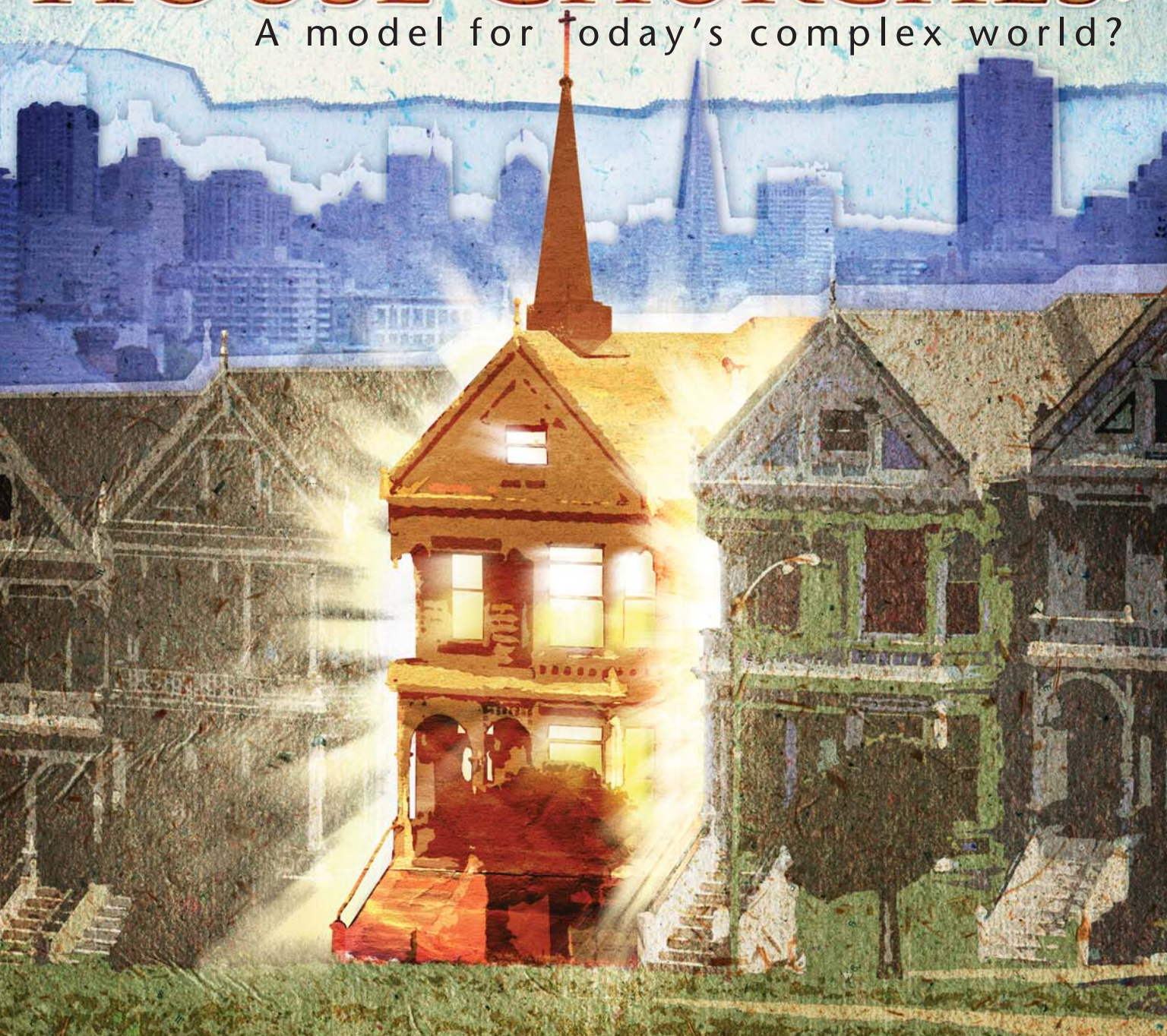


# MINISTRY<sup>®</sup>

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## NEW TESTAMENT HOUSE CHURCHES: A model for today's complex world?



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## OUR READERS RESPOND...

**Where is the Lamb?**

I found the December 2007 article written by Mervyn Warren, “But Where Is the Lamb?: An Ancient Question for Modern Pulpits,” irresistibly inspiring and enlightening. It is not an exaggeration to confess that most of our pulpits, including those in our theological institutions, are awash with sermons having plenty of *wood and fire*, but sadly lacking the *Lamb*. This lamentable condition has made our pulpits degenerate into intellectual and motivational platforms instead of being fountains of spiritual edification and inspiration.

Yes, we need the *wood* and the *fire*, but the presence of the *Lamb* in our sermons is more important. We should not substitute Him with fire or wood. This article is indispensable to our ministers.

—Erick Were, theology student, Bugema University, Kampala, Uganda

In my long years of ministry in the Adventist Church, I read at least three times A. G. Daniells’s little book *Christ Our Righteousness*, plus other literature dealing with our 1888 growing and tragic experience. Reading Dr. Warren’s article confirmed my discoveries regarding that era. As a young church, we had drawn the line “in the sand between righteousness by faith in Christ Jesus and righteousness by faithfulness to the law, trusting in Jesus or training [our] obedience.” The preaching at that time was Christless. We rejected the message, despised the messengers, and grieved the Holy Spirit.

My question now is, Have we since made a full circle moving in the right direction? I, too, with Dr. Warren and poor Isaac am asking, “But where is the Lamb?” in so many sermons I hear today. Could it be that this is the cause why in so many parts of the world there is no growth?

—Jeremia Florea, retired minister, Spring Lake, Michigan, United States

Thank you for Mervyn Warren’s excellent article, “But Where is the Lamb?: An Ancient Question for Modern Pulpits,” on the need for Christ-centered preaching. I appreciated his “zero-based

theologizing—starting all over at ground zero with nothing, so to speak, but Jesus Christ, then working ourselves out from Him and adding only what is absolutely necessary for a saving relationship with our Lord in the context of our time.” And his challenge to “our traditional approach of confronting prospective converts and each other right off with ‘things to be believed,’ a constellation of ‘dos and don’ts,’ rather than beginning with ‘Christ in whom to believe,’ a saving relationship with God.”

Sadly, many young people who leave the church know the dos and don’ts but not Jesus. There are also too many members who do not have assurance of salvation. They think that they have to reach a certain level of behavior before they are accepted by God and ready for heaven.

It’s ironic that we should need such an article in view of the counsel we’ve been given.

“Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. . . . The great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out.” “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths center. . . . This is to be the foundation of every discourse given by our ministers” (*Gospel Workers*, 156, 315).

—Errol Webster, retired pastor, Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia

**Helping one another when disaster strikes**

Willie E. Hucks II’s timely article, “Ministering in the Wake of Disaster” (December 2007) reveals that the spirit of volunteerism is alive and well in his part of the world, as it is here in Australia.

At a time when many parts of Australia are experiencing the worst drought in the country’s 200 year colonized history, two major floods have impacted areas of New South Wales and South East Queensland in the past seven months. Many farmers and residents, after having to cope with spirit-breaking drought conditions, now have to cope

with the added burden of restoring some form of normalcy to their families, farms, and underfed livestock after being inundated by floodwaters.

In New South Wales, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) volunteers play a major role under the state government’s Department of Community Services by providing emergency accommodation to disaster-affected persons and workers in a time of disaster. Volunteers from other denominations, as well as the Red Cross, also play major roles such as catering, counseling, and personal requisites.

I was impressed when Dr. Hucks described in his article how the Christians in a devastated area rally together, regardless of denomination. Surely, this is Matthew 25 in action, and it shows how the spirit of Jesus is embedded in the spirit of volunteerism—feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and clothing the poor.

—Bruce Prince, ADRA Australia Ltd, State Disaster Recovery Coordinator for New South Wales, Blaxland, New South Wales, Australia

**Ellen G. White and plagiarism**

I read with interest the December 2007 installment of the article “Was Ellen White a Plagiarist?” by Kevin L. Morgan. The research tool that is needed in the study of the plagiarism charge is content analysis; but I doubt that Conklin’s and Morgan’s material will pass muster as a submission in even an introductory class in content analysis.

Pastors have often wondered how much longer we are going to offer the world this type of scholarship to the problem. It seems that as time goes by, the church could deal with the plagiarism charge in a much better and honest way. If, for instance, the publishers of Ellen White’s books were required by the church and its leadership to list, through quotation marks or italics, with standard footnotes the books and authors from which material was quoted—with proper bibliography and acknowledgment pages of those

*Continued on page 27*

# Something important happened in Galilee

NIKOLAUS SATELMAJER



**A**s a young boy I remember several men standing up and singing. Though they were off-key, I enjoyed listening anyway. Perhaps the fact that my father was one of the singers predisposed me to enjoy their singing—no matter how they sounded.

It is too long ago for me to remember all the words of their song, but I do remember two: “Galilee” and “Jesus.” That’s my earliest recollection of singing in a worship service, and the words *Galilee* and *Jesus* are still a part of my Christian life today.

## Something was missing

The song was not a grand church hymn sung by a large congregation. There was no organ or any other musical instrument. In fact, there was no church, that is, no church building. They were singing in a home, which was the place of that worship service, attended by about 20 individuals. It was some years later—when I was almost 13 years old—that I first worshiped inside a church building, heard an organ and piano, and listened to musical groups who knew how to sing.

Since then I have worshiped and preached in many churches—small and large—in many countries. I have appreciated solos, small groups, and choirs, and have been blessed by the beautiful sounds from individual instruments and orchestras. All of this music has enhanced my worship experience.

During my ministry I have heard and participated in discussions about worship and music. You know how those discussions go: “What makes a good sermon?” “What makes a great preacher?” And if you want the discussion to hit a high note, bring up

the subject of music. “What instruments should be used?” “What kind of music should be sung?” It doesn’t take long for “experts” to make their pronouncements.

But something is often missing. In our discussions, we tend to focus on our personal likes and dislikes, and our opinions take on the role of authority. As important as these discussions may be, we tend to move away from the basic question of worship—who and what does worship involve? I can’t adequately address theology and the practice of worship in one editorial, but I would like to identify several important features.

## The essentials

First, we must acknowledge that a focus upon God is fundamental to worship. The psalmist invites us to

Come, let us bow down in  
worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our  
Maker (Ps. 95:6, NIV).

Jesus discussed worship with the Samaritan woman and reminded her that “ ‘God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth’ ” (John 4:24, NIV). His final words to her proclaimed Him to be the promised Messiah.

All discussions of worship and all worship itself must then focus upon God; if we focus on anyone or anything else, we practice idolatry.

Second, worship involves people. Psalm 95:6 invites *us* to bow down and worship God. Whenever God’s people worship their God—Creator, Savior, Lord—they join a family composed of individuals who were once strangers. Though testifying of His creative power, trees and flowers cannot choose to worship God. People, though, can and do.

Third, we focus on the place of worship. As I pointed out, in order for worship to take place, God and His people are needed. But what kind of *place* is needed? I have been to famous places of worship and have marveled at their architectural beauty. Certainly well-known places *can* be places of worship but, as the lead article by Kwabena Donkor shows, worship can also take place in humble homes. Long before the first cathedral was ever built, before the first harpsichord was heard, before organ music filled a church, before the first guitar was strummed, before the first *contemporary* song was sung, God and His people gathered for worship.

## Focus

Discussions about worship can easily escalate into arguments. All too often such discussions focus on self—*my* worship style, *my* music preference, *my* kind of sermon. Instead of allowing a discussion about worship to become controversial, let the focus be on the fundamental elements of worship—God and His people. The place is where God and His people come together for worship. Worship is not about *me*, it’s about *us*—God and His people. ■

*Tell us what you think about this editorial. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.*

# New Testament house churches: A model for today's complex world?

**Kwabena Donkor**



*Kwabena Donkor, PhD, is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.*

**I**nterest in house churches has been on the increase since the 1980s. Some are drawn to the subject because of its ecclesiological and missiological implications; others simply wish to show the inappropriateness of today's "church buildings"; and still others are drawn to the model because of the increasing cost and difficulty of building churches with today's economic conditions. Whatever the reason, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no illusions about the necessity of having church buildings. Ellen White counseled, "The companies that shall be raised up will need a place of worship. They will need schools where Bible instruction may be given to the children. The schoolroom is needed just as much as the church building is needed."<sup>1</sup>

This article seeks to give a description of the house churches during the times of the early church. Hopefully, this will lead to a better understanding on the suitability, or otherwise, of house churches for Adventist missionary work today.

