier. Now she was there for me. It began with an embrace and ended with a kiss. But that was just the first night. Humpty-Dumpty was not reeling any longer. He was falling. I couldn't remember how long it had been since I felt loved and desired. I was feeling that way now. I lost all sense of right and wrong. The passion I had robbed from myself through the years by ignoring my wife was being shared with another. “What am I doing?” Crash! Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.

How did I arrive here? A place called unfaithful, dishonest, deceitful, adulterous. Yes, the man of purpose, called of God, had fallen. I knew this problem had to be corrected. The affair had to stop and never happen again. It must be kept quiet. Maybe after a period of time it would be as if it had never happened. But this was not just a fall, it was a great fall! It did not happen on that one night, but over a period of years. It was induced by an inflated yet false sense of how important I and my work were. It was perpetuated by neglect of the wife God gave me, by ignoring the family He placed me in. It was fostered by feeding and nurturing everyone but myself. While it was something I caused, it was not something I could fix. It could not be repaired by friends, family, or another man of God. “All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again.”

This fall caused a shattering that, try as I might, I could do very little about. The broken pieces began to cut me up from the inside and then started further damage in other parts of my life. It splintered my home, injuring my wife and children. Without mercy it took the career I loved and was so effective at. It confused my friends, colleagues, and those I had served. Broken pieces are still turning up years after the fall. Occasionally someone steps on a broken piece of my mistake and is hurt as a result. I too discover a broken

Continuing education exercises

Reflection exercises

1. A distorted definition of success often contributes to failure in ministry and marriage. Together with your spouse define success for the work you do. How does this definition impact your important relationships with God, your spouse, children, family, and close friends?
2. Sexual sin also rises to devour us because of loneliness or lust. Have you found effective ways to address these concerns in your life? Besides prayer, what is your strategy to overcome these traps in your ministry?
3. Ministry is a call to integrity. Determine who, of the same sex, you can talk to, confide in, to keep you honest with yourself.
4. A tired person is a vulnerable person. Develop a list of activities and places that provide retreat and rest from the work you do. Together with your spouse and family plan uninterrupted retreats.
5. Read the story of Samson in the book of Judges and the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Remind yourself daily that you are indeed a child of God.

Suggested reading

Hyatt, C. and L. Gottlieb. *When Smart People Fail*. Penguin Books, 1993.

Jakes, T. D. *Loose That Man and Let Him Go!* Albury Press, 1995.

MacArthur, John. *Integrity*. Word, 1997.

MacDonald, Gordon. *When Men Think Private Thoughts*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996.

piece under some part of my life that I thought was unaffected by my failure. Bewildering and frustrating. How can this be corrected? The truth is, it may never all be fully corrected. When a trusted cleric falls, for whatever reason, life is never altogether the same again.

But Jesus can fix it! He is the Master Potter who specializes in mending what's been broken. His love for the erring is never failing. It is undying and relentless. He wants to heal us. We must recognize today that often a moral failure is more than a sexual act. It's an ego, an attitude in which one thinks more highly of oneself than one ought. It's the neglect of the people who truly matter in life—your spouse, children, parents, siblings, close true friends, and most of all, your Saviour. The deterioration of these relationships happens over time. So does the restora-

tion. Because it takes time, let the healing begin now. Allow Jesus to gather the broken pieces and put you together again. This is more important than anything any of us could do. It could mean our very salvation. When we wander, God knows both where we are and how to get us back.

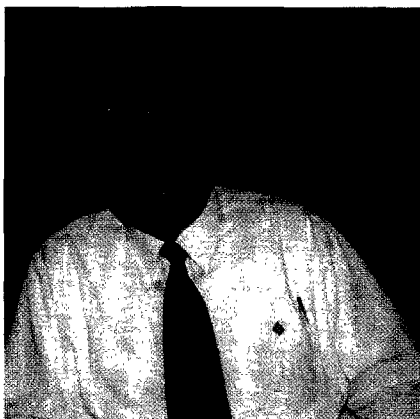
While sexual sin takes us out of God's will, it does not take us out of His reach. The hand of God is not too short that it cannot save. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness . . .” (John 3:14). Just as the Israelites in the desert took that which hurt them and lifted it up to God and were healed, so in Christ we can take our mistakes and sins, lift them to God in prayer and faith, and trust Him to heal us. I am discovering with each new day more of the power of God to restore and repair what's been messed up because of sexual sins. You can too! ■

Dynamic New Computer Resource for Pastors

Ministerial Association secretary James A. Cress recently sat down with his former boss and mentor, Don Gray, to discuss how new technological advances can improve our presentation of the gospel.