## **The phenomenon of the house church**

The New Testament speaks of groups of believers meeting regularly in the intimacy of a home rather than a church building. This house church was a Christian fellowship group formed in and/or around a house (Gr. *oikos*). Paul speaks of such a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3, 5), of Philemon (Philemon 1, 2), and of Nympha in Laodicea (Col. 4:15).

The use of *oikos* to describe the group of believers was not intended just to be a spatial

marker but a group identifier as well. Indeed the *oikos* was a significant sociological unit already. According to Acts 2:46, the believers met in these houses to break bread. But on the basis of the wording, we could say that they broke bread "according to" or "by house" (*kat' oikon*). Similarly, when they met for teaching, they did so "by house" (*kat' oikon*). The phrase "according to house" or "by house" then becomes a unit of measure because of its use in a distributive rather than in a simply locational sense.

The case for the house church as an identifiable unit of the early Christian community can also be made linguistically, for the words *oikos* and *oikia* were used interchangeably for this phenomenon. These two words have a range of meaning that includes the literal sense of house as well as the metaphorical sense of family, household, clan, and even the bigger tribal unit such as the "house of Judah." This broad range of meaning is the case in both the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) and the New Testament. However, in the Septuagint and in secular Greek usage, when the word *oikos* is used with God's name, it refers to the temple or sanctuary<sup>2</sup> with Numbers 12:7 as the exception. But the exception of the Old Testament is the unique feature of the use of *oikos* in the NT, where the idea of the house of God "is transferred from the temple to the congregation worshipping there."<sup>3</sup> The point is that a real sense exists in which the "house" became a unit or group in the structure of the early Christian community.

One can hardly tell whether, as a result of the early church's preference for the metaphorical use of the phrase "house of God," the "house church" model was intended to be normative. Clearly, however, the metaphorical use of "house of God" made it possible for the NT writers to further clarify the truth about the Christian community with such concepts and images as foundation (1 Cor. 3:10–12), cornerstone (Acts 4:11), living stones (1 Pet. 2:5), and pillars (1 Tim. 3:15).

## **The distribution and description of the house church<sup>4</sup>**

It seems clear that the house-church model was a real Christian model, for it was found both within the Jerusalem Christian community and in other communities, including those that Paul established in his missionary efforts.

*Jerusalem's house churches.* With the book of Acts as the primary source of information on the use of houses in the primitive church in Jerusalem, there were at least two, possibly more, of these churches in Jerusalem. First,

Acts 1:12–15 depicts the disciples, after Christ’s ascension, as returning from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, entering a house whereupon they went into an upper room. The upper room, a common feature of architecture in the East that occupied the second or third floor of a house, was a fairly large room for rest and relaxation. To the extent that here was the place where the disciples and the believers totaling 120 continually gathered, experienced community, and prayed (1:14; 4:31)—possibly breaking bread and teaching and preaching (2:46; 5:42)—this upper room served as a house church.

Second, Acts 12:10–17 records a meeting of believers in the house of Mary, mother of John Mark. The observation that “many” were gathered together praying (v. 12) clearly suggests that this was a fairly large house-worship setting. Other details of the narrative, such as a gatehouse with a servant girl, suggest a distinguished house. Peter came to this house on the night of his liberation from prison, implying that he knew the house and knew that believers would be gathered there, the period being Passover (12:2–4).

Most scholars agree that the house in Acts 12 should be distinguished from the upper room mentioned in Acts 1, with verses 12 and 17 of chapter 12 implying at least two distinct places of assembly. When Peter told the believers in Mary’s house to tell James and “the brethren,” he may have indicated another group of believers elsewhere.

There are other practical reasons to suggest that in Jerusalem there were probably a plurality of house churches and not just the two possible ones mentioned above. If the church grew as rapidly as recorded in Acts 2:41 and 4:4, the two houses alone would not have been adequate for the believers.

In calling these groupings of the early believers “churches,” it is critical to examine the nature of the activities that took place in their meetings.

*Worship service.* Acts 2:42 provides a list that seems to indicate an agenda for early Christian worship. The list includes teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer—needful activities in

the worship experience of any religious community. Apart from the houses, the only other place of assembly for the believers was the temple, but it is unthinkable that these activities of worship could have happened in the temple. Therefore, we may conclude that the believers consciously saw the houses as their churches and undertook the worship services there.

*Teaching.* Although the first Christians taught in the temple court and took part in the prayer services there, that did not prevent them from engaging in their own teaching activities in the houses.

*Fellowship and breaking bread.* The word for fellowship is *koinonia*, which connotes a God-given unity of heart and mind and signifies a close connection among the believers for mutual support and involvement in each others’ lives, both spiritually and materially (2:44, 45; 4:32–37).

*Prayer.* In the list referred to above, prayer is in the plural. It hints, at least, at two possibilities on the prayer practices of the early believers: as a critical part of the bread-breaking event, possibly at the end of it, or as an imitation of the Jewish prayer times in the house setting.

*Mission and house churches.* The power of the house-church setting as an evangelistic strategy should not be missed. Acts 5:42 reports that in the temple and from house to house the believers kept on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. To preach Jesus as the Christ, in the context of Jerusalem, would for all intents and purposes qualify as an evangelistic kind of preaching. Also, the experience of Peter and Cornelius recorded in Acts 10:23–48 would seem to *not* exclude the possibility that houses, even of believers whose households were not entirely Christian, would become the staging grounds for evangelistic activity. The intense fellowship of “heart and mind” (Acts 4:32, NIV), which the house church would foster, expressing itself materially, could be compellingly attractive to neighbors. Indeed, given the context that the believers had “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47, NKJV), it is not unreasonable to conclude that the adding to their numbers day by day

was partly a result of that favor with the people.

On the basis of these activities carried out in those house locations may we not legitimately, theologically, call these groupings churches?

## House churches in Antioch?

The evidence for house churches in Antioch is not explicit, but scholars suggest that this would have been the case for a couple of reasons: this was the pattern for the early Christian movement, and early converts appeared to have been “God-fearers,” including affluent ones (see Manaen, for example, in Acts 13:1), who could make their homes available for assemblies. Also it is suggested that one relatively small house church of Christians would not have caught the attention of the residents of Antioch as Acts 11:26 suggests. Finally, the prevarication of Peter in his relation to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11–14) may also be taken as evidence for the existence of separate Jewish and Gentile congregations that on occasion came together.

On the assumption that the “house churches” in Antioch were possibly patterned after the Jerusalem model, the issues of organization, worship service, and mission discussed in the previous section would also apply to Antioch churches.

## House churches in Paul’s missionary cities

We have already seen that Paul’s letters recognized the existence of house churches. Acts contains reports of house meetings in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Troas. We need not be detained by details on these and other individual churches, but simply note the texts that possibly mention them: Philippi, (Acts 16:11–15, 25–34); Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9); Corinth (Acts 18:7, 8; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:15, 17); Cenchræa—Phoebe is described as *prostatis* meaning “patron” (Rom. 16:1, 2); Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19, 26; 1 Cor. 16:19); Rome (Rom. 16:3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 15); and Colossæ (Philemon 1, 2). Further, as in Jerusalem, there was the possibility of more than one house church in these cities; for example, in

Philippi—in the houses of Lydia and the jailer—and in Corinth—on the properties of Aquila and Priscilla, Justus, Crispus, Stephanas, and Gaius.

The existence of house churches in Paul's time has been questioned by some New Testament scholars, arguing instead for "tenement churches."<sup>5</sup> The latter would be crowded, low-rent apartment housing where believers might be able to meet together only after joining several apartments. It is argued that the social status of the early Christians was such that they could not have had their own houses. The argument, however, is hardly provable either on the basis of archaeology or the biblical evidence.<sup>6</sup> Phoebe probably had a slave background, but she was a patron. The evidence seems convincing that Christians of the churches on Paul's missionary trail met in the houses of some affluent members.

*Worship service.* First Corinthians 11 and 14 contain data relevant to the worship service at the church of Corinth. Some discuss whether or not 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 talk about two separate worship services; one for Communion celebration and the other a service of the Word. In any case, from these two chapters we can be certain about the elements of the worship service: song, prayer, teaching/instruction and prophetic speech, as well as Communion. We could expect that the elements of the worship service at Corinth were present in other Pauline churches: Romans 12:3–8 mentions service, teaching, exhortation; Ephesians 5:19 speaks about teaching, singing of psalms, hymns, and songs; and Colossians 4:16 gives an indication that at least Paul's letters were read to the congregation at meetings.

*Pauline house churches and mission.* The role of Pauline house churches in missionary activities seems to have been dictated by Paul's missionary philosophy. Convinced that he had to preach the gospel to the entire world, Paul visited important cities, following the commercial routes of the time. Paul's churches, then, fit into a framework where they functioned as cells from where entire cities were to be reached. The fact that

Paul did not stay in the cities to make the cells full-fledged churches speaks to the point (1 Thess. 3:1–5). Thus, it would have been natural for the house churches to see themselves as bases for missionary work, assisting in providing the needed resources.

### **Holding it together: Leadership and organization of NT house churches**

The picture that emerges from the discussion so far indicates that in many of the cities where the early church found a home, including Jerusalem, there were a number of Christian groups operating simultaneously. But what sense did these groups have of themselves and how was their sense of identity maintained? These questions address issues of organization and leadership.

*Organization.* Acts 8:1 speaks about *the church* in Jerusalem in the singular. Yet the evidence presented above suggests the existence of at least two, and possibly more, house groups of believers. Acts 2:42–47 and 4:31–37 provides a picture of a community of believers with a community of goods and the added suggestion that all the believers must have, on occasion, met at the temple for common fellowship. It seems, then, that at some level in the community life of the believers in Jerusalem, they had a common or general organization, whereas at other levels the community was organized along the lines of the individual house groups. Thus, we see at least a two-level form of organization. The argument could be extended to the Pauline churches, at least in Corinth. The possibility of a number of house churches in Corinth has been noted, yet Paul, in addressing his first letter to the Corinthians, made it out to "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2). Against the background of a plurality of house churches in Corinth, possibly the statement "if the whole church comes together in *one place*" (1 Cor. 14:23, NKJV; italics added) could refer to a gathering of all the house churches at one place on occasion.

If the foregoing observations are correct, then we may be able to say this much. Although there may have been

several individual house churches, all of them saw themselves as belonging to *the church* in their respective cities. This probably was the sense of identity they had; not an unreasonable one given the fact that Paul's missionary philosophy may have led them to see their communities as bases or cells for evangelizing their cities. Thus, their missionary goal informed their organization.

*Leadership.* Such a system of organization could not have functioned without a corresponding leadership. With the church in Jerusalem, leadership appeared to be clearly in the hands of the apostles. What about Pauline churches? First Thessalonians 5:12 gives us a clue as to the leadership and nature of leadership functions in these churches. Paul urges the church to "respect" a specific group of individuals. The Greek word for "respect" (*eidenai*) means literally to know, which "by itself . . . means to 'identify' or to 'take note of' those listed as its objects."<sup>7</sup> Describing this group of individuals, Paul uses three participles in the present tense: "those who work hard" (*koipiontas*), those "who are over you" (*proistamenous*), and those "who admonish you" (*vouthetountas*). NT scholars have noted that the use of a single definite article to introduce all three participles indicates that a single group is intended. Furthermore, the use of the present tense implies that these functions were not sporadic in nature but consistent and habitual activities in the congregation. As to the nature of the leadership functions, *working hard* describes strenuous physical labor needed to support a ministry both physically and spiritually (1 Thess. 2:9; 3:5). Here is indicated strenuous effort put out to secure the material and spiritual welfare of the congregation. *Standing over*, however, has a range of meanings including presiding over, directing, caregiving (Rom. 12:8), and managing (1 Tim. 3:4, 5). Finally, *admonishing* may involve instructing, usually with the goal of exerting a corrective influence (1 Cor. 4:14).<sup>8</sup> Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:12 in the context of verses 20, 21 may lead us to conclude that some in the congregation may have been facing the risk of being misled, and such needed

to show respect to those who worked hard among them, stood over them, and admonished them.