Jim: Don, when I began public evangelism as a young pastor, state-of-the-art technology meant two projectors with a dissolve unit. I suspect things have changed.

Don: Yes. Cutting-edge technology everywhere is focusing on the future. What worked and was accepted in the seventies, or even in the eighties, is totally out of date today. We are just three years away from the new millennium. No other generation has ever witnessed the unbelievable developments in communications that we are experiencing. Computers and the CD-ROM, along with satellite downlinks and the Internet, have all enhanced our ability to communicate. Today you can let everyone everywhere simultaneously share the same information. For example, the recently completed Discoveries in Prophecy series was transmitted to five continents.



Jim: So do satellite broadcasts mean there is no longer need for a pastor to personally proclaim the gospel message in his own community?

Don: No. But today's savvy pastor must use tools that speak to audiences in ways they are accustomed to receiving informa-

tion. For example, we need to communicate to the young—and even the middle-aged—by the means with which they are familiar. Slides to illustrate your sermons may have been great in the seventies and eighties, but state-of-the-art technology is used, expected, and understood today.

Jim: I wish such technology were readily available to a technologically challenged pastor like me.

Don: Pastors like you are the reason North American Division Graphics was created. Our task is to make it possible for busy pastors to use the computer to illustrate graphically what he or she wants to communicate. Any pastor with basic computer skills can now have photographs, texts, and charts that will rival the appearance of a 35mm slide.

Jim: I use a computer for word processing, electronic mail, and preparation of simple graphics. How do I move into this new type of computer usage?

Don: We have chosen the CD-ROM as the medium for making this material available to the busy pastor. The CD has the capacity for all the pictures, video clips, graphics, charts, and sermon texts for the entire NET '96 series.

Jim: Video clips? Are you telling me I could illustrate a sermon not just with photographs and charts, but with action videos?

Don: Computers are now capable of playing video clips with the quality of a VCR, yet with personal control of starting, stopping, and sequencing. In our new CD resource we have included all the action clips as well as the slides from NET '96. We have even included these clips in two different CD formats—one for higher quality and a second for broader compatibility.

Jim: I hear you talk about all the slides, videos, and sermon scripts from the satellite series. But what if I don't want just to preach someone else's sermons? I want a product that is uniquely mine.

Don: That's the beauty of this resource. You can have high-quality pictures that are easy to use and easy to modify. You can preach the sermons just as they are, or you can rearrange the sequence, add your own material and illustrations, or modify the charts and texts for a different version of Scripture, etc. You can even translate the material into any language. You are in control. The program allows you to rearrange the pictures and video clips in any order to suit your preferences.

Jim: That sounds encouraging. But my next obvious question is: What new computer hardware must I purchase to use such a resource?



Don: All personal computers sold today are capable of running software for slide presentations, and many of these can also play video clips. If a pastor has an older computer, it is quite possible that it, too, can do a good job of playing the presentations. In general, if your computer is a 486 or faster with a CD-ROM, has at least Windows 3.1 and a minimum 16 MB memory (32 MB recommended), all you would need is a video adapter and you would be able to use it for giving presentations. Of course, you will need to connect to a video projector or large-screen TV.

Jim: That's all I need? I think my laptop meets those parameters.

Don: You might want a few extra options, such as a remote mouse so that you can control the slide show without having to be near your keyboard, some sort of backup device, such as a tape drive, and a removable cartridge hard drive. A full

instructional manual comes with two CDs. The manual is thoroughly illustrated to walk you step-by-step through the process of using the materials. It is specifically written for those new to computers and computer graphics. Also, a program for viewing the slides is included on the disk so you need not purchase any other software.

Jim: What about wider use than just public evangelistic meetings. How else can I use this resource to enhance my presentations?

Don: A pastor in Las Vegas uses this material to illustrate his weekly sermons. He says his church services have come alive as he modifies the photos and text to illustrate what he wishes to communicate. He can also create his own pictures, using a scanner, and add these to his bank of available illustrations. I believe that this tool will give many pastors confidence to hold their own evangelistic meetings with up-to-date technology.

Jim: Don, I know you well enough to realize that this is just the beginning. What do you envision for the future of this resource?

Don: When you buy the original program, you will receive a discount on future programs, such as those planned by Kenneth Cox, Dwight Nelson (NET '98), and Lonnie Melashenko's upcoming series to go along with the Discover Bible Lessons.

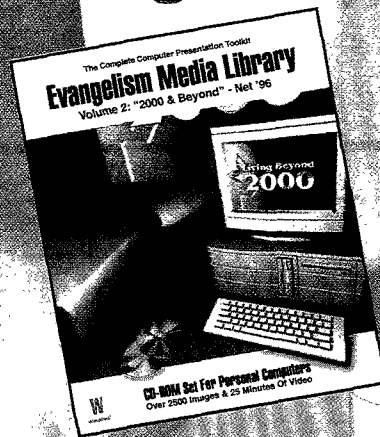
Eventually we intend to produce a library of all the pictures we have from all of these programs on a single high-capacity DVD disc. Then you will be able to arrange 10,000 to 15,000 pictures in any order you choose. This extensive collection will provide an excellent resource from which to draw for creating new lectures, illustrating video series, etc.

Ultimately, any pastor can fully illustrate any sermon and project quality representations for the congregation. Using this new technology, we can more easily attract people to the old, old story of Jesus and His love. ■

James A. Cress is the secretary for the Ministerial Association at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Don Gray has served as a pastor, church administrator, and ministerial secretary. Throughout his career, however, his first love has always been training and equipping pastors and laity for ministry.

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THE MUSIC OF GREAT PREACHING

For 58 years I have been a more-than-casual observer of preaching. As a career minister of music, it has been my privilege to sing for, sit behind, say amen to, and analyze the style of scores of evangelists, pastors, teachers, lecturers, and preachers of all kinds and styles.



Wayne Hooper was the director of music for the King's Heralds for the Voice of Prophecy. He is now retired and lives in California.

For 35 of those years it was my good fortune to work with and be inspired by one of the greatest—H.M.S. Richards, Sr. From the day he graduated from Campion Academy in 1914 until the late 1930s in California, he held one evangelistic campaign after another. In tents and tabernacles he preached the Word seven nights a week, almost always to capacity crowds.

Shortly after I joined the King's Heralds Quartet in 1944 for Pastor Richards' radiobroadcast, *The Voice of Prophecy*, we held a five-week campaign in the newly completed Sligo Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. Big crowds came every night. And through the years I heard him preach hundreds of sermons at camp meetings, Weeks of Prayer, and youth congresses, in churches and public halls, outdoors, in prisons, and at General Conference sessions. How the people came when his name was announced as speaker. Often there was standing room only.

Why did so many people come to hear this man speak? First and foremost, he was God's man, and he knew God's Book. They

came to hear old-fashioned Bible preaching.

Second, I believe that the style of his great preaching had much in common with many of the elements of great music. These concepts have been developed over many years of exposure to great preaching. H.M.S. Richards, Sr., is a prime example.

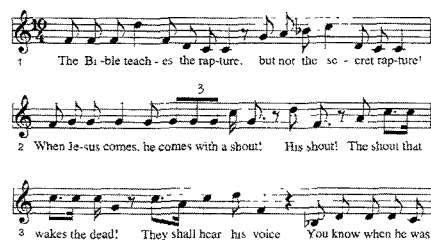
Melody

This is the succession of notes that most people remember about a piece of music. The words "The hills are alive with the sound of music" call instantly to mind the captivating melody of that song. Ellen White advised: "Ministers should speak in a manner to reach and impress the people. The teachings of Christ were impressive and solemn; His voice was melodious. And should not we, as well as Christ, study to have melody in our voices?"¹ "His voice was as music to those who had listened to the monotonous tones of the rabbis."²

Richards had melody in his voice as he preached. I have tape-recorded a sermon he gave at the Illinois camp meeting, June 12, 1971, on John 14 and the second coming of

WAYNE HOOPER

Christ. As best I could, I have transferred the pitches of his voice and the approximate duration of each syllable to a music staff. You may get an idea of how he sounded as you sight-read the melody and the rhythm of the note values. Notice how he reaches a high note climax on the words "His shout!" and "They shall hear His voice!"