The question as to how leadership was constituted is not particularly relevant to our interest here,<sup>9</sup> although it must be noted that the householder seemed to acquire leadership authority in the church. In any case, enough evidence exists to show that leadership functions were firmly in place in these congregations as a way of maintaining their material and spiritual health. In Corinth, Paul challenged the believers to submit themselves to the household of Stephanas and others who appeared to have a special position and exercised leading roles. Like those in Thessalonica, “they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints” (1 Cor. 16:16). Certainly, if there was no leadership structure in Corinth, it would have been senseless for Paul to expect certain members of the congregation to resolve the internal conflicts of the church (1 Cor. 6:1–5). Elsewhere, in the church at Philippi, a brief mention is made of leadership functions provided by *episkopoi* (overseers/bishops) and *diakonoi* (deacons), functions that appear to be designated as offices. Here we see a formal, ongoing leadership function.

As far as leadership to coordinate the activities of the various house churches is concerned, the duty appears to have rested mainly on the apostles. Paul called himself the “father” of the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:15). He exercised the “overseer” function in the churches he founded, employing in no small measure the medium of letters to exercise that function from a distance. He also had several coworkers for missionary purposes (Timothy, Titus, Silvanus, etc.). In addition, we should also keep in mind the role of some central leading authorities in Jerusalem: in sending Peter and John to help Philip (Acts 8:14); in possibly calling Peter to account for his dealing with Cornelius (Acts 11:1–18); in the council dealing with the issue of Gentiles and rituals (Acts 15); and in commissioning Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2).

Although all the details of organization and leadership are not clearly

available, the early church had in place structures and leadership patterns that held together what seems to be a plurality of house churches.

### Conclusion

In the early church, it seems that in many ways the house churches were vibrant and successful Christian congregations in carrying forward the gospel. The house church was an authentic Christian unit. There may have been several house churches at any one time in the cities where the gospel took root. In each of these congregations activities took place that qualified them to be called churches.

These churches, however, were not self-serving congregations but bases from where the cities were to be reached. Hence, there appears to have been some collaborative effort among several churches of any one city, necessitating what seems to have been at least a two-form organization. While each house church was authentic by itself, the whole church in a city would come together on occasion. All of this organization must have required a level of leadership to promote the health of the churches.

The house church appears to have been a success because architecturally, sociologically, and missiologically it had come into its own. The architectural limitation imposed on congregational size did not seem to be a problem because the household seems to have been a viable unit of social organization. Indeed, the sociocultural situation provided by the *oikos* concept seemed to have provided a good sociological fit for the house church that potentially served as a catalyst for mission.

Is the house church an option for Adventist work in today’s big cities? Our study shows that in principle the house church is functional or “doable.” Indeed, a house church could be a powerful corrective to the impersonal life of modern cities, and thus, a catalyst for evangelism; not to mention the potential monetary savings.

However, its effectiveness in any particular city would appear to depend on a careful evaluation of several factors including physical, sociological, and

organizational ones. What real limitations on size would be imposed given the architecture and building designs of the city where the message likely will take root? What psychological impact would size per se have on the viability of the church? What real dangers of one-sidedness, both theologically and otherwise, are imposed by size? Given the sociocultural mix of the city, how would people warm up to the more intense level of interaction that the house church affords? What would be the potential role of the house owner in the church and how would that fit in the Adventist system of church governance? What risks will the natural role of the house owner in the church’s life pose to the congregation’s material and spiritual health? Given the potential influence of the house owner, this question becomes critical in view of the contemporary proliferation of independent churches. How effective is the church’s representative form of church governance going to be when the church exists on the goodwill of the house owner? These and many more such questions may need to be addressed on case-by-case basis before a decision can be made on the viability of the house church for today. ■

- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Advocate*, March 1, 1899.
- 2 Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 247.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 For a detailed and critical discussion see Roger W. Gehring, *House Churches and Mission* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 1–225.
- 5 See for example Robert Jewett, “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church,” *Biblical Research* 38 (1993): 23–43.
- 6 Gehring, 148–151.
- 7 D. Michael Martin, *The New American Commentary, 1, 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Pub., 2002), 171.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 173.
- 9 It has been argued from a sociological perspective that the household setting determined the inner life and organization of the local Christian church. Hence, Gehring concludes that “the leadership structures of the house church did not have to be created out of nothing. ‘The church in the house came with its leadership so to speak built in.’” See Gehring, 194.

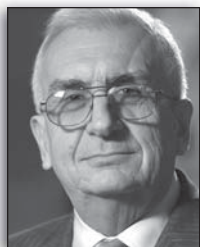
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# Guarding the church organization:

## An interview with the Office of General Counsel

**Nikolaus Satelmajer and Paul Mwansa**



*Nikolaus Satelmajer is editor of Ministry magazine.*



*Paul Mwansa served as an intern for Ministry.*

*Photography: Reger Smith*

*Editor's note: The Office of General Counsel (OGC) is a part of the organizational structure of the General Conference headquarters at Silver Spring, Maryland. OGC, with six attorneys, counsels the church on issues affecting its function, organization, and mission. They are Robert Kyte (RK), general counsel, Lisa Burrow (LB), Richard Caldwell (RC), Todd McFarland (TM), Dionne Parker (DP), and Thomas Wetmore (TW), associate general counsels.*

*Ministry editor Nikolaus Satelmajer and Paul Mwansa, who served as an intern with Ministry, interviewed the attorneys regarding the role of the OGC as it relates to the mission of the church.*

**Nikolaus Satelmajer (NS):** *What is the Office of General Counsel?*

**Robert Kyte (RK):** The Working Policy of the General Conference (GC) includes our mission statement: *The Office of General Counsel (OGC) advises, represents, and provides legal counsel to the church and its institutions in all matters and at every opportunity, consistent with the laws of the applicable jurisdiction. OGC also advises the church as to what appears to be fair, just, moral, and equitable, thereby seeking to direct the church toward a position of moral and social leadership in harmony with Scripture and reflective of Christian*

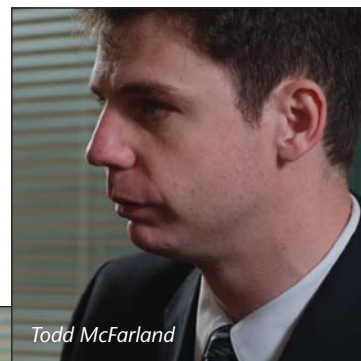
*love.*<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, we have two areas of responsibility: first, to address specific legal issues; second, to do preventive law by counseling and education.

**Paul Mwansa (PM):** *What are some of the areas covered and by whom?*

**Thomas Wetmore (TW):** My primary areas are tax exempt organization issues and structural issues for the overall organization. I also look after compliance. It's about preventive law—determining where the church organization should be and how it should be in compliance with the law. We need to be aware of legal requirements and regulations, and be sure that there are appropriate systems in place to make that happen so that the system will run as it should. Substantive areas I deal with pertain to tax, employee benefits, and contracts.

**Lisa Burrow (LB):** I am involved with immigration work for the GC, other employers in the complex, and some church organizations outside of the building. Workers outside the GC headquarters who need immigration assistance include pastors, teachers, music ministers, Bible workers, and task-force workers. In addition, I also handle contract issues for the North American Division (NAD), whereas Tom Wetmore handles such matters for the GC.

**Todd McFarland (TM):** I deal with religious liberty issues, such as church-state



*Todd McFarland*



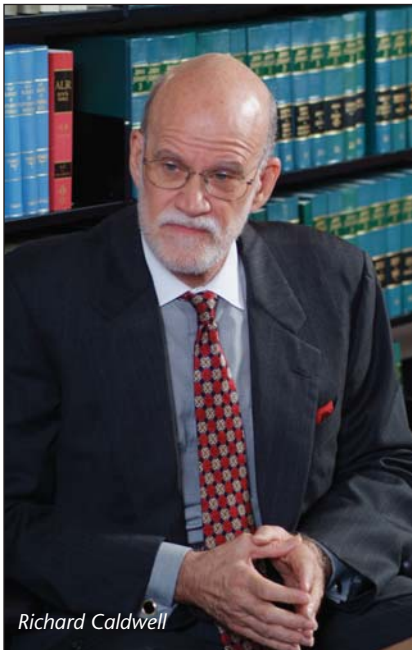
*Robert Kyte*



Dionne Parker

relations, issues where church members are discriminated because of their faith. In addition, church entities that suffer religious discrimination fall under my purview. I also cover some issues that affect GC/NAD departments, including the Ministerial Association, Biblical Research Institute (BRI), Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI), and Chaplaincy.

**Dionne Parker (DP):** I care for the employment law or human resources law and intellectual property matters



Richard Caldwell

for the GC, Adventist Church in North America, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and Pacific Press. As part of my intellectual property duties, my primary responsibility is working to protect the name of the church.

**Richard Caldwell (RC):** My primary responsibility involves charitable estate planning. That includes wills, trusts, estate taxation, gift taxation, income taxes of the trusts, donor-advised funds,



Thomas Wetmore

and endowment funds. Most of my time is spent with Planned Giving and Trust Services. I also advise GC Auditing Service and trust auditors on the trust and estate planning issues. I consult with GC Treasury on donor-advised funds and sometimes endowment fund issues.

**RK:** Each of the attorneys has specialty areas in which they practice. But within the broader spectrum, we also have assigned departments and institutions that we liaison with. I focus a lot on corporate and transactional law and work with a variety of organizations including the GC and NAD in dealing with their corporate structure and governance. I also serve as the legal counsel for the GC Corporation. The GC has an unincorporated ecclesiastical body and a legal structure that is the corporate entity. We also serve as general counsel for ADRA, Pacific Press, Review and Herald, and institutions within the GC building including Griggs University, Adventist World Radio, and Hope Channel. We serve as a resource to other church organizations and the divisions around the world.

**NS:** So it's primarily the GC and the GC-managed/owned organizations, right?

**RK:** OGC limits its practice to church organizations. Our client base is primarily GC, NAD, and GC institutions. But we're not limited to that. Often, especially with the NAD, we get calls or letters asking questions specifically about legal issues and how the church has handled similar issues in the past. We also do a considerable amount of work with the divisions overseas because they're part of the GC. I think we've been working with all of the divisions in one way or the other and I spend a lot of time on this. When you're practicing law your client asks, What is the law? But at the GC, we cannot tell them just what the law is; we have to apply that law within the church setting. That



Lisa Burrow

doesn't mean that we compromise on the law or do something that's not legal but we counsel the church on how it should function in a particular setting or environment.

**NS:** When does the church utilize courts either to initiate or to defend a lawsuit? What biblical principles guide you in those decisions?

**TM:** We initiate lawsuits primarily when church members or church institutions have been discriminated against. For example, when church members face

discrimination in their workplace on account of the Sabbath, we go to court after all other avenues have failed. We go through an administrative process. First, the union conference tries to work with the employers. Often that is successful in dealing with the problem, but if not, then the case comes to the division and then to our office, and we take action against the employer on behalf of the aggrieved member. As far as biblical principles are concerned, I refer to the example of Paul. When he was flogged, he responded that he was a Roman citizen and he had certain rights under the law: he could not be flogged. In today's situation, I see nothing inconsistent with taking advantage of the provisions of the law that guarantees religious liberty. People should be able to be true to their conscience and feed their families.

**NS:** *In this particular area of religious liberty, what has been the trend? Have things become more difficult for our members or are things easing up a bit?*

**TM:** As we've become more and more a twenty-four-seven society, the situation is certainly more difficult. More of our members are getting fired; more of our members are having problems. There is another aspect to the problem as well. As the church grows, new converts—people who were working on the Sabbath—find themselves in a predicament, and getting Sabbath privilege becomes problematic. And with the general hostility to religion, people are less willing to accommodate.

**NS:** *Some twenty-five years or so ago, there were other denominations that were very interested in these religious liberty issues. Is that still the case?*

**TM:** The interest has diminished. We certainly work with other organizations routinely. Recently, we did a criminal court brief in a case, and we got eleven church organizations to join us. There are other institutions that do litigation, but they are fewer in number. As far as representing individual members discriminated on the basis of religion, we're one of the few organizations left.