This is just a sample of the melody in his preaching voice. In this example he used an octave and a third in range, and many different note values. And notice the rests. You may find it helpful to do a similar analysis on one of your recorded sermons. See if there is a kind of pleasing melody, or if you have too many stay-on-one-note-too-long phrases.

Form

Most great music compositions have a form that is recognizable: introduction, theme A, development, theme B, development, recapitulation of theme A, coda, finale. This, of course, is just one of many musical forms. The form of a sermon can take many shapes, but it should be well organized. Listeners are happy when it is obvious the speaker has a plan for getting from here to there. We love to recognize progress. A presentation that rambles aimlessly will never keep the congregation awake.

Rhythm

This has been defined as the systematic grouping of notes with regard to their duration. We are well acquainted with the march and other regular rhythms. Most of our speech rhythms are irregular and flow along with the natural accents of the words and phrases. Once in a while, for effect it might be good to use a regular pattern of note values. Here is a favorite sentence Richards used:



You see, I was able to assign regular note values, pitches, and bar lines.

Besides a rhythm of single words, there is also a rhythm of phrases. Richards loved the great hymns and often quoted from them for powerful effect. Still today I can hear him inserting these John Bowring lines into a sermon:

"In the cross of Christ I glory, Towering o'er the wrecks of time; All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime."

Galatians 6:14 was one of his favorite texts: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rhythm, rightly used, is a powerful force in music and in speech.

Dynamics

There are six levels of soft and loud used in ordinary music: *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *ff*. Some pieces even use *ppp* and *fff* for very soft and very loud. How many of these dynamic levels do you make use of? Sadly, most of us are willing to glide lazily along on *mf* (mezzo [medium] forte [loud]), putting everyone to sleep in the process. I heard a good preacher recently make a special point by whispering an entire sentence. Everyone leaned forward to make sure and catch every word. A good symphony usually has one or two loud passages in each movement, saving them for the important moment or musical phrase. The preacher who shouts too much seems to be saying, "Everything is important, and nothing is important." Changes in the dynamics are essential. And remember, as you speak more softly you must increase the intensity so you can still be understood. At all levels of dynamics, a suitable projection must be maintained.

Sequences

By sequences I mean the repetition of a definite group of notes or chords in different positions on the scale. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech contains a good example of sequence. The repetition of this phrase at the same or slightly different pitch followed by a variety of answering phrases made a dramatic moment the whole world remembers. The mind is easily led from point to point and eagerly awaits the diversity of each answering phrase. The composer Edward Elgar (one of my favorites) was criticized by some for using this device to excess. But other critics complimented his use of se-

quences as highly original, resourceful, and varied, three qualities that explain the success of his music and which might also make our sermons more successful.

Modulation

Modulation is shifting to another key somewhere in the piece. Changing to another key in music is very refreshing, especially after we have been in the original key for a while.

In many of my arrangements for the King's Heralds, I used this device to maintain interest and to give each voice the opportunity to carry the melody. Because of the natural range of *your* voice, it is easy to get stuck in a monotonous range or key of four or five pitches. Most of us have at least an octave (eight notes of the diatonic scale) that we can use easily.

If you think about it, you *can* modulate to a higher key if a segment of your sermon suggests it. You remember our example of the H.M.S. Richards "melody" was an octave plus three notes. He sang bass in a college quartet. Normally such a low voice would peak around middle C or the D above it. One night while preaching to a large camp meeting crowd, I "clocked" him using my pitch pipe (softly) as emphasizing a climactic point on the G above middle C. That would be a fairly high note for a tenor! Yet he did it easily, supporting the tone from his abdominal and dia-

Continued on page 29

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More than 70 men from the church I last pastored recently spent an entire weekend in a stadium filled with other Christian

males. Their purpose in attending this convocation was to seek deeper personal spirituality, to affirm faithfulness to their marriages, and to enhance their personal spiritual leadership.

These great rallies, sponsored by Promise Keepers, one of several organizations that help local churches in the quest to make disciples of men, often attract up to 50,000 attendees. Their activities, which include passionate calls to break down barriers of racism and denominational bigotry, have stirred fear in the hearts of some casual observers, who wonder if abuses to religious freedom might follow in the name of all churches uniting. However, those men who actually have participated in these events, which regularly fill large sports stadiums to capacity, report a much greater emphasis on revival and personal spirituality than any political agenda.

Has the time come for a church-sponsored ministry focused on men? I believe so. For nearly a decade the Department of Women's Ministries has demonstrated effectiveness in mobilizing laywomen for energetic service by focusing on gender-specific issues.

I am not alone in a growing conviction that Christian men should focus on male-specific issues that affect our lives, and thus present a Spirit-controlled witness to the power of the gospel as we go about our daily lives in our jobs, our homes, and our neighborhoods.

For example, the Washington Conference, at the impetus of President David Weigley, recently appointed a pastoral couple, Phil and Jan White, to be director of men's and women's ministries, respectively. Of his new assignment, Phil says, "In this role I'm not really doing anything new. It has officially expanded to the whole conference, and I now have better

resources on which I can rely to help accomplish our objectives of ministering to men and encouraging them to more effective ministry themselves." He also describes a men's advisory that has been established to help foster this ministry.

What is the role of men's ministry? For several years Phil has led men's retreats for the members of his own congregation. More recently these activities have included a conferencewide invitation for other men to join in seeking more effective utilization of opportunities to witness, to minister, and to reach other men for Christ.

Another encouraging development has been the increasing genre of Christian literature addressed to men's spiritual

Now is the time for men's ministries

JAMES A. CRESS

journey. Several such books have impacted my own life. Two creative Adventist authors, Ray Dabrowski and Dick Duerksen, have produced a book of devotionals specifically geared to male issues. This book, *600 Minutes With God*, and a companion cassette tape, *60 Minutes With God*, present real-life experiences of Christian men struggling for spiritual relevance. Captivating chapter titles such as "Full-Throttle Christianity," "Kiss Her Hand and Go for It," or "Battling the Demons" make this a highly readable and inspiring resource that dares men to embrace Christ passionately and to become the spiritual leaders they are designed to be. (Note ordering information in the resource section on page 30.)

While I strongly advocate that church leaders follow the example of the Washington Conference and officially appoint a men's ministry leader, you don't have to

wait for church structures to catch up with the need. You can begin an effective men's ministry in your congregation right now.

Terry Etter, director of an interdenominational men's ministry, recently published eight ways to start a great men's group for your church. He says:

1. Men must be personally invited. Men will not readily respond to bulletin announcements or flyers. Instead, leaders should invest their energy in developing a system of personal invitations, ideally coming from a friend.

2. Utilize shared leadership. Men's groups often fail because they are initiated and led by one man rather than a team. One man might have enough motivation and drive to organize a single event, but usually not enough to sustain ongoing activities.

3. Have an outreach mind-set. Avoid the temptation to become inward and exclusive. Consistently and intentionally invite new and unchurched men to participate.

4. Meet for a specific, limited period of time. Most men are reluctant to make long-term, open-ended commitments. Offer a short-term experience with the option to renew or opt out. Try seven one-hour meetings, take a break, and begin a new short-term cycle.

5. Meet in a comfortable, nonthreatening place. A home, workplace, or restaurant is preferable to your church if you are attempting to reach unchurched men or to develop cross-denominational fellowship.

6. Don't assign homework. Most men would rather skip the meeting than show up embarrassed because they failed to complete a study assignment.

7. Allow men to discover Bible truths for themselves. Don't lecture. The key responsibility of the leader is to facilitate discussion by asking open-ended questions that invite answers. Encourage discovery rather than setting yourself up as the expert.

8. Don't ask men to do something for which they are unprepared. Avoid calling on men randomly to read scriptures or to pray. Many men are unable to read well or

are embarrassed to pray in public. Either ask for volunteers or recruit participants ahead of time.

The future of a men's movement lies in whether the enthusiasm of stadium events can be transferred to thousands of small groups fostering continued spiritual growth among men.

Try this for your own church and let me know what works. We will continue to explore this issue as you share with us your own experiences and journeys in men's ministry. ■

The music of great preaching continued from p. 27

phragm muscles. I don't recall his ever becoming hoarse from abusing his voice.