**NS:** *Dionne Parker, you talked about intellectual property. Does that deal with areas such as the use of the church's name? What is the status of the name "Seventh-day Adventist"? How frequently does the church go to court in seeking to protect the church's name?*

**DP:** We work to protect the church's name, and we try not to go to court often. Take, for example, an offshoot organization that uses the church's name. We do many things before we ever seek litigation. Usually we start with a letter informing the errant party that they are wrongfully using registered trademarks that belong to the GC Corporation, and we ask them politely to stop using the church's name. In the majority of cases, people will stop using the church's name once they're notified that they're not in compliance with the law, and they're infringing on trademark. What happens when we sue someone? Basically we're not seeking any money benefits; we're just seeking what's called an injunction to get the court to have the erring party stop using the church's name. Our stand is simply this: the more people use the church's registered trademark without permission, the weaker our trademark becomes.

**NS:** *You've mentioned groups separating from the Adventist Church. What about individuals who are church members? Can they use the name for their business undertakings?*

**DP:** Pursuant to the GC Working Policy, individuals are not allowed to use "Adventist" or "Seventh-day Adventist" in conjunction with their commercial endeavors. That's a violation of church policy. Sometimes we have individuals who try to do that because they think they are members, and they can use the church's name. In the case of not-for-profit supporting ministries, they can apply for a license to use the church's name, and that involves a whole process whereby it is approved or disapproved. But the church's name is not supposed to be used for commercial endeavors.

**RK:** Any church organization listed in the GC Yearbook,<sup>2</sup> including the health

system, is free to use our name. The commercial activity issue generally comes into play in private business. There are church organizations—such as publishing houses and hospitals—that could be construed as being commercial, but when one looks at their mission, it's broader than just a commercial endeavor. A lot of uses by individuals, especially in a commercial setting, are inadvertent. They don't even think about it, they just use it. Not only is it against GC policy, but in most cases it would be a violation of our trademarks. But litigation is really the church's last resort—and I emphasize the word *last*—because we try to work in every way possible not to sue these groups.

Let me switch to another question you asked. Obviously, we cannot control who sues us and how we respond to those who sue us. If there are suits that involve personal injuries of any kind, they are turned over to Adventist Risk Management (ARM), the church's insurance company. With regard to other matters that do not pertain to insurance, we directly handle such suits ourselves or work with outside counsel.

**NS:** *And you have to respond to those; you have no choice.*

**RK:** If we don't respond to lawsuits filed against the church, we end up defaulting and losing them and that would put the church's resources in jeopardy. Fortunately, such cases are few and far between, but there are suits that the GC gets pulled into that don't really involve the GC at all. They may concern a local conference activity, such as somebody injured on the job or injured on church property. In such cases there's an automatic assumption by some that the GC is responsible. We try to get the GC dismissed from those cases as quickly as we can.

**TW:** Sometimes there's a perception that because we take the defense of a lawsuit seriously, we will defend the church aggressively, and that we don't look at compromise. But the reality is otherwise. If we perceive that there is real merit to a claim, we will be amiable

to resolve the issue as appropriately as possible. We don't just go to court regardless; we try to be responsible, take every step to resolve an issue long before it gets to court.

**NS:** *I want to go back to the use of the name. If a group of Seventh-day Adventists forms an organization and starts using the name, but they don't have any formal relationship with the organization, it makes that group appear that it is speaking on behalf of the church, when in reality it has no organizational connection or validity. Is that what's at stake here?*

**RK:** That's the basic assumption. The name "Seventh-day Adventist" is reserved to be used only by groups that are officially part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and are supportive and part of that organization's structure. There may be some innocent groups that use that name with no ill will at all, but just the same, they're not part of the church. In the history of the Adventist Church some groups that are not part of the church structure and mission have used the name inappropriately, and this has caused negative and harmful publicity for the church. Hence the safeguard: to preserve and protect the name only for units that are part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church organization.

**NS:** *Any example of such historic misuse?*

**RK:** A tragic example is the one that involved the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. Initially, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was brought into that disaster because of the past affiliation of some of its members. When it comes to protecting the name of the church, you can't pick and choose. You have to protect the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as consistently as possible. If you

start letting different groups that are not part of the church use that name, you dilute the ability to protect the church's name and the people.

**TW:** Some members may feel that they're entitled to use the name. But we as protectors of the name must recognize that the name is like any other property. If vandals or thieves violate the physical property of a church, we would take legal action. Likewise, if someone "steals" our name and misuses it, we must take action to protect against such misuse.

**PM:** *You spoke about preventative law. How do you prepare for an anticipated legal crisis?*

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**RK:** Education is one way to anticipate and prevent a crisis. All the attorneys at the OGC are involved in holding seminars and programs, making leadership at various levels aware of how the law impacts various activities of the church. We are involved in meetings that are conducted by ARM, Human Resources, and other entities. And we actually take part with meetings involving pastors, workers, and members, and create awareness among them on legal issues that affect church work.

**RC:** May I point out an example of ways in which we try to bring about legal awareness? First, in tax areas. We constantly face new tax laws. I try to keep our church clients informed about

these new developments and changes. Keeping up with what's current is important for all church entities so as to ensure compliance. This involves holding seminars and lectures on trust and estate tax audit issues, on planned giving, on trust accounting topics, and on legal issues facing Planned Giving and Trust Services, et cetera.

**TW:** The education part of our work comes in informal settings as well. Each of us in OGC attends various church meetings at different levels. Discussions during such meetings often deal with issues that have legal implications. While such implications may not be obvious to lay persons, the person from OGC can pick up the legal issue involved, and try to bring some legal clarity. That's part of education, part of preventative law. It steers the organization and the administrators down the correct path before they go too far and do the wrong thing.

**RK:** Some may wonder, *Why do we need lawyers working full time within the church when you can hire lawyers from outside as issues arise?* The point is that we need to be actively involved in the procedures and processes of the law

as it affects our church work. We need to be watching with legal eyes all the time in all of the areas we work in. The work of the church is increasingly more complex—emails, Web sites, announcements, departmental promotions, communications, books and magazines, and a hundred other activities. These need to be carefully monitored and guided so as to not create any legal problems. Recently, a department sent out a very positive promotion for something that concerned certain activities. When we read the announcement, we immediately saw some legal issues in how some things were being handled. Because we were right here in the building, we could address those issues immediately.

**NS:** *How do you manage your work, when it involves so many states, and often attorneys in other parts of the world?*

**RK:** Actually, we're licensed in certain jurisdictions and practice only where we are licensed.

**NS:** *But you relate to lawyers in other jurisdictions.*

**RK:** Right, but we work with local counsel. For example, I'm working on issues in various countries right now, but I work with local legal counsel sharing with them the GC perspective.

**NS:** *How do you keep up with all the legal books and developments?*

**RK:** Nearly everything is electronic now. We're on a subscription base to all the electronic encyclopedias, the laws, and other online research resources. In addition, all of us are engaged in continuing legal education.

**TM:** We also attend fairly regularly various legal association meetings. The legal profession is pretty good about informing itself with its various magazines and trade publications.

**NS:** *In the last few years some denominations have gotten a lot of bad press with issues of misconduct by clergy or lay members. What is our church doing to address this issue?*

**TW:** We as a church are not free from problems of this sort. From an organizational standpoint, the learning curve has forced us to create policies that would insist that there be a screening process for employees. It's a basic must. So, hopefully we can prevent things from occurring.

**NS:** *This screening process applies to both employees and to volunteers?*

**TW:** Yes. Simple processes have been put in place where such problems are likely to occur. For example, a screening process for those who would work with children can prevent possible child

abuse situations. But policies alone won't do. We need to set up an educational process at all levels so that everyone understands what's involved and what's expected.

**RK:** When this issue first came up, many conferences were concerned about the costs involved, but they quickly recognized that every dollar spent was worth it. In the NAD even small conferences have now put together good screening processes. ARM has also worked on some procedures that are really helpful. One factor that is changing the thinking of the church is the need for faster recognition and notification of local authorities when an alleged situation of abuse is reported. You speedily report not just because it's required by law, but because civil authorities have to take necessary steps to investigate and pursue the case.

**LB:** For the past fifteen years or so, there's been an increasing awareness that sexual misconduct occurs in the church at all levels, and the church has a responsibility to deal with it. I have noticed a huge difference in the way such conduct is handled now from the way it was handled a few years ago. When the first sexual misconduct guidelines were drafted, it was an effort between ARM and the Office of General Counsel. As the guidelines were used through the years, both weaknesses and strengths were discovered. The guidelines eventually turned into a policy, and now that policy is under revision. The whole process represents a continued growth within the church, a continued responsiveness. I must also add that while we have developed policies to deal with misconduct, we also have been working on the preventive side of the process. You can't leave out prevention in any aspect; it's always part and parcel of what we do. When we're dealing with sexual misconduct, being aware and being responsive are of course important, but we want to prevent misconduct by educating, doing seminars, workshops, and presentations. We must also take steps to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

**PM:** *How do your responsibilities help the mission of the church?*

**RK:** We help protect the resources of the church, and we safeguard the church from getting detoured from its mission. By taking care of the legal problems, we let the church leadership focus on mission and do it in a way that's legal and that exemplifies the right way of doing business within the environment that we have.

**TW:** Protecting the name of the church is also protecting the mission of the church. The integrity of the church must remain above reproach. When it comes to protecting the resources of the church, it's much less expensive to prevent a problem than to fix one after it occurs. Sometimes it's hard to measure the success of our work because problems are not occurring, but they are not occurring because of systems in place to prevent them from happening.

**RK:** One unique difference between OGC and other services and departments in the church is the staff. Most departments are staffed by pastors and church leaders with theological training, and they get involved in the direct mission of the church. But OGC has six lawyers, none from a practicing pastoral background. However, we are contributing to the mission of the church by safeguarding the church's assets and its ability to fulfill its mission.

**NS:** *Thank you for this interview and for all you do in fulfilling the mission of the church. ■*

- 1 To see the full text of the mission statement, as well as to access other pertinent information, go to the Web site of the Office of General Counsel, [www.adventistlawyer.com](http://www.adventistlawyer.com).
- 2 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2007). The GC Yearbook is a directory of all recognized entities and employees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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# Christian commitment

Steven P. Vitrano



Steven P. Vitrano, PhD, is professor emeritus of preaching, worship, and evangelism, Andrews University Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States.

**H**ow can commitment be defined? Commitment can be defined as the decision to do what needs to be done, whatever the cost—a definition that characterizes countless heroes throughout history.

Christian commitment, however, can best be defined by starting with God's examples: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God decided to save a lost world. The cost was the cruel, despicable death of His only Son. What made this commitment Christian? Because it was inspired by love, the love defined by Jesus: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

How does this apply to the followers of Jesus, specifically to ministers? These words explain the relevance: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Jesus asked. And Peter answered, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus then said to him, "Feed my lambs." A similar question was repeated twice more to which Peter finally answered in exasperation, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." And again Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep." Then he told Peter "by what death he was to glorify God" and said, "Follow me" (John 21:15–19).

Following Jesus, or feeding His lambs and His sheep—this was Peter's mission. And love

inspired him to fulfill it. While Peter didn't quite understand the mission when he first became a disciple, he grew in love and became one of the founders of the Christian church—a commitment that, in the end, cost him his life.

Love for Christ does not mean merely a feeling or affection but a commitment to follow Him all the way. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus also said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Christian love inspires the commitment to obey God's commandments, not in order to win God's favor but because He has won our favor. Christian love demonstrates what discipleship is all about. We say what He tells us to say, we go where He tells us to go, we do what He tells us to do—at whatever cost.

Love inspires commitment, and to have this kind of commitment we also need a crucial component: faith. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Given our human limitations, what we hope for and what we do not see cannot be confirmed as *fact*, at least as the world understands "facts." Faith, however, gives the assurance and the conviction that what we hope for, and what we cannot see *becomes a reality, a fact*.

Of Enoch it is said that he pleased God. "And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists" (Heb. 11:6). Enoch could not touch or see God, but he believed in God. Faith made God a reality.

In Romans 4, Paul gives us another example of faith as reality in the life of Abraham. "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations" (Rom. 4:18). Sarah was beyond the years of childbearing, and he considered his own body as good as dead, "but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised" (vv. 20, 21).

But faith cannot be defined as just belief, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder" (James 2:19).

"By faith Noah . . . constructed an ark for the saving of his household" (Heb. 11:7). He not only believed God, but he did what God told him to do. He built a ship on dry ground, telling people a flood was coming at a time when he had never seen rain. For that matter, nor had anyone else. He was laughed at,

challenged, ridiculed, and despised, but he did it, enduring the persecution for many years.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance and he went out, not knowing where he was to go” (v. 8). Abraham’s faith motivated him to do what many would consider unthinkable.

So with people of faith. Hebrews 11 offers us a “hall of faith”—Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets—“who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (vv. 33, 34).

Following his definition and examples in Hebrews 11, Paul gives us a model for commitment in chapter 12: “Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which

clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith [the Model], who for the joy that was set before him [the motive] endured the cross, despising the shame [the cost], and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God [the victory]” (vv. 1, 2).

Paul then admonishes us not to grow weary or fainthearted, because in our struggle against sin we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood. We are to strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Striving for holiness becomes the commitment, but what motivation is there for it?

If Jesus is the Model, our motivation will be the joy set before us. This joy can be described as the joy of salvation, the joy of knowing that what God has promised, He will fulfill.

Righteousness by faith does not patronize sin, because faith in Jesus motivates the commitment to follow Him. The substitution of Christ’s

righteousness for our unrighteousness does not patronize sin because that gracious act of love motivates us to obey Him. Commitment does not ask “How hard shall I try?” Commitment says, “Whatever it takes!” Commitment does not say, “I can never be perfect.” Commitment says, “I may not be perfect, but in Christ I can be.”

What Christ *has done* for us, what Christ *does* in us, what Christ *will do* for us—all these motivate us to commit our lives to Him. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30). ❏

\* Scripture references are from the Revised Standard Version.

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# Developing an Adventist concept of spirituality

Bruce Manners



Bruce Manners, PhD, is senior pastor of the Avondale College Seventh-day Adventist Church, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

**S**pirituality has been described as “a broad concept referring to the ways in which people seek, make, celebrate and apply meaning to their lives.”<sup>1</sup> In a society with growing uncertainties and ample choices, people will need more time to reflect on the deep values that make life worth living, and it will be “increasingly difficult to determine precisely what spirituality means.”<sup>2</sup>

The waters become muddled, though, when individuals use the term for almost any experience. For instance, Jerry Hall, the former long-term companion of Mick Jagger, supposedly said that natural childbirth was a spiritual experience, as she was watching her goddaughter being born. As is her love of poetry. As is her ability to forgive the press for what they say about her and Jagger.<sup>3</sup>

Spirituality means, then, different things to various people with the word often used in a vague and ambiguous way.<sup>4</sup> For some it’s an undefined word with no clear meaning or with wide and loose significance,<sup>5</sup> a word that is “hardly more than a hint, a ‘hint followed by guesses.’ And the guesses proliferate exponentially.”<sup>6</sup>

It has been argued that instability exists in what spirituality means.<sup>7</sup> Spirituality has become a “proliferation term” with a “clutter” definition.<sup>8</sup> One researcher, David Tacey, admits that a definition is difficult, “but we can talk around the subject and provide some hints and descriptions.”<sup>9</sup>

## Interviews

While involved in research including 41 face-to-face interviews and 10 focus groups (totaling 78 people) among Adventists in Australia and New Zealand, I asked them to define *spirituality*. The question was direct: “How would you define a spiritual person?” The respondents’ answers give us insight into their understanding and may help develop an Adventist concept of spirituality.

Most among those who responded had difficulty finding a ready answer. In focus groups, the concept tended to be bounced around the group, but even there, follow-up questions proved helpful in gaining a fuller response. The additional questions asked were if respondents knew someone they sensed was a spiritual person, and what was it about that person that made them view this person as “spiritual.” These questions helped clarify their thoughts, and allowed them to express more freely why they thought certain individuals were spiritual.

Responses weren’t limited to concepts of spirituality within Adventism or Christianity. Four of those interviewed, and several in focus groups, spoke of spirituality or of a spiritual person within other religious bodies citing “Eastern religions,” Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as examples. Within Christianity, Mother Teresa and a pastor gained mention (the pastor, though, was mentioned only once as an illustration of one who did *not* demonstrate spirituality).

Surprisingly only eight individuals specifically linked spirituality to the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–24). This seemed an obvious connection for people with biblical knowledge, although several referred to elements mentioned in Galatians, within the life of a spiritual person, but without making any direct link. In one focus group, when an individual responded that a spiritual person has the “fruit of the Spirit,” another retorted, “What a cop-out!” Perhaps others felt the same way.

While respondents gave a variety of answers, their responses concerning demonstrations of spirituality may be gathered under three broad categories: demonstrations of spirituality through a connection with God, within the personal life, and through relationships with others.

## Spirituality through a connection with God

This concept was also expressed in terms of a connection or a relationship with Jesus. Because of the nature of this relationship, these demonstrations were subjective. They ranged from a spiritual person being one who believes



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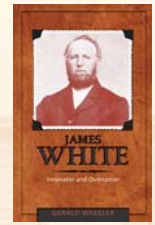
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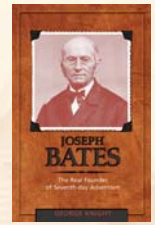


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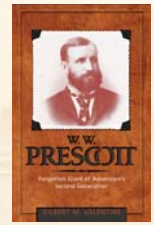


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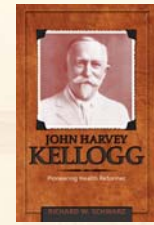


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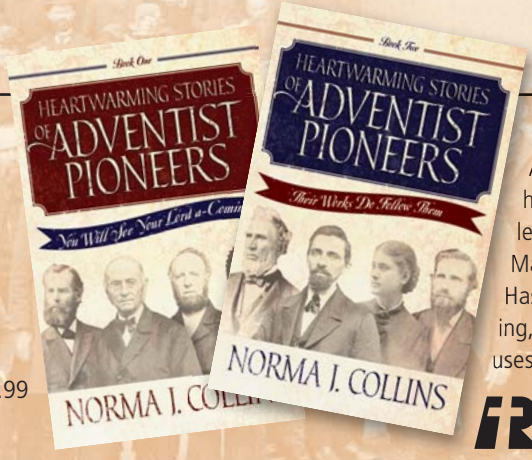
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in God and has complete trust and dependence in Him, to having the sense that Jesus walks with them or that they walk close to God.

This relationship becomes personal and can be described in terms of a love relationship involving the heart, mind, and soul—one that is open, that places God first and central, and leads to obedience in response. This relationship has an impact on the life, with spiritual people knowing that God has changed their lives. They want to live the life Christ would live, and this leads to the “image of Christ” being reproduced in them or a reflection of God in their lives.

Respondents expected that there will be some excitement about this relationship and, when trouble arises, thoughts will turn immediately to God. A practical and measurable response will be found in a devotional life that includes prayer and Bible reading, which they understood as spending time with God every day.

## Spirituality within the personal life

As noted, an active devotional life was expected as a personal result of a spiritual

connection with God. Other anticipated spiritual attributes may include humility, sincerity, tolerance, gentleness, compassion, integrity, and caring for others.

Spiritual people will be easygoing and cheerful, but firm when they need to be; they have their life “together.” Their life will be an “open book.” While you may recognize them as spiritual persons when you meet them or pick them out in a crowd by the way they speak, they will tend to go about quietly living saintly lives.

With the spiritual life of central importance to spiritual people, they will talk naturally about spiritual matters without making another person feel out of place. In fact, they will talk openly about their prayer life, devotional reading, and devotional life.

A sense of peace surrounds spiritual people including a consistency in their lives. They do not put on a “Saturday [Sabbath] face” that’s different from the weekday face. They have a value system but are nonjudgmental and supportive of others. They stand up for what they believe, have high principles, but look honestly at their own battles

and victories, and realize that Jesus has become the answer to their problems.

At the same time, they’re able to recognize and accept failure in their own lives and in those of others. They have a deep appreciation of spiritual things—something you can see in them because it impacts everything they do. You feel good when you’re with them because they make you feel inspired, a little closer to God.

## Spirituality in relationships with others

There are practical consequences to spirituality, said the respondents, because the love relationship with God becomes a priority and shows itself in practical ways in relationships with others. They saw spiritual people wanting to reach out to others as Jesus did.

Spiritual people won’t be self-focused, but will have an active faith. They’ll be seen doing more than praying. They’ll be in tune with people around them and accept people as they are without being judgmental. They’ll have a social consciousness and a passion for people and for helping others. They will

be a “blessing” to those with whom they come in contact, and active in their church. Spiritual people are practical in their faith and in what they do.

### More than hints and descriptions?

This composite picture painted by respondents idealizes spiritual people, making them nice to know (as one woman commented about a friend she knew as a spiritual person). She also noted a difference in everyone, with some more practical in demonstrating their spirituality—an important recognition that allows for differences within the experience and outworking of spirituality.

Having attempted to illustrate Adventist spirituality in this way leaves us with precisely that, an illustration, not a definition. Lacking definition, perhaps we have only briefly discussed the subject, dealing with it on a surface level. Perhaps one respondent was correct when she said of spirituality, “It’s indescribable. It’s something you can’t define, but it’s there.”

This reflects several realities: spirituality remains for some Adventists a slippery concept without a set definition, which makes it difficult to construct an understood, concrete boundary. Unlike some of its theology, no distinctive Adventist understanding of spirituality exists.

Added to this, we have evidence that not much is distinctive between denominations in concepts of spirituality, or in the terminology used.<sup>10</sup> Finally, spirituality, as a relatively recent term within Protestant Christianity (in the past 50 years),<sup>11</sup> would be expected to rate lower than theology or lifestyle, which have far stronger traditions within the Adventist Church.

However, these responses may be able to help us begin to develop an Adventist understanding of spirituality. Of course, any concept of spirituality or spiritual formation must be biblically based, not founded on mere comments. What was fascinating about this research was that, although it was opinion-based, it generally points toward an underlying biblical theology that supports the “hints and descriptions” respondents gave.

### Developing an Adventist spirituality

I wish I could now unveil a model of Adventist spirituality with appropriate fanfare. That isn’t going to happen. However, this biblical base stands as important for developing a Christian and Adventist understanding of spirituality. This takes it to a level more meaningful than that of Jerry Hall’s understanding of self-actualization schemes that can pass for spirituality. The Bible remains essential for a Christian understanding of spirituality for it “reveals the God who is the subject, the object and the means of true spirituality.”<sup>12</sup>

Eugene Peterson says the Bible is a great gift to “offer the world in all matters of spirituality.”

Tested against the reality of actual lives, [the Bible] turns out not to be another of many “guesses” about spirituality, but spirituality itself. Instead of reading *about* spirituality, getting careful definitions or elaborate descriptions of it, we come upon spirituality in action. Reading the Bible, we are immersed in the intricate tangle of human life as it is entered, addressed, confronted, saved, healed and blessed by the living God—God’s Spirit breathed into human lives. Spirituality.<sup>13</sup>

Biblical spirituality remains grounded in something solid and outside ourselves. Having accepted the validity and authority the Bible brings, we can come to two immediate results. First, we can no longer claim every warm feeling as a spiritual experience in the biblical or Christian sense. Second, we discover within its pages spiritual disciplines that enhance Christian spirituality.

We can describe biblical spirituality as an experience and relationship as the human spirit to *the* Spirit—or, better expressed, “a magnificent choreography of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit. . . .”<sup>14</sup> Spiritual disciplines help build and strengthen this relationship. They assist in taking the relationship to a more consistent level than the occasional experiential encounters with God, and in creating a “room where Christ can invite us to feast

with Him at the table of abundance.”<sup>15</sup> For the Christian, biblical revelation and spiritual disciplines are something solid to work with in giving focus, direction, and methodology for developing a strong, personal God-related spirituality.

And because this concept concentrates on a personal relationship with God, it means there is no set formula for what will be the most meaningful for an individual—one size does not fit all. What proves to be a meaningful approach to God for one, may not work as well for another. While it’s true that all Christians should be involved in spiritual disciplines such as prayer and Bible reading, not all will have the same impact.

### A model?

So, what could an Adventist model of spirituality look like? From the research there is a strong emphasis on what could be called “practical spirituality,” or defined as spirituality demonstrated in action, in doing—a part of our heritage. We have tended to promote and applaud action. This will naturally be reflected in our approach to spirituality.