Repetition

If a musical phrase is beautiful, we enjoy hearing it again later in the piece. It contributes to the unity of the song and makes it memorable. If you work hard in preparation and find a fresh creative way to say something, it should be worth repeating. It is doubtful if we remember much from a discourse that goes on from one idea to another and another without any repetition to seal it in the memory.

Once while traveling with Richards in a car, we were listening to a dynamic radio preacher. He used the phrase "God wants a man! A man who . . ." followed by a description of that man's qualities. Then again, "God wants a man! A man who . . ." He repeated this phrase about six times. We all enjoyed hearing his style. Can you think of an idea or gem of truth in one of your recent sermons that you helped your congregation remember by using repetition?

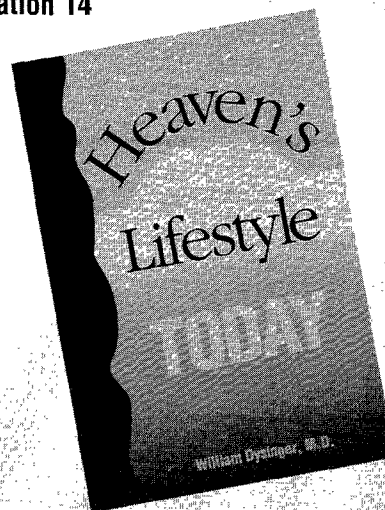
Transition

This is a passage that connects two sections of a composition. Even though these musical notes are less important, they still must carry enough interest to hold our attention. How often have we seen a preacher bring a section to a rousing, mountain peak climax only to lose the moment completely by fumbling around in the next valley for words to start the next idea rolling. Richards

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was a master at keeping us on the hook during transitions.

Coda

This section brings the piece to the conclusion. Often it reuses themes from earlier in the music and may enlarge upon them to make the conclusion effective and brilliant. Beethoven sometimes made the coda the most creative and interesting part of the movement. He even introduced new musical ideas here. About sermon construction there is an old saying, "Tell 'em what you are going to tell 'em, tell 'em, then tell 'em what you told 'em." That last phrase is the coda.

Finale

Similar to the coda, the finale applies more specifically to the last few measures. In your sermon it may be a big dramatic climax, or it may be a quiet appeal to the heart. Whichever it is, when you are done, quit! We all sag a bit when a preacher goes on and on, passing several great stopping places. "Let your discourses be short. . . . You may gain the reputation of being an interesting speaker."³

I'm sure there are other elements we could cite to show the correlation of great music to great preaching. In all those years with H.M.S. Richards, we never tired of

hearing him. His voice and style of presentation were musical in all of these ways.

Improvisation

This word applies to a soloist who, near the end would improvise a cadenza that was several measures of music not written down in the score. Richards was an avid reader and a keen observer of life all around him. So even if we had heard a certain sermon before, it would be different each time. Different and fresh because of the way he would work in something that he had read that day, or some new insight he had gained from his study of the Bible.

Ellen White sums it up well in these words: "The human voice is a precious gift of God; it is a power for good, and the Lord wants His servants to preserve its pathos and melody. The voice should be cultivated so as to promote its musical quality, that it may fall pleasantly upon the ear and impress the heart."⁴ ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 2, p. 617.

² ———, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), p. 253.

³ ———, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), p. 177.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 667.

BOOKS

The Seventh-Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800, by Bryan W. Ball. Clarendon Press, Oxford University, Oxford, England, 1994, 402 pages.

The book is a result of 10 years of research tracing the existence, activities, and chief persons of the widespread Sabbathkeeping movement in Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ball carefully documents from that era the existence of more than 100 Sabbathkeeping groups, mostly Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists, but also Calvinists, Congregationalists, Huguenots, Independents, Puritans, and Quakers. Some of these Sabbatarians even observed biblical health laws, an indication that their recovery of long-forgotten Bible truths was extensive.

Ball cites the literature of such great Sabbatarians as Trask, Brabourne, and the Stennetts. These writers were sufficiently influential to have provoked a flurry of anti-Sabbath books and tracts during the 1650s and 1670s from such eminent divines as Baxter, Owen, and Bunyan. But defenders of the Sabbath proved irrefutably the perpetuity of God's law as integral to the new covenant. Some Sabbatarian authors gave pointed exposition to Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 7) that foretells and anathematizes Rome's attempted change of God's law in substituting Sunday for the true Sabbath.