The following seven points are tentative starters that are disciplined based, and attempt to place Adventist teaching into the context of spirituality. I have intentionally avoided the use of terminology often associated with spirituality in an attempt to bring the topic into a plain-speak format.

*Relationships.* Biblical spirituality is bound up in our relationship with God. Christianity itself is about relationships. With God as the majestic Creator-Lord of the universe, we know Him also as the Father (a relational term). His Son (another relational term) lived, died, and rose from the grave so we might have hope and life. He gave believers the right to be called children of God (John 1:12). Siblings to the Savior, we’re family. Love strengthens the family of God. Love spreads out from the family of God because, yes, Cain, we are our brothers’ (and sisters’) keeper. Therefore, both good deeds and the good news need to be shared. With building relationships classed as a discipline, the same kind of work needed to develop relationships within families and within

friendship groups is needed in developing a relationship with God.

**Worship.** God alone is worthy of worship. Revelation 14:7 describes His worthiness and our worship choices. Worship should be a spiritual discipline in both its private and corporate experience involving a variety of elements including praise and adoration, prayer, music, and the Word. It can be structured or unstructured. In worship, privately or publicly, God is the audience. We worship falsely when we become the center of worship—avoiding this takes great discipline.

**Communication.** God communicates through His Word and His Spirit. The spiritual disciplines of reading and listening, of journaling and meditation, of shouting (inwardly, if you prefer) and silence are all part of this communicative experience with God. Solitude can be helpful, but praying with a crowd can be just as effective. While some find it easy to “practice the presence of God” in everyday life, most have to set specific times.

**Time.** Adventists should be at an advantage here because of the Sabbath 24-hour time emphasis when we attempt “to become attuned to *holiness in time*.”<sup>16</sup> Taking the time, and not only on the Sabbath, may be the most difficult discipline of all because of the fast pace of life. Social researcher Hugh Mackay has discovered that families are reassessing family life. “In all this re-evaluation, *time* is of the essence! . . . Spouses speak of the need to take ‘time out’ to work on the repair and maintenance of their relationships.”<sup>17</sup> We, as part of God’s family, need time to maintain this relationship.

**Money.** Tithing, as the most obvious spiritual discipline involving money, in its true sense, recognizes a trust relationship with God. But it is so much more. Our giving and our spending and our resisting the temptations of materialism should fit into the context of the disciplined life. Ideally, we should make money a spiritual tool, perhaps as Rabbi Shawn Zevit sees it: “To obtain something is to create an exchange that leaves all parties feeling whole and holy in their comings and goings with each other. Money used as a spiritual tool in this way has the potential to leave everyone resting in a place of peace, of *shalom*.”<sup>18</sup>

**Witness.** Whether it’s walking across the room to befriend a stranger, or witnessing on a street corner, or preaching an evangelistic sermon, rightly done, sharing about God is a spiritual experience. If it comes out of a relationship with Him, what we share comes out of our practical and spiritual experience.

**Present-future living.** We live in the present, but we can already taste the future with Christ because we’re part of the family of God. Our hope for the future will impact how we live now. Our relationship with Him brings with it the desire to live a balanced, wholesome lifestyle for this type of lifestyle will lead to a balanced and wholesome spirituality—you can’t divorce the physical and emotional from the spiritual.

As noted already, I’ve placed a strong emphasis on spiritual disciplines in my suggested approach to Adventist spirituality for within the disciplines we find something solid that can be used to develop a strong experiential relationship with God. There’s nothing new here, it has been this way since the beginnings of Christianity<sup>19</sup> and grows naturally out of Old Testament teaching. It can be argued that without the disciplines there is no sustainable Christian spirituality, for while they do nothing of themselves, they “get us to the place where something can be done. . . . in the place where the change can occur.”<sup>20</sup>

We will always have difficulty defining spirituality because, as an experiential term, it can be used to describe feelings of euphoria. Biblical spirituality brings the focus where it should be—away from us and on God. The spiritual disciplines give structure for developing a strong relationship with Him.

In the end, I’ve suggested that Adventist spirituality should fit within a biblical and holistic approach to Christianity—and that’s all. There’s something very Adventist about that concept. Then again, “the spiritual life is not one slice of existence but leaven for the whole loaf. . . . Spirituality is naturally holistic.”<sup>21</sup> ■

1 Philip Hughes et al., *Believe It or Not: Australian Spirituality and the Churches in the 90s* (Kew, Australia: Christian Research Association, 1997), 7.

2 Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in*

*America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 14.

3 Michael Raiter, *Stirrings of the Soul: Evangelicals and the New Spirituality* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2003), 74.

4 Paul Kurtz, “Spirituality, Neospirituality, and the Paranormal,” in *Modern Spiritualities: An Inquiry*, eds. Laurence Brown et al., (Amhurst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1997), 223.

5 C. P. M. Jones, preface to *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones et al. (London: SPCK Publishing, 1986), xxii.

6 Eugene Petersen, foreword to *New Testament Spirituality: True Discipleship and Spiritual Maturity*, by Michael Green and Paul R. Stevens (Surrey, United Kingdom: Eagle, Inter Publishing Service [IPS], 1994), vii.

7 Barry Brummett, “Rhetorical Epistemology and Rhetorical Spirituality,” in *The Academy and the Possibility of Belief: Essays on Intellectual and Spiritual Life*, eds. Mary Louise Buley-Meissner et al. (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2000), 122.

8 Johann Roten, “The Marian Counterpoint of Postmodern Spirituality,” in *Divine Representations: Postmodernism and Spirituality*, ed. Ann W. Astell (n.c., NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 104.

9 David Tacey, *Re-enchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (Sydney, Australia: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), 17.

10 Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 13, 14.

11 It must be admitted, though, that *spirituality* now covers terms such as *piety* and *devotion*, which have fallen out of favor.

12 Michael Green and Paul R. Stevens, *New Testament Spirituality: True Discipleship and Spiritual Maturity* (Surrey, United Kingdom: Eagle, Inter Publishing Service [IPS], 1994), x.

13 Eugene Peterson, vii, viii.

14 Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 6.

15 Henri J. M. Nouwen, foreword to *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, by Marjorie Thompson, x.

16 Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 10.

17 Hugh Mackay, *Turning Point: Australians Choosing Their Future* (Sydney, Australia: Macmillan, 1999), 18.

18 Shawn Israel Zevit, *Offerings of the Heart: Money and Values in Faith Communities* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005), xxv.

19 For instance, Jesus and the New Testament writers encouraged us to engage in such spiritual activities as prayer, worship, witness, coming apart, reading the Word, walking in the light, and loving God.

20 Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 6, 7.

21 Thompson, 15.

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# Abiding in Christ and ministry

Dennis Smith



Dennis Smith, MDiv, is pastor of the New Haven Seventh-day Adventist Church, New Haven, Connecticut, United States.

**M**inistry can become a heavy burden, at times filled with anxiety and stress until the Christian learns to truly abide in Christ. However, once the person experiences union with Christ, everything changes. They recognize the joy that ministry for the Master brings; the stress and burdens are relieved.

Many Christians have discovered the peace that comes from abiding in Christ. At first they encounter years of defeat, failure, and discouragement. This brings a deep sense of need, the feeling that something must be missing in their walk with God. They become aware of inconsistency in their life of obedience and service. Then they enjoy times of wonderful fellowship with their Lord, and survive times of desert experiences as well. These feelings of failure are seldom, if ever, shared with others.

Before truly abiding in Christ, they had heard messages on the subject. They knew the Bible verses. Yet what was being described was not a reality in their lives. Such feelings of defeat can cause Christians to doubt their own sincerity and perhaps even their salvation.

## One person's discovery

J. Hudson Taylor, the nineteenth-century missionary to China, wrote about the change he experienced after making this discovery. Before then, the burdens he carried were difficult, sometimes overwhelming. When he received a letter from a fellow missionary and friend, John

McCarthy, his eyes were opened to the marvelous truth of Christ's abiding presence. After that Taylor was a new man in Christ. In a letter to his sister in England, Taylor wrote of his experience: " 'As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible, or so difficult; but the weight and strain are all gone. The last month or more has been perhaps, the happiest of my life.' " <sup>1</sup>

He described the blessing his new experience had been in his personal life, and the joy he now found in the Lord. Then he wrote of changes concerning his ministry: " 'The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest positions He must give me grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient.' " <sup>2</sup>

The burden and anxiety were gone. He learned the lesson of resting fully in Christ. He knew that Christ was living in him and would give him wisdom, guidance, and strength. He now realized that he was simply working with the Master and following His lead, and that Christ would provide all the grace needed to carry the load of responsibility.

Anglican clergyman H. B. Macartney of Melbourne, Australia, wrote of Taylor's attitude in ministry for His Lord. " 'He was an object lesson in quietness. He drew from the Bank of Heaven every farthing of his daily income—"My peace I give unto you." Whatever did not agitate the Savior, or ruffle His spirit was not to agitate him. . . . He knew nothing of rush or hurry, of quivering nerves or vexation of spirit. He knew there was a peace passing all understanding, and that he could not do without it.' " <sup>3</sup>

Macartney was amazed at the peace Taylor exhibited under all circumstances. Writing of this he continued: " 'Here is a man almost sixty years of age, bearing tremendous burdens, yet absolutely calm and unruffled. . . . Dwelling in Christ he partook of His very being and resources, in the midst of and concerning the very matters in question. And he did this by an act of faith as simple as it was continuous.' " <sup>4</sup>

Taylor knew Jesus was living in him and continuously rested in that fact. Knowing this truth, he had no need for worry or anxiety. Certainly all in ministry long for the kind of abiding rest and peace that J. Hudson Taylor discovered. All His servants may discover that Jesus offers this complete rest in Him.

## What happened?

Those who found true rest in Jesus learned that Jesus actually lives in the believer. Jesus told His disciples that He would “come” to them after He ascended to the Father following His resurrection (John 14:18). Previous to this statement, Jesus indicated He would come to dwell in His disciples through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 17). The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).<sup>5</sup>

Jesus and the apostle teach us that Christ actually dwells in the believer through the Holy Spirit. In this manner the Christian has the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16), as well as the wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30).

Once God’s ministers understand and experience this marvelous truth, they can then believe that He will manifest Himself in and through them. They can be assured that Christ will give them His obedience, wisdom, faith—everything they need to serve Him. Thus, they no longer need to be anxious about anything. Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them (Heb. 13:5).

Christ simply ministers through you in your service for Him. In your obedience, He simply manifests His obedience through you. You are to obey and minister, just as Jesus did. He said, “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:10).

Jesus experienced obedience and ministry that was manifested by the Father dwelling in Him and He in the Father. Everything He said and did was by the Father. God’s servants may have the same experience today. As they abide in Christ and He abides in them, everything they say and do is to be Christ manifesting Himself in and through them. For this reason there need

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MASTER AND FOLLOWING HIS LEAD,  
AND THAT CHRIST WOULD PROVIDE  
ALL THE GRACE NEEDED TO CARRY  
THE LOAD OF RESPONSIBILITY.

be no fear, anxiety, worry, or burden in obedience and ministry. It is all of Jesus. We simply allow Him to do these things. When we understand and experience Christ’s abiding presence, God gets all the glory for anything His servants achieve in His service (1 Cor. 1:31).

### The challenge of ministry

Having been in full-time ministry for more than 30 years, I know the danger of taking things into my own hands, of making my own plans and asking God to bless these activities. In Christ’s service, we must keep constantly in union with Him so we will be under His direction when it comes to plans, methods, and ministry. We must pray for His guidance; He will direct our ministry if we let Him. Then He will do His ministry through us.

We see this principle illustrated in the gospel commission and how the Holy Spirit led in fulfilling that commission when Jesus commanded that disciples make disciples of “all nations” (Matt. 28:19, 20). Upon hearing this commission, the apostles would likely conclude that the gospel should be preached in every town they passed through. We read in the book of Acts about how the Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul in his efforts to fulfill this commission: “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ After Paul

had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:6–10).

Here we see a clear example of the importance of Christian ministers not following their own ideas as to when, where, and how to serve the Lord. Every servant

of the Lord must recognize the importance of being under the Holy Spirit’s direction and that happens when ministers abide in Christ and Christ in them.

This certainly does not mean that we put forth no effort to follow the Spirit’s leading. Paul’s experiences required Spirit-inspired determination and effort. Service for the Lord will not always be easy, yet even in the most difficult situation we can find rest and peace as we depend on Christ.