Ball asserts that the Protestant resolve to free the church from all Romanist influences and heresies gave strong,

irrepressible influence to the development of Sabbatarian theology and practice. He also affirms that the "English seventh-day movement was more a spontaneous response to the recovered authority of the Bible than a historically or geographically conditioned phenomenon" (p. 46). Thus the revival of Sabbathkeeping in Britain bears little evidence of a nationally organized movement, which accounts partly for the gradual decline and eventual disappearance of most Sabbathkeeping congregations in England by the early nineteenth century.

Ball validates his findings from primary sources, avoids speculation about any of his data, and aims rigorously at objectivity. The book is written in a relaxed, nonpedantic style all too rare in scholarly literature. It will command the respect of all readers who are interested in this remarkable but almost forgotten portion of church history.—Brian Jones, pastor, Lewisburg Seventh-day Adventist Church, West Virginia.

All Kinds of Love: Experiencing Hospice, by Carolyn Jaffe and Carol Ehrlich. Baywood Pub., Amityville, N.Y., 346 pages.

All Kinds of Love, a book about "good dying," gently narrates the personal experiences of the dying, their families, friends, and caregivers, as they interface with their unique gifts and needs through the miracle of hospice.

The authors are well qualified for the job—Carolyn Jaffe is cofounder of Hospice of Metro Denver, and Carol Ehrlich, Ph.D., is chair emeritus of audio and speech pathology at Children's Hospital, Denver. They present nine stories of people with faces, feelings, fears, fantasies, choices, and decisions.

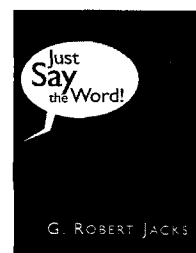
Written in a conversational journal/diary form, the book is an attitude changer and emphasizes that death is primarily a personal experience wherein the uniqueness of each individual is honored and affirmed. Thus the needs of the body, mind, spirit, past, present, future, things done and things left

undone, likes, dislikes, families, and friends are all part of the mix. The reader quickly becomes involved as part of the caregiving team and not a passive observer of what's happening to someone else. Therein lies the uniqueness of the book.

I highly recommend the book to parsons, persons, and parishes. It will serve as a ready-to-use study. Each chapter is followed by a reflective interpretation to promote discussion and encourage further reading from the bibliography provided.—Rev. Cn. Gordon S. Price, rector emeritus, Christ church, Dayton, Ohio.

Just Say the Word: Writing for the Ear, by G.

Robert Jacks. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, 1996, 195 pages, paperback.



G. Robert Jacks, associate professor of speech communication in ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary, has done all preachers a great favor with his manual on preaching so people can hear.

The book is part textbook, part workbook, and always entertaining. It seeks to help preachers write sermon manuscripts (whether they read them in the pulpit or not!) that will help them speak in ways that people listen. Included are instructions about the proper use of questions, ordering the sequence of ideas, getting rid of excess words, developing style, doing rewrites, and using and telling stories (these alone are worth the price of the book!). The book provides many usable examples of sermons, stories, and conversations.—Andy McRae, associate pastor, Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Ministry and the American Legal System, by Richard B. Couser. Fortress Press, 1993.

As a pastor, are you obligated to reveal a confession of criminal conduct told you in confidence by a parishioner? Can the local zoning commission prevent your congrega-

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tion from building a new sanctuary on the property given to it specifically for that purpose? Should you allow your custodian, who wishes to do so, to receive pay for only some of the hours he or she puts in maintaining the church building?

The local school board allows all other groups to rent the school auditorium, but when you want to use it for evangelistic meetings, they refuse. Can they legally do that? One of your members has a conflict between work schedule and Sabbath observance. Can that person be fired for refusing to work on Sabbath? You didn't check the background of the new schoolteacher, and you are now hearing disturbing reports of a sexual nature. Should you be concerned about the church's liability—and your own—for negligent hiring and supervision?

Richard Courser, a New Hampshire attorney specializing in civil litigation, has written a volume that will help you answer most of the foregoing questions. The author being a member of the Christian Legal Society and obviously a practicing Christian, *Ministry* readers will find his convictions and positions compatible. For example, Courser is evidently familiar with the idea that separation of church and state places us beyond regulation: "Lack of knowledge or naïveté is sometimes compounded by the theologies of separation from the world or religious convictions that claim to transcend, but may in fact conflict with, civic obligations. Ministry effectiveness is impaired by unnecessary conflict with civil authorities and by the failure to order church business to minimize liability exposure and maximize use of the church's financial and organizational resources." Sound familiar?

Courser's work has three sections. Part 1 contains a thoroughgoing discussion of the interaction of the U.S. Constitution and religion. Part 2 focuses on the law as applied to religious entities: ecclesiastical organization, legal privileges and responsibilities of clergy, church liability for torts and contracts, the church as regulated employer, the church as

property owner, and other regulatory matters such as copyright.

Part 3 addresses risk-management issues: how a church can and should conduct itself within the rules set out in part 2 and in doing so minimize its exposure to liability. Chapters in part 3 address the organization and governance of religious entities; the hiring, supervision, and firing of employees; the church as wage payer; compensation and taxes; purchasing, maintaining, and altering real property; accounting for funds; supervision of children; the pastoral counseling relationship; litigation; and liability insurance.

Four caveats are in order. First, it must always be remembered that the law is a moving target. It changes daily. Second, this book is not a substitute for qualified legal counsel. As Courser rightly advises: "Always get qualified legal advice when dealing with specific problems." Third, this book deals with American law. It has only limited applicability anywhere else. Fourth, the book does not answer all the questions. This is not a criticism of the author; merely a reminder of the vastness of the subject matter. This volume is the best I've seen in its balance and completeness.—Mitchell A. Tyner, associate general counsel, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

IN MEMORIAM



Ellen Louise (Hendrickson) Bresee was born in Puyallup, Washington, January 15, 1928, and died peacefully in her sleep July 13, 1997, after a 12-year battle (including 60 months of chemotherapy treatments) with cancer.

Ellen met her husband, Floyd, former secretary of the Ministerial Association, at Walla Walla College and joined her life and ministry with his on September 5,

Wishing consolation for her family and friends from around the world, we announce the death of Ellen Bresee.

1948. Together they served as instructors at Columbia and Laurelwood academies and in pastorates in Oregon; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Keene, Texas. In Keene Ellen served as family life director for the Southwestern Union. They also served on the staff of Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, for 16 years.

For 10 years, concluding with their retirement in 1992, Ellen and Floyd served the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, where she, along with Marie Spangler, founded Shepherdess International, the entity of the association that provides nurture, encouragement, and training resources for ministers' wives. In fact, it is fair to say that Shepherdess International would not exist if it had not been for Ellen's determination and tenacity.

Ellen received the President's Award from the Association of Adventist Women in 1992 and was chosen Woman of the Year for Church Life in 1995. The plaque that honored her reads, "For undaunted spirit, validating and enhancing the work of ministers' wives, worldwide."

Ellen, a mother and homemaker at heart, is survived by her husband, Floyd; her mother, Opal Hendrickson; her brother, Larry Hendrickson; one daughter, Tamara; three sons, Terry, Ted, and Tim, along with Tim's wife, Wendy; and two grandchildren, Katie and Lily.

During memorial services July 14, in Medford, Oregon, Ellen was eulogized by Bruce Johnston, former president of the North Pacific Union, and special tribute to her ministry was presented by current Shepherdess coordinator Sharon M. Cress and Ministerial Association secretary James A. Cress. Alf Birch, of the Oregon Conference, also paid tribute to her influence in the conference where Ellen and Floyd had retired.

Only in eternity will the full impact of Ellen's selfless life and devoted ministry be fully comprehended. Until that glad resurrection, the influence of her life will be felt continually in the lives of pastoral families around the globe. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus! ■

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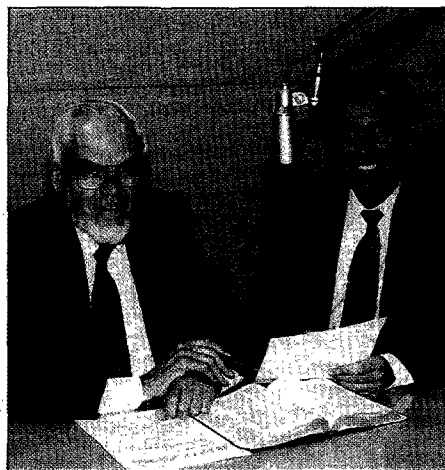
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