Facing controversy can be very stressful. Dealing with financial problems, members’ personal crises, and expectations of members and church officials can become overwhelming. However, when pastors come to realize that Christ has become their wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30) they experience the release of anxiety and burden for now they trust that Christ will manifest His wisdom through them.

The bottom line: through the Holy Spirit, Jesus abides in us, renders obedience through us, and ministers through us. Therefore, we can rest in that fact and choose to let Him do it. Once again I say, when this becomes a reality, your ministry will never again be the same. Your life will be filled with love, joy, peace, faith—all the fruits of the Spirit. You will see personal and ministerial victories as never seen before. Jesus will be everything to you. ■

1 V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (n.p.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 19.

2 *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

3 *Ibid.*, 21.

4 *Ibid.*, 22.

5 Scripture references are taken from the New International Version.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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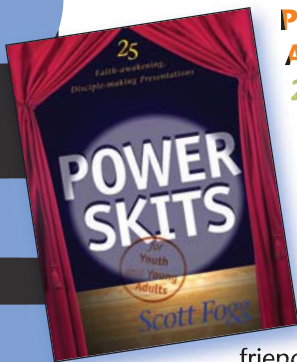
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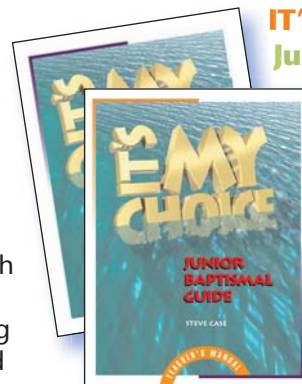


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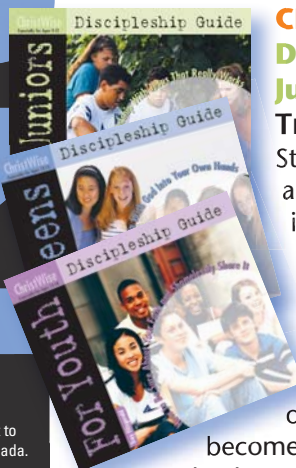


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# The lady in the aisle

Don Jacobsen



Don Jacobsen, DMin, now retired, was special assistant to the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.

**H**er first sentence I found somewhat affirming. “Pastor, I was blessed by your sermon.” That was nice; I was a guest in her church, and she was being a gracious worshiper.

However, her second sentence nearly made my knees buckle. “The problem is, I never know when it’s safe to bring visitors.”

“Never know . . . safe?”

“Tell me what you mean,” I said, wanting to explore this a bit further.

“Well,” she said, “being a small church we have quite a few guest speakers and some of our own people ‘preach,’ and they all mean well. But I never know what they’re going to say or how they’re going to say it. I often find myself thinking, *I’m glad I didn’t bring a neighbor with me this morning, they’d be shocked or confused or bored.*”

I looked at this woman, slight, graying, buoyant, and I thought, *My dear sister, you deserve better than that. Your neighbors deserve better than that. Your God deserves better than that from His church.*

Sad to say, I have heard this before—this idea that members are sometimes afraid to bring guests to church because they’re not quite sure what they’re going to encounter when they get there.

## Who is to blame?

If, when the elders in your church, or anyone else for that matter, preach, they sometimes scold, use in-house language, ride spiritual hobbyhorses, or concentrate on spiritual to-do lists, who is to

blame? Who taught them that? Most have only the homiletic training and theological perspective they received from going to church.

People come to church to experience God, to bask in His presence, to marvel and worship Him for who He is, and not just to be told about the things He doesn’t like. We are remade when we see Him as He is, not when we are given instructions about what we should or shouldn’t be doing.

Of course, there is a time for rebuke. Scripture makes that clear. But when Jesus uttered rebukes, He had tears in His eyes, and that wasn’t His *theme*. I mean, little kids didn’t crawl into a lap that was crowned with a scowling face.

He was about good news. The whole Book is about good news. His church should be about the *business* of good news. And the sister who just started this conversation deserves a regular, weekly opportunity to be reminded that we know how the *good news* story ends, and we know which side of the wall we’re going to be on when it does.

## Change as danger

What can we categorize as more dangerous, change or no change? It depends. Change can mean compromise. Change can mean tampering with the sacred. Change can mean losing something valuable.

But no change can also mean losing something valuable, something we must never lose. Like relevance. Like speaking a language that assures us people will listen when we tell our story.

We don’t need to forage very far back in our history to come on a time when people in our culture were attracted by propositional truth. We could lay out our arguments, underscore them with Scripture and logic and history, and voilà! The light would go on.

“I understand that, I believe it. Where do I sign up?”

I did evangelism that way for 40 years in many countries. I loved it. But it took me a long time to discover why it was not working so well in North America during the past few decades.

The following story, I think, expresses how things work—at least in North America.

## Paradigm shift?

Recently an officer from our General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists headquarters phoned a clerk (whom we’ll call Shirley) in a store not far from where my wife and I live. He wanted to buy cabinets. The caller was so kind and gracious on the phone that Shirley was impressed. After they hung up, she stared at the wall for a few minutes thinking about the



## Some discussion questions for your staff, elders, or board members

If you were to stop someone randomly on the street and ask, "I am from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we want to be a significant spiritual influence in this community. What advice do you have for me?" How do you think they would answer?

We have a unique message for our community. We need an audience. What might the bridges look like that we need to build that would earn the right to tell them our story?

Are there ways we can make our distinctive beliefs attractive rather than problematic?

Think back over the past half dozen worship services in your church. On a scale of 1–10, how visitor friendly would you say the language and terminology were? If there were guests, how well do

you think they connected with what was being said from the pulpit? How do you feel about your answer?

### Assignment

Prayerfully solicit a person who is not of your faith and ask them to visit your church anonymously—that is, not as your friend, but as a total stranger. Ask them to make notes on their reactions, how they were treated, what they liked, what they heard, and what, if anything, they found confusing or unclear. Get their feedback. What did you learn?

remarkable conversation she just had and how something in this man's voice, in his demeanor, in his attitude, had caught her by surprise.

A few days later he showed up at Shirley's desk. The face to face was even more impressive than the phone call. There was a genuineness, an authenticity, an overt caring, almost a radiance in his manner that confirmed her earlier impression. What was it about this man? Whatever he had, she decided she wanted some of it.

A day or two later, Shirley was introduced to her new friend's son-in-law, a pastor of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church who had just moved to town

with his wife and baby. She talked to him for a while, and when he walked away she thought to herself, *Would you believe it? He's got it, too!*

As it turned out she couldn't accept his invitation to attend church that week because her schedule included working Saturdays. Would she like to visit on Wednesday night, instead? She said she'd love to. And she did. In fact, she's hardly missed a Wednesday night since.

But an interesting thing happened. She walked into the church that first Wednesday evening, was warmly and genuinely welcomed by the members, and told me later, "I sat there thinking to myself, *Wow, they've all got it!*"

Thus, she started keeping company with our church family and recently called us "my church" when she conversed with a group of colleagues at work.

### Backwards?

Let me suggest one of the most jarring observations. Would it be heresy to reckon thus: with the previous paradigm we advertised and proclaimed *the truth*. The path of the seeker was (1) believe, (2) accept our lifestyle and other issues, then (3) join.

But could this be *today's* paradigm: (1) join, emotionally, at a deep, *I want what they've got* level—though not by membership yet; (2) accept our



**If you pastor more than one church—we want to hear from you**

Here at the *Ministry* magazine editorial offices, we are planning another issue featuring and recognizing the work of pastors who have more than one church. In order for this issue to be valuable to ministers around the world, we need your participation. You are invited to prepare an article for *Ministry* magazine. Here are some suggested topics you may consider:

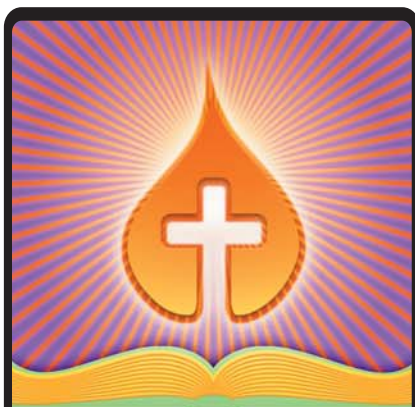
- Training lay leaders to effectively work with you
- Designing sermons to meet the needs of different churches
- Addressing family life in a multichurch district with special emphasis on children
- Organizing the evangelistic outreach in a district
- Coordinating boards and committees in a district
- Working with the communities in the district
- Creating a spirit of cooperation among the churches
- Recognizing the needs of the pastor's spouse and children for continuity as the pastor preaches in a different church each week

If you pastor several churches, you will no doubt have other topics in mind.

**Next steps:**

- Email, write, or call and discuss with us the topic or topics you are suggesting.
- Once we have agreed on the specific topic, we will ask you to proceed with the writing.

**We need to hear from you by MAY 30, 2008.**  
**Nikolaus Satelmajer, editor**  
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# ACTS 100

acknowledgment • communion • training • service

## National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving

What can your congregation pray for when a nation calls for a national day of prayer? Beyond God's gracious providences, the friendship of fellow believers, and earnest petitions for guidance of your government leaders, you might also consider some of the following suggestions:

**Senior Citizens.** Those who have contributed much to laying the foundation upon which your country continues to build.

**Indigenous People.** Those who inhabited your country before immigrants became the majority.

**Volunteers.** Thousands who freely give of their time and talents to the community. They are both within the church and in the larger society.

**Service Organizations.** Community groups such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Red Cross, and Habitat for Humanity. Such groups undertake projects to help others both in your nation and in other lands.

A national day of prayer and thanksgiving is a great opportunity to put into practice the admonition of Paul: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (1 Thess. 5:16–19, NIV).

—Joy Butler, prayer coordinator for the Adventist Church in the South Pacific.

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lifestyle and other issues, not because we *proved* them but because experience demonstrates the transformation they create; and finally (3) believe—which eventually leads to membership. At that point, any obstacles they may encounter in our belief system are inclined to be minimal.

Though that process seems backward, it might just *seem* that way. Those who follow trends in North American Christian churches assure us that the first question most people ask when approaching a church today is not, "Do these people have *the truth*?" But rather, "Is it safe here? Is this a place where I am loved and accepted and understood? Does what these people believe make them authentic and attractive and joyous and contagious?"

The earnest leaders of the Reformation, in attempting to rectify some horrific misunderstandings that had been growing for 1,500 years, defined the church as "a place where . . ." and then they went on to talk about preaching the gospel, receiving Communion, and celebrating baptism. But when the

New Testament talks about a church, it seldom refers to a building, but, instead, usually refers to a people. Not so much *a place where* but *a people who*. *A people who* are an extension of the loving hands of Jesus. *A people who* are the personification of the unconditional beckoning arms of God. *A people who* are missionary minded with a passion.

Missions exist in the DNA of every believer. A missionary (pastor) first learns to speak the language of the people to whom they are sent. Right? Thus, my fear is that, perhaps, we are standing again in the aisle, talking to a slight, graying, buoyant, little Christian lady in her church, who laments that the "missionaries" in her church don't always speak the language of the people whom she hopes and prays they will influence.

Certainly something we all, as ministers, need to think and pray about. ■

Tell us what you think about this article. Email us at [MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org](mailto:MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org) or write to us at 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904.

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on Ellen White's staff, including James White, who helped with each book—and republish these volumes, we would have in our hands material that would appeal to intellectuals and lay people alike both in the church and in the world.

—Reginald N. Shires, retired pastor, email

There was much food for thought in the December 2007 issue. However, in the article by Kevin Morgan titled “Was Ellen White a Plagiarist?” vital research of David Conklin—demonstrating that her heavy reliance on the writing and word choices of others was no worse than those of her contemporaries—was shared without addressing the one fact that distinguishes her from her contemporaries: that she claimed to be a prophet.

That fact needed to be explicitly addressed. It does no good to say she copied no more than other prominent writers without explaining how that fact, nonetheless, squares with the claim to write under the guidance of divine inspiration. None of the other authors with whom she was compared claimed

to be inspired. Until that question is effectively answered, all our articles on this topic appear defensive in tone.

—David A. Pendleton, email

### Pastors praying for pastors

Sitting in the customer lounge at a local car repair facility this morning afforded an opportunity to read past *Ministry* issues, including the August 2007 edition. Thank you for your editorial titled “The Pastor’s Gethsemane,” that reminded me of those rare—and I wish more frequent—moments when a fellow laborer in ministry paused and not only reminded me that I was in their thoughts and prayers, but on occasion, actually prayed for me personally right then and there.

This need is, as you pointed out, greater among those of us who serve in ministry as a calling and a profession. Recently, when moved by the Spirit, I’ve taken a few moments and prayed with pastors, colleagues in administration, and church members who are sometimes filled with anxiety and concern about their church. I may not always

receive the blessing myself, but I can model it! Personal prayer is powerful, and regrettably we who serve are least prayed for personally when the thoughts and expressions of love and support can be voiced and heard in real time.

But when it happens, it’s incredibly powerful. And I can recall even years later the people who prayed for me and even the content of those prayers! It’s so moving, that I like to respond in those times with a candid appreciation: “Thank you, brother, for agreeing to remember me in prayer.”

—Steve Haley, vice president for Administration, Georgia-Cumberland Conference, Calhoun, Georgia, United States

### A simple note of appreciation

I am unable to completely convey to you how much I love *Ministry* magazine; but I will say this much: it is the only magazine of which I read every single article. No exceptions. Thank you, and keep up the good work. God bless you.

—Gabriel Constantinescu, Dallas, Oregon, United States

# Historic Anniversary Celebration

## Lapse of the Ages

May 10, 2008

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# Dateline

## Teleconference on living with grief

**Silver Spring, Maryland, United States**—On April 16, 2008, from 1:30 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. eastern daylight time, the Hope Channel will broadcast a hospice teleconference titled, “Living With Grief: Children and Adolescents.”

Local churches can become downlink sites to host community professionals, such as hospice personnel, counselors, pastors, nurses, pediatric doctors and nurses, and others. Continuing education units (CEUs) are available for a small fee.

Register with Hospice at [www.hospicefoundation.org](http://www.hospicefoundation.org) or call 800-854-3402. When registering online, use the discount code VET08 so your registration fee will be waived or write “ACN SITE” on the form to be mailed. [Bernadine Delafield]

## Making waves

**Silver Spring, Maryland, United States**—Adventist World Radio (AWR) recently released its weekly TV series called *Making Waves*. It is an exciting format that draws the viewer into

the sights, sounds, and culture of each country.

*Making Waves* explores the lives of listeners discovering how AWR has been instrumental in drawing them into a relationship with Christ.

Go to the following link: <http://www.awr.org>. Follow the prompts to *Making Waves*, and be prepared for a gospel adventure! [Jim Ayer]

## Great controversy vision commemorated

**Kettering, Ohio, United States**—On May 10, 2008, a historical anniversary celebration will take place in Kettering, Ohio, commemorating what Seventh-day Adventists have come to call, “the great controversy vision” received by Ellen White in Lovett’s Grove, Ohio, on March 14, 1858. The celebration will take place on the lawn behind the Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church and across the street from Kettering Medical Center.

**Jim Nix**, director of the Ellen G. White Estate in Silver Spring, Maryland, will present “A Vision of Hope” during Sabbath School, followed by **Jon Paulien**, dean of the School of

Religion, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California. Dr. Paulien will be speaking on “Paul, the Remnant, and the Great Controversy,” a Bible study on the identity of the remnant and the church’s special connection to the faiths of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

**Jan Paulsen**, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is the featured speaker for the eleven o’clock hour. In his sermon titled “Love of the Ages,” Pastor Paulsen will share his passion for the greatest gift ever given to the world, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

In the afternoon **Smuts Van Rooyen**, pastor of the Vallejo Drive Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern California, will present the topic “Central Issues of the Great Controversy.” To close out the day, **Charles E. Bradford**, retired president of the Adventist Church in North America, will preach on the topic “Sabbath: God’s Sign of Freedom.”

Concerts throughout the day will be provided by the **Heritage Singers; Ponder, Harp, & Jennings**; and tent-time Grammy Award winners, **Take 6**.

For more information, contact Hubert Cisneros at [hubertcisneros@cs.com](mailto:hubertcisneros@cs.com). [Raj Attiken] ■

## R E S O U R C E S

he has returned. I believe God will use this book to help many others return as well.

It is much more common for Christian authors to shy away from sharing the warts and flaws of their lives. But in his book, Jones is willing to be vulnerable and open about the good and the bad in his journey. I don’t believe that the book would have been nearly as effective if he hadn’t been so transparent.

This book is good at speaking to those who have left the church. Mike’s is an experience to which many will relate. I can best describe this book with three words: practical, positive, and helpful.

As far as the practical is concerned, there are questionnaires that the reader can answer to gauge where they are

spiritually and emotionally—as well as Bible texts to meet specific needs. It is also practical in that he says *this is where I was before I left the church, this is where I was while I was away, and this is how I have come to a much better place with Jesus*.

The entire tenor of the book is positive. Even when he is sharing the tragedies of his journey, he writes positively. Mike is definitely a glass-half-full Christian!

The book is helpful because it speaks to real-life problems and gives real Christ-centered solutions. It is about how to grow more intimate in your walk with God.

This book is more than worth it. It blessed me, and I believe it will bless you too. If you have a family member

## BOOK REVIEW

***Sometimes I Don’t Feel Like Praying!*** by Mike Jones, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2008.

When I read the title of Mike Jones’s new book, *Sometimes I Don’t Feel Like Praying!* I had to smile. It was a smile of understanding. I related to it. I have been there.

Mike Jones is a man who grew up in the church—even worked for it—only to end up leaving it. After many years away,



or friend who has left the church, try giving them this book. It is obvious from reading this book that Mike Jones has something important to say to those outside and inside the church!

—Reviewed by Ron Halvorsen, Jr., MDiv, pastor of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, Takoma Park, Maryland, United States.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Simple Church: Returning to God's Process of Making Disciples** by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006

I'm sure many pastors and other local church leaders have spent countless hours developing excellent mission statements, core-value lists, or purpose-driven organizational outlines. I know I have.

But the hard reality is that most of those carefully worded visions end up only being lists on paper printed on the back of bulletins or sitting lost in the office file cabinet.

Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger convincingly suggest that all those directive statements are usually too complicated. They point out that pastors, local leaders, and members sitting in the pews can't keep up with or understand the relevance of all those great ideas. I think they're right.

Rainer and Geiger's research compares simple churches with those who have complex ministry programs—like the ones I've tried to implement. Their research shows how these churches are much more effective in doing ministry than those with complex programs. Evidently, these churches have focused on keeping the process of doing ministry simple. Simple ministry process offers clarity, alignment, purpose, and focus for everyone. Everyone understands it.

The book shares various ways of doing three simple steps for effective ministry in the local church. When churches trim their mission statements to *love for God, love for others, service in the community*, they remove the clutter that hampers the work they're trying to accomplish. Each step leads everyone to move on to the next. Everyone is involved in those three steps somewhere. Each program or ministry is challenged to be part of those three steps. Programs that are not, are eliminated, no matter how painful.

*Simple Church* seeks to help church leaders to streamline and simplify how they do church. It gives a simple pattern for implementation which pastors and laity alike can quickly grasp, adapt, and apply.

—Reviewed by William Bossert, DMin, pastor of The Edge Christian Worship Center, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, United States. ■

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# Not quite Christians

JAMES A. CRESS



**E**xciting and dynamic! More than 43,000 new members had been added to the church in the previous year. What rejoicing in the glad news of baptisms with such an abundant inflow of new members that equaled a completely new conference.

Unfortunately, however, the statistical report of great membership growth was not matched by other measurable faithfulness factors such as worship attendance or church finances. For the year following all these new accessions, per capita tithe income had not increased by one penny in the same territory.

When I queried this disparity of statistics, one leader suggested that it is unfair to evaluate their weak economy in comparison to a "healthy Western economy." My response remains, "Ten percent of even a very weak economy stays at ten percent. God does not ask for tithe of a United States dollar; He asks for faithfulness in tithing the currency of wherever believers live."

George Gallup observes, "Many Americans belong to the not quite Christian category: . . . They want the fruits or reward of faith, but seem to dodge the responsibilities and obligations. They say that they are Christian but often without a visible connection to a congregation or religious fellowship. The major challenge appears to be . . . how to guide men and women into becoming mature Christian personalities."<sup>1</sup>

Discipleship, then, involves the whole process of initial instruction (pre-baptism), welcoming the new member into the community (at baptism, for Adventists), and teaching them to observe all things (postbaptism).

The ongoing discussion, of course, is "How much and what type of instruction is to precede baptism?" Peter Wagner ably addresses this issue of prebaptismal instruction versus postbaptismal development in an excellent chapter titled, "The Gospel, Conversion, and Ethical Awareness," in his book, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*.

"There is some risk in keeping the ethical content of discipling to a

minimum in preaching free grace. But to me there seems a greater risk in prematurely trying to uproot the tares and destroying some of the wheat in the process. I know of many evangelists who do not insist, as a prerequisite to salvation, that unbelievers agree to tithe their income. But after they become Christians they learn that their new Lord expects them to tithe their income. This is not bothersome to the average Christian. Initial repentance and conversion means turning to Christ as the Lord of life, and when, over a lifetime of discipleship, the Lord speaks and brings new requirements to their attention, they are cordially accepted. Taking the step of tithing is an advance in Christian obedience, more a part of perfecting than of discipling."<sup>2</sup>

This *perfecting* role becomes the privilege and duty of the church. "A perfecting which lifts educational attainments, increases earning ability, heightens conscience as to social justice, and decreases concern to win kindred to eternal life, betrays the Gospel. High secular and cultural attainments must not be mistaken for dedication to Christ."<sup>3</sup>

When does this perfecting role occur in the life of the new believer? "Undisciplined pagan multitudes must be 'added to the Lord' before they can be perfected. The church exists not for herself but for the world. She has been saved in order to save others. She always has a twofold task: winning men to Christ and growing in grace. While these tasks overlap, they are distinct."<sup>4</sup>

An "instruction in righteousness" exists as necessary to postbaptism as surely as there are essentials that need to be accepted and believed prior to baptism. George Hunter offers these conclusions from a study of about four

thousand converts in India: "Their post-baptismal training was more influential in whether they remained and grew in the Christian community than even the motives which originally attracted them to Christianity."<sup>5</sup>

And fellowship with the community of believers will have its impact. Information may be imperfectly communicated, but in the long run what is *caught* by association with fellow believers may be more important than what is *taught* as far as discipleship is concerned. This "teaching" cannot be limited to merely intellectual knowledge, but must be implemented into the life. This describes applied theology—applied in the daily Christian walk.

Bill Hull says that the Greek word for disciple—*mathētēs*—means learner, pupil, someone who learns by following. "The word implies an intellectual process that directly affects the lifestyle of a person."<sup>6</sup> It also anticipates a growing in faith—a completion, sanctifying process by which not-quite Christians become functioning disciples within the body.

Juan Carlos Ortiz points out that this application of discipleship must be conveyed by more than intellectual instruction. "In a discipleship relationship I do not teach the other person to know what I know, rather I teach him to become what I am. Discipleship then is not a communication of knowledge but a communication of life and spirit."<sup>7</sup> ■

1 George Gallup Jr, and David Poling, *The Search for America's Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 42, 43.

2 C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 140.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 George G. Hunter III, *The Contagious Congregation: Frontiers in Evangelism and Church Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 143.

6 Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1978), 10.

7 Michael Harper, *Let My People Grow* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977), 152.

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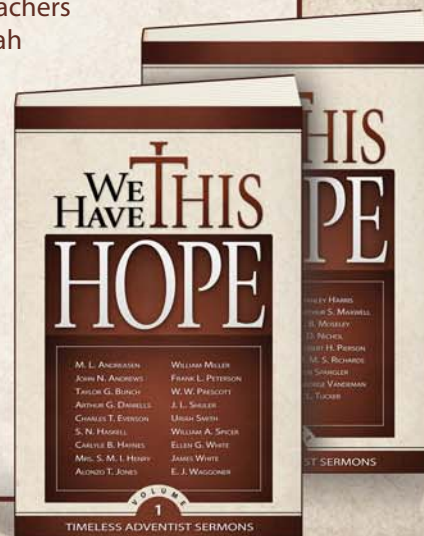
